

## Call to Worship

We come because Christ calls us.  
**We come to listen for the living God.**

In a world of many voices and competing claims,  
**we seek the voice of Christ.**

Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?”  
**Lord Jesus Christ, open our hearts, shape our faith,  
and lead us in your way. Amen.**

## Prayer of Approach

Living God,  
You are not distant or silent,  
but active and present among your people.  
You speak through Scripture,  
through the life of Christ,  
and through the quiet prompting of your Spirit.  
As we worship today,  
draw us into your truth,  
challenge what needs to change,  
and renew our trust in you.  
We offer this worship not to impress,  
but to respond -  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Confession

*Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless, indeed, you fail to meet the test!*

*2 Corinthians 13:5*

God of grace,  
we confess that we often repeat words of faith

without letting them shape our lives.

We confess that we listen to the loudest voices rather than the wisest ones.

We confess that we sometimes prefer safety to faithfulness,  
comfort to courage, and familiarity to trust.

Forgive us, gracious God.

Renew us by your Spirit,

that we may confess Christ not only with our lips but with our lives.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

## Assurance of Forgiveness

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

*2 Corinthians 5:17-19*

Hear the good news.

God does not wait for perfect faith, but meets us with faithful love.

In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven, renewed, and called again into hope.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

## Reading

*St Matthew 16: 13-20*

## All-Age Activity

"Many Voices – One Question"

(Children are invited to come to the front. Adults are encouraged to watch and participate.)

*Purpose*

To explore how many people have different ideas about Jesus.

To help all ages understand that Jesus asks each of us a personal question.

To reinforce that faith involves listening, thinking, and responding.

*Materials Needed*

A bag or box, several labelled cards or objects, for example:

A crown (king)    A heart (friend)    A book (teacher)  
A cross (saviour)    A question mark (mystery)

### *Scripted Activity*

Leader:        I've brought a bag today with some things inside. Each one represents something people say about Jesus. (Take out items one by one.)  
Some people say Jesus is like a king—someone powerful and important. (Hold up crown.)  
Some say Jesus is a teacher, because he told stories and taught people how to live. (Hold up book.)  
Some say Jesus is a friend, someone who stays with us when things are hard. (Hold up heart.)  
Some say Jesus is a saviour, who shows us God's love and forgiveness. (Hold up cross.)  
And some people aren't sure at all. Jesus is a question for them. (Hold up question mark.)  
In today's Bible reading, Jesus asked his friends: "Who do people say that I am?" They had lots of answers—just like we do. (Pause)

Leader        (gently): But then Jesus asked something more important: "Who do you say that I am?" That question isn't a test. It's an invitation. We don't all answer in the same way, and our answers can grow and change as we grow. What matters is that Jesus invites us to walk with him and discover the answer together.

### *Prayer with Children*

Loving Jesus, thank you for calling us your friends.  
Help us to listen, to learn, and to follow you each day. Amen.

## **Sermon Notes**

I remember a moment when someone asked me, 'Why do you follow Jesus?' I answered, but later I realized Jesus was asking me something deeper: not what others say about Him, but what I truly believe. Matthew 16 brings us to that same moment. Jesus' question that still resonates with us today: This question is not just about identifying Jesus; it's about understanding our relationship with Him.

### *I.        The Question of Jesus in a Plural World*

In Caesarea Philippi, a city known for its Roman imperial loyalty and Greek and Canaanite

worship, Jesus is confronted with competing truth claims. Yet, He doesn't retreat to safety; instead, He brings the question of identity into the heart of these competing voices. Caesarea Philippi: A Place Shaped by competing loyalties. Loyalty to Rome and the emperor, loyalty to local rulers such as Herod Philip, loyalty to ancestral gods and cults. Jesus asks his question where allegiance is already divided. This highlights that faith is never merely intellectual but is about who or what ultimately commands our loyalty. Christ is not one voice among many. Faith requires discernment about what we truly serve—nation, economy, identity, tradition, or Christ alone. The city bore the name of Caesar. Imperial propaganda portrayed the emperor as saviour and lord. Jesus' question therefore challenges political theology: Who truly saves? Who truly rules? Who has the final word? When faced with peer pressure or societal expectations, do we stand firm in our confession of faith or compromise our values?

## *II. From Public Opinion to Personal Confession*

Jesus was not looking for a superficial answer. He wants to know what's in our hearts. The phrase "But you..." places emphatic stress on the disciples. It is plural. Jesus does not ask Peter alone. He addresses the whole community of disciples. Peter's response is a testament to the revelation of God's grace. Faith, in Matthew's Gospel, is never merely individual—it is communal discernment leading to personal response. Faith is not inherited automatically. Tradition must be received critically and gratefully. Each generation must confess Christ anew. Second-hand belief may inform us—but it cannot sustain discipleship. This is like the difference between: knowing what scientists say about climate change and deciding how you will live, vote, consume, and act. Information alone does not transform. Commitment does. Faith is not just about intellectual assent; it's about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

## *III. Peter's Confession: A Gift of Grace*

Peter's confession is not a human achievement; it's a gift of God's revelation. This reminds us that faith is not something we can manufacture; it's a gift from God. Peter's confession is tightly structured and theologically rich. "the Messiah": the anointed one, God's promised agent, "the Son of the living God": not a metaphor, but a claim about divine life and authority. This confession places Jesus above prophets, kings, and political powers. Jesus responds not by institutionalising authority, but by identifying revelation. Recognising faith is like recognising life itself. A machine may function impressively but only a living being has life within itself. Faith recognises the living God—not because we generate belief, but because we encounter life.

## *IV. "On This Rock"*

The rock refers to the confession of faith, not Peter himself. Our unity and foundation are in Christ, and we're built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ

as the cornerstone. The wordplay between Petros (Peter) and petra (rock) is real—but not simplistic. Matthew does not say the Church is built on Peter alone, but on what Peter has confessed. The Reformed tradition consistently interprets the “rock” as Christ-confessing faith, the foundation as Christ himself believing that Scripture interprets Scripture: “No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 3:11) “I Will Build My Church” The future tense matters here. Christ - not the Church - remains the active subject. This is pastorally vital in times of decline, transition, and anxiety.

Think of community regeneration: broken systems persist, change is slow but faithful presence reshapes space over time. The Church participates in Christ’s work—it does not replace it. The Church is built on Christ-confessing faith, and we're called to be a community that reflects Christ's love and values. In a world that often values power, wealth, and status, the Church stands out as a community built on the foundation of Christ's love and sacrifice. As a Church, we recognize that our authority is not in our structures or traditions; it's in our confession of Christ. We're called to be a community that points to Christ, not ourselves.

#### V. *The Keys and Shared Discernment*

The keys to the kingdom symbolize responsibility and authority. However, this authority is not about domination; it's about service. We're called to exercise discernment together, prayerfully and scripturally, as we seek to follow Christ. The verbs “bind” and “loose” were rabbinic terms referring to teaching and interpretation, not domination. Authority belongs to Christ alone; the Church serves ministerially with decisions are a to Scripture. Binding and loosing can involve: naming forgiveness, exercising care and discipline, proclaiming grace truthfully and conciliar discernment. URC polity reflects this shared responsibility: Ministers and elders together, Councils and Assemblies engaged in prayerful listening. No one individual controls the keys.

## **Affirmation of Faith**

We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.  
We believe in Jesus Christ,  
God’s only Son, our Lord,  
who calls us to follow, to serve, and to trust God’s future.  
We believe in the Holy Spirit,  
who leads the Church into truth  
and sends us into the world in hope.  
We are one Church, called to confess Christ,  
to seek justice, and to live by grace. Amen.

## Prayers of Intercession

Living God,  
we pray for your Church,  
that it may confess Christ faithfully in word and action.  
We pray for our world,  
where many voices compete for attention,  
and where truth is often distorted.  
We pray for those with power,  
that they may govern with humility and justice.  
We pray for those who suffer,  
those who doubt and those who feel forgotten.  
In silence, we name before you  
those on our hearts today.

*Silence*

Faithful God,  
hear our prayers, for we offer them in the name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

## Blessing

Go now, trusting not in your own strength,  
but in the faithfulness of Christ.  
And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
the love of God the Father,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, now and always. Amen.

## Hymn Suggestions

	RS	CH4	StF	MP
The Lord is King lift up your voice	76	129		656
Rejoice! the Lord is King	657	449	335	575
Jesus shall reign where'er the sun	269	470	328	379
There is a Redeemer		559	338	673
Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)	92	555	440	31
The Church's one foundation	566	739	690	640
I will build my church				305
The church is wherever God's people are praising	583	522		
Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult	355	509	250	359
Christ is the world's true light	601	456		
As a fire is meant for burning		252		
Longing for light, we wait in darkness / Christ be our light		543	706	1201
Go in grace and make disciples		682		
Will you come and follow me?	558	533	673	

RS – *Rejoice & Sing* | CH4 – *Church Hymnary 4* | StF – *Singing the Faith* | MP – *Mission Praise*

Tafadzwa also suggests [Come, let us sing to the Lord our song](#) with information about the song [here](#).