

Poole Bay Methodist Circuit worship
Sunday 19th April 2026

“Hearing God’s Voice” - Led by Dr Julian Tawn

This service can be found on my YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/xgfPr-CeS3k>

Hello again, friends! Julian Tawn here, after a few months, with online worship for Sunday 19th April 2026. Today we will be reflecting on the familiar story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and how this teaches us to listen for God’s voice.

Let us pray.

O Lord, who walks with us along life’s way,
we come before you today,
joyful to be back in your presence.
Draw near to us as we draw near to you, we pray,
and may we step forward together on this journey of worship and praise.

Amen.

So, let us begin our worship as we sing a hymn of praise, “The head that once was crowned with thorns”, which is number **312** in Singing the Faith. There is an organ track on the video, and a YouTube link for those who wish to use it:

https://youtu.be/Aw2U_sf02II?si=eENqJCh7zqnAffam

The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now;
A royal diadem adorns
The mighty victor's brow.

The highest place that Heav'n affords
Belongs to Him by right;
The King of kings and Lord of lords,
And Heaven's eternal Light.

The joy of all who dwell above,
The joy of all below,
To whom He manifests His love,
And grants His Name to know.

To them the cross with all its shame,
With all its grace, is given;
Their name an everlasting name,
Their joy the joy of Heaven.

They suffer with their Lord below;
They reign with Him above;
Their profit and their joy to know
The mystery of His love.

The cross He bore is life and health,
Though shame and death to Him,
His people's hope, His people's wealth,
Their everlasting theme.

Let us pray:

Lord of the journey, we praise you that in you we find our destination.
Lord of hospitality, we praise you for welcoming us and feeding our souls.
Breaker of bread, your body broken for us, we worship and adore your holy name.

Lord, we confess that we live our lives
distracted by so many things.
So often this is when things
aren't going the way we think they should,
like the pair who trod the Emmaus road.
Our feet carry us forward,
but our thoughts go round in circles;
and at such times, when you come to us, Lord,
we often fail to recognise you.
We are sorry and ask you to
reveal yourself to us afresh.

All-seeing, all-knowing, and ever-present God,
you understand how easily we are caught up
by life's cares, spiralling into despair and distance.
Yet in your grace, O Lord, you forgive us
and walk the way with us,
welcoming us back into your presence.
You feed our souls with comfort and hope,
teaching us to see life in a new light.

Amen.

In this hallowed hour when you welcome us
into your presence, O Lord, and we experience your hospitality:

we offer our humble thanks and praise.

When you stop us in the tracks of our frantic lives,
and offer succour to our weary souls:

we offer our humble thanks and praise.

When our eyes are opened and we realise how blind
we have been, unheeding of your presence:

we offer our humble thanks and praise

to Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Our Bible reading for today is from the Gospel of **Luke 24:13-35**:

¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles^[a] from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognising him.

¹⁷ He asked them, ‘What are you discussing together as you walk along?’

They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, ‘Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?’

¹⁹ ‘What things?’ he asked.

‘About Jesus of Nazareth,’ they replied. ‘He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn’t find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus.’

²⁵ He said to them, ‘How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?’ ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

²⁸ As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going further. ²⁹ But they urged him strongly, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.’ So he went in to stay with them.

³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, ‘It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.’ ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognised by them when he broke the bread.

Our second hymn is a call for each of us to hear and follow God’s voice, “Master, speak! Thy servant heareth”, which is a rather unfortunate number **666** in Singing the Faith. There is an organ accompaniment on the video and also a YouTube link:

<https://youtu.be/raPJHiezEhw?si=UI3NCfNFQEso7urP>

Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth;
Master! let it now be heard.

I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
What hast Thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock,
In the shadow of the rock.

Master, speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! For O, Thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need:
Speak! and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak! and make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
Master, speak! O, speak to me!

Reflection

Have you ever considered how many voices are speaking to you every day? Of course, we interact regularly with friends and family, with classmates and coworkers, but this is barely the beginning. Every day, we are listening to the voices of television, books, podcasts, music or talk radio, films, newspapers, Twitter feeds and Facebook streams, and on and on and on. As Christians, followers of Jesus, one of the most important questions we can ask is, “Am I hearing God's voice?” Are we hearing God's voice in the Bible as just another sliver of noise in the echo chamber of our minds? Or do we give God's word the undistracted attention it deserves? We must think through the habits of our lives, the voices to which we listen. Does God's voice shape and colour, amplify or silence the other voices we hear? What we hear and what we listen to every day is the material that will make up our faith (Romans 10:17; *‘Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ’*). Are you letting God's word feed your faith?

Not long ago, I reread a book by Pete Greig, called, ‘How to hear God: a simple guide for normal people.’ I want to take this opportunity to share a few things that I have learned on the way through this book. I am not saying that I now have it completely sussed out, but I have had my eyes opened at least a little.

First, and possibly most importantly, we hear God's Word in Jesus. Jesus is what God sounds like. He is literally the living Word of God. This means that hearing His voice is not so much a skill we must master, but He is the Master Whom we must meet.

The couple on the road to Emmaus were engaged in conversation when Jesus sidled up to them and walked along side them. Jesus then entered into the conversation, but they did not recognise Him immediately. What happened to Cleopas and his companion often is true for us too. A covert Jesus

Christ joins us on our journey through life. We are reminded that we need to proactively invite Him into our questions, our relationships and our homes. Then He will walk with us and talk with us, patiently answering our questions, realigning our thinking and teaching us to pray.

Yes, the Emmaus road story is a model of prayer. Somehow these few verses distil more insight into how God speaks, and how we are to hear Him speak, than any other passage, anywhere else in the gospels. In fewer than 20 verses, the Lord communicates in at least five different ways: *conversationally* ‘as they talked and discussed these things with each other’; *exegetically* when He explained ‘all the Scriptures concerning himself’; *sacramentally* when He ‘took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them’; *prophetically* when ‘their eyes were opened’; and *inwardly* when He spoke directly to their hearts, which were ‘burning.... while He talked’.

This isn’t an exhaustive list of all the ways which God speaks, but it is a good starting point. The ultimate way in which God communicates in this story is not through the Bible (as some evangelicals might have it), nor through the breaking of bread (as sacramentalists might say), nor is it through hearts burning within (as contemplatives might think), but rather it is through Jesus Christ Himself. He is the preeminent and ultimate Word of God, who animates and defines every other word God may speak in our lives. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus emphatically does not send a Bible, nor an angelic messenger, nor even a sudden epiphany to the couple, but rather goes to great lengths to appear to them personally, taking at least a couple of hours to explain ‘what was said in all the scriptures concerning Himself.’ Hearing God begins and ends with meeting Jesus. We understand the Bible in the light of Christ and not the other way round. Every other way in which God communicates, and in which we may therefore hear Him speak, comes through Jesus and points back to Him too.

Nothing can replace, and nothing matters more, than a personal encounter with Jesus. *“It is Christ Himself, not the Bible, who is the true Word of God,”* writes CS Lewis. *“The Bible, read in the right spirit and with the guidance of good teachers, will bring us to Him.”*

Some people will inevitably have an uneasy feeling that such a focus on Christ as the preeminent word of God might detract from the authority of the Bible as God's word. Nothing, I repeat nothing, could be further from the truth! The Bible is the primary means by which we become familiar with both the purposes and the personality of its subject Jesus Christ.

The Emmaus Road story is a dynamic picture of the dance between God's word in the Bible and His final word in Jesus. Each one points to the other. Our subjective personal encounters with Jesus are counterbalanced by our objective examination of His word in the Bible. One without the other simply doesn't work. Hearing God begins with Jesus and leads us immediately to Scripture which in turn points us back to Christ. Any revelation that claims to be from God, therefore, but does not sound like Jesus, and fails to push us deeper into relationship with Jesus, is fundamentally not Christian, no matter how supernatural it seems, how profound it sounds and how many Bible verses come wrapped around its delivery.

So, we do hear God's Word in the Bible. When it comes to hearing God, the Bible is the language of His heart. Nothing He says in any other way, in any other context, will ever override, undermine or contradict what He has said in the Scriptures.

If we are not hearing God's voice speak to us, it's not because He has gone silent. God's grace comes to us most commonly through His word, and today more than ever, there are numerous options available

to hear God's Word: various Bible translations, study bibles, online articles, audio bibles to name but a few.

But all too often, we fill our lives and our minds with every voice but God's. If we want to see God's grace in our lives, we must avail ourselves of the many opportunities for hearing His voice. We shouldn't view Bible reading mainly as a duty to be done or as a chore to complete, but as a feast of grace offered by God to sustain and strengthen us day by day. For every Christian who has ever lived, the Bible is ultimately how we know what we know. This is a vast and ancient record of God's revelation regarding the nature and purpose of reality. Like a GPS satnav, the bible is a constant source of guidance, wisdom and direction through life's many twists and turns. As it says in the book of Isaiah (30:21), “*Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way; walk in it.’*”

Christ's commitment to Biblical exposition on the road to Emmaus reveals three important truths. First, it shows us that the resurrected Jesus continues to look to the Bible for authority. Second, Jesus interprets the Scriptures in a radical new way, indicating that all scripture points towards Him. We should always approach the Bible looking through the lens of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. And third, we see that when the Bible is interpreted in this way, in the light of Jesus and inspired by the Holy Spirit, it has a remarkable power to speak directly and personally into our lives. Like the couple on the Emmaus road, we will sometimes find ‘our hearts burning within us’ as the Lord reveals Himself to us through the Bible.

Next, we hear God's word in prayer. We need to learn how to pray through the Bible. There is an ancient approach to spiritual listening known as *lectio divina*, which can be a very useful tool to harness the power of imagination and meditation, allowing the Holy Spirit to give us a fresh revelation from familiar texts. I use an app each morning and evening, Lectio 365, which helps me to ponder on short Bible passages, actively listening for God’s voice.

If we are serious about reading and praying through Scripture in this way we must pause before reading the Bible. This is not just a way of preparing ourselves to receive from God, it is also a simple act of common courtesy towards the Bible. Reverence may not be a familiar posture for citizens of a secularised and cynical age more used to writing reviews than removing our shoes, but it is intrinsic to the method of *lectio divina*, which is explicitly the art of prayerfully reading sacred texts. Muslims approaching the Koran are expected to dress appropriately, to wash thoroughly (wudhu) and to say a prayer. They must never place their holy book on the floor or under another book. When a Muslim witnesses a Christian treating the Bible casually, they have good reason to conclude that we don't really respect or revere it as God's Word. Perhaps there is a little truth in this?

Now I'm not advocating ritual washing or special clothing before reading the Bible, but we should treat it with the respect and reverence it deserves. And praying before, during and after reading Scripture helps tune our hearts and mind to God's frequency.

We can hear God's Word in prophecy. The New Testament uses two different Greek terms to describe the word of God: *logos* and *rhema*. *Logos* refers to God's living Word in Jesus, and God's written Word in the Bible. *Rhema* on the other hand describes God's spoken word, living and active today, in prophecy. Prophecy does not mean predicting the future, but it refers to a particular message from God given to an individual for the purpose of building up another person or congregation.

I firmly believe that God still speaks prophetically today. But this can be a bit intimidating for those of us who sometimes struggle to discern the voice of God even in the simplest of ways from day-to-day.

Now God does not speak indiscriminately like a relentless radio station. The atmosphere around us is not abuzz with His continual chatter, accessible to anyone who happens to tune in. God’s specific words tend to be targeted and seasonal. Of course, His *logos* word, in Christ and in Scripture, remains consistently and wonderfully available, but there are times in all our lives, as there were in biblical times, when God's *rhema* word is rare. Perhaps this is simply because He, unlike us, is not in a hurry. Mature disciples learn not just to celebrate the seasons of abundant revelation, but also to wait patiently and watch diligently during the in between seasons, when ‘the word of the Lord is rare.’

Since all believers are filled with the Holy Spirit, we can and should all receive and exercise His gifts, including prophecy. Indeed, the apostle Paul valued prophecy above all the gifts. However, how do we know that the thing we think we’re seeing, hearing or sensing is truly from God? A simple, memorable rule of thumb is therefore to apply the ABC filter.

A: Affirming. Does this word fulfil the criteria of 1 Corinthians 14, by being strengthening, encouraging, comforting, edifying and upbuilding?

B: Biblical. Is this word consistent with the broad teaching and witness of scripture?

C: Christ like. Is this word consistent with the character, mission and message of Jesus?

Then we can hear God’s whisper. As we turn from God's Word (His voice external) to God’s whisper (His voice internal), we come to the heart of the problem that many millions of Christians, including me, have with hearing God, namely their presumptions about what God sounds like, and their expectations about how they think He should speak. His voice is relatively easy to hear when it comes to us loud and clear, through an encounter with Jesus, through the Bible, or through supernatural prophetic utterances. But it's easy to miss when it comes, as it mostly does, in a voice hushed to ‘a gentle whisper’ (1 Kings 19:12).

It is so easy to expect God to show up in our lives in some spectacular fashion. Maybe He’ll kick down the door in hobnail boots, speak in a booming voice, use a little dry ice, tricks of the light, that sort of thing. But Jesus tends to sidle up to us quietly, almost without us noticing, as He did to the couple on the road to Emmaus. Notice how, when they arrived at the house in Emmaus, Jesus appeared as though He would carry on, and Cleopas had to invite Him in.

Too often we expect the King of kings to shout with primal power in earthquake, wind and fire. Of course we do! From the origins of time, God has been the great explanation of nature 's many mysteries, the ultimate power that changes seasons, hurling thunderbolts and rumbling from the heavens in rolling thunder. Elijah knew very well, and so do we, that Yahweh is absolutely able to speak in dramatic ways, through miracles, calamities and natural phenomena, through shaking rooms, blinding lights and astounding prophetic revelations. But perhaps the problem with such displays of power, and the reason God patently refrains from speaking in such ways most of the time, is because they belie the fundamental gentleness and intimacy of His heart. Dramatic revelations impress, of course they do, but they can also intimidate and alienate those on the receiving end. And so, our awesome Creator chooses to whisper in our ear way more often than He shouts from the skies. This is so important. If we are ever to feel fully safe and truly loved by the Lord of all the earth, we must eventually, like Elijah on Horeb, and that couple on the Emmaus road, learn to listen for His voice in the anticlimax of life's non-events.

God’s whisper can also come in the realm of dreams and the unconscious mind. One of the main ways God communicates in the Bible, and in which He continues to speak today, is through the subconscious realm of intuition. This is an essential yet fallible mouthpiece for the Holy Spirit. While often dreams are

the result of the brain’s subconscious filing system, they are still a way that God can and does communicate with us.

God’s whisper can also be seen heard in the community, creation and culture in which we live. The Emmaus road story is inescapably an account of God speaking through the actualities of community, creation and culture. When Jesus was born, God’s people already had His Word in the Bible (the Hebrew books at least), but it clearly wasn’t enough. They also had His Word through prophets and prophecies, but that wasn’t enough either. They knew God’s whisper in the still, small voice of Elijah, and in their consciences, dreams and visions. In fact, they had almost every expression of God’s Word we have considered today, but none of it was enough. Eventually, God’s Word had to become flesh, not in a book but in a body, not just mystically in heaven but materially ‘among us’ (John 1:14). There is no aspect of God’s creation through which He cannot and does not speak.

For the couple on the road to Emmaus, it took perhaps three hours for the penny to finally drop. It took at least that long for them to realise that they were hosting the living Word of God. But the moment their eyes and ears were opened, their overwhelming attitude was, ‘Yes!’ Hearing became doing. They hurried out of the house immediately, they didn’t wait until morning, and walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem, where they found the disciples and told them what had happened. This is the pattern: the more we say ‘yes’ to Jesus, the more familiar and precious His voice becomes until ultimately, at the end of the road, at the end of the day, at the end of our lives, we look back as the sun sets and whisper in wonder and joy, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked?”

Amen

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus, we come in stillness to seek you. We pause now to review in our minds the week that has passed. As we do so, we ask you to show us where you were present. Perhaps we didn’t notice you at the time, but can see you now as we remember.

Lord, we rejoice that you were with us every step of the way, even if we couldn’t see you. You were there in moments of pain and sorrow as well as deep joy and fun. We thank you that you are always present, whatever our circumstances, whether we can feel your presence or not. As we go into a new week, help us to look more closely for your presence.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:

and open our eyes to see your presence.

Lord Jesus, you are with each of us in all the tiny details of our lives. You are also there in the important moments: We bring to you now any upcoming important moments for our community this week... any weddings/funerals/baptisms/anything else in the local community.... Lord, we ask that those who will be at these events/in these places will have a real sense of your love and care.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:

and open our eyes to see your presence.

Lord, you are also there in our locality and you are there in the big events in the world. We bring to you now the places and people who have made the headlines this week. Once again we note the ongoing conflicts in the Ukraine and the Middle East; you see the places of conflict even when they are out of the news.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
and open our eyes to see your presence.

Lord, we pray for those who need a sign of your presence with them this week. We lift to you our young people back at school and all those who are preparing for exams. We pray for pupils, students and teachers in this very busy term.

We pray for those who are sick in body, mind or spirit. We ask for your comforting presence to aid them in their pain. We pray for patience and courage for all those who look after them. We pray for the lonely, isolated and the housebound. For all who are carers, paid or unpaid; known or unknown. And we pray for those who are sorrowful today. Help them to know that your resurrection means that there is hope for the future.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
and open our eyes to see your presence.

Lord, we turn now to the week ahead of us. You are already going before us, and we thank you that you are preparing our way. Show us how to be Christ-bringers wherever we go so that others will see your reality through us. We commit the new week to you, asking that you help us see you at every turn. Forgive us when we ignore the signs and guide us forward into all the new wonders that will greet us in the resurrection hope you have given us.

Lord Jesus, help us to recognise the signs:
and open our eyes to see your presence.

And lead us ever onwards into your light. **Amen.**

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven. Hallowed be thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. **Amen.**

Our final hymn for today captures the wonder at Jesus’ victory over sin and death, culminating in the glory of His resurrection, “Thine be the glory”, which is **313** in Singing the Faith. I have provided the usual accompaniment and YouTube link:

<https://youtu.be/Tjz4yXUJrgU?si=Im6yHbeLjldxEzCp>

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;
Endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won;
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded grave clothes where Thy body lay.

Refrain

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,
Endless is the victory, Thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly He greets us, scatters fear and gloom;
Let the church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing;
For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting.

Refrain

No more we doubt Thee, glorious Prince of life;
Life is naught without Thee; aid us in our strife;
Make us more than conqu'rors, through Thy deathless love:
Bring us safe through Jordan to Thy home above.

Refrain

A sending out prayer

Lord, as we go from here, walk with us and talk with us.
Inspire us to join the dots of our faith to see more clearly the wonder of the Easter story and the glory of Pentecost. Motivate us to share your story with others, and encourage us to live and work with you and in you. **Amen.**

Thank you all again for choosing to spend some time with me in this act of worship. I wish you all well for the week ahead and may you feel and reflect God’s presence with you, each and every day.

I am closing today with a personalised blessing based on Numbers 6:24-26:

*May the Lord bless us and keep us;
may the Lord make his face shine on us and be gracious to us;
may the Lord turn his face toward us and grant us his peace.*

Amen

Julian Tawn

10th April 2026