

10th May 2020 – Morning Service

Call to Worship: Micah chapter 6 verses 6 to 8 (Contemporary Bible)

What offering should I bring when I bow down to worship the Lord God Most High? Should I try to please him by sacrificing calves a year old? Will thousands of sheep or river of olive oil make God satisfied with me? Should I sacrifice to the Lord my firstborn child as payment for my terrible sins? The Lord has told us what is right and what he demands: “See that justice is done, let mercy be your first concern, and humbly obey your God.” **Amen.**

We shall sing a hymn written by David Evans as a response to many of the hymns and worship songs of the 1970s that were over-familiar to the Lord. Like our reading from Micah, it reminds us of God’s power, holiness, glory and loving-kindness – as hymns ought to! We shall sing hymn number 20, “Be still, for the presence of the Lord,”

STF 20 - Be Still for the Presence of the Lord

- 1) Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;
Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.
In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

- 2) Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light;
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

- 3) Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.
No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

David J Evans © 1986 Thankyou Music CCL No. 515642

Prayers

Almighty God, we come to you in awe and joy to sing your praises, to pray to you in faith and to acknowledge your holiness, might and glory. You are the Word who brought life into being throughout the universe and yet you have blessed us with your love through the ages, sinful though we are.

Generous God, we offer our heartfelt thanks to you for all you have done for us and given us throughout our lives: for people who have guided, inspired and loved us; for all that has enriched our lives and brought us happiness.

Gracious God you shared our mortal frame as Jesus Christ, not only so we could understand how you want us to live, but Jesus died at Calvary to redeem us from our sins. His resurrection offers everybody the gift of eternal life, not through any merit of our own, nor through our works, but as your gift of grace.

Amazing God, your goodness overwhelms us as we reflect upon it, for our own shortcomings rise before us, reminding us how far short we have fallen from what you would have us be.

Merciful God, although Jesus showed us how we should live, we confess that our love for and service to you and our neighbours are frequently not wholehearted. As we turn away from what we know is wrong, we ask your forgiveness for the sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

Loving Lord, we believe you have heard and answered our prayer, pardoning us and calling us to follow you again. May the Holy Spirit help us to serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and warm-heartedly from now onwards, in the beautiful name of the risen Lord Jesus. **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, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our next hymn was written by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall sing hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'

STF 706 – Longing For Light

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| 1) Longing for light, we wait in darkness,
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see. | 3) Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed. |
| Ch) <i>Christ, be our Light!</i>
<i>Shine in our hearts,</i>
<i>Shine through the darkness.</i>
<i>Christ be our Light!</i>
<i>Shine in your Church gathered today.</i> | 4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone. |
| 2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. | 5) Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come. |

Bernadette Farrell © 1993 Bernadette Farrell CCL No. 515642

Reading: 1 Peter 2 : 2 to 10

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe, "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone," and, "A stone that causes men to stumble and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for. But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Amen.

Reading: John 14 : 1 to 14

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.” Amen.

Sermon: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” John 14:1

Peter’s reference to living stones is significant in several ways: we are stones in a worldwide Church with Christ as our cornerstone; a building where unity of purpose is essential; a building in which the living stone make our sacrifice of love in worship, service and giving; a building that be reformed and grow, for living stones, though grounded in Christ, can be adapted to changing needs. Importantly, each of us living stones plays its part in the building and is of immense value to the Lord, precious enough for him to have died for us. Peter also spoke of the craving of new-born babies for colostrum to kickstart their new life. They are demanding, impatient and as many of us who’ve been roused from our slumbers in the early hours, unreasonable in their need. The needs of the Developing World are just as intense, yet too often the wealthy nations have become selectively deaf to the cries of our poorer brothers and sisters.

Certainly, the coronavirus pandemic is a threat not only to the health services of the world, but to economies. Experts are already warning about a world recession, or even a depression, so it is tempting to reason that it is better to concentrate on our own needs and, when they have been satisfied, to look further afield. However, there are recent reports of a ‘perfect storm’ of misfortune in East Africa alone. Climate change has resulted in a severe drought and crop failure; a huge plague of locusts has then destroyed much of the remaining produce; malnutrition has weakened the populations, so thirteen million people are already at risk of starvation. I can’t bear to think what COVID 19 will do if becomes established there, but can we do anything to help.

The good news is we can by supporting Christian Aid, an ecumenical charity founded in 1945. It doesn’t only provide food, water and shelter when disasters occur, but works with communities to give them the dignity of becoming self-sufficient by providing tools, equipment, hardy varieties of crops that can grow in difficult conditions and precious water supplies, without which life itself can’t exist. The current campaign features two East Kenyan women, Rose and Florence. Rose is struggling to exist, let alone to care for her grandchildren, for the nearby earth dam has run dry in the drought, so she has a long walk to and from the nearest water source. Crops are withering in the fields and livestock are dying of thirst. If and when rains come, she and her fellow-villagers need to improve the dam to preserve every drop of water, so they can cultivate their fields and keep thirst away for themselves and their animals.

Florence, on the other hand, lives close to a dam that she and her community constructed with the help of Christian Aid and its partner, Anglican Development Services Eastern, or ADSE. She no longer has to walk miles to collect water; her children are neither thirsty, nor hungry, for Florence is able to grow tomatoes, and chillies on her farm, as well as maize, so the family has a staple diet. Moreover, water allows Florence

to keep bees that provide honey she sells at the local market. She is able to be independent, not to rely on handouts, but she worries about less fortunate neighbours.

I'm sure we are all aware of how the lockdown has reduced the income of most charities drastically. Charity shops are closed and fundraising events postponed. Despite some Government help, charities, including Christian Aid need our support, too. The opening of our gospel reading reminded me of the consequences if we don't act, for Jesus' words are often used at funeral services. Although it may reassure mourners that Jesus has prepared a place for us in heaven and that death doesn't have the final word, Christ's words do not just allude to death. It speaks of God's all-embracing, redemptive love for all people in life as in death. Yes, whilst the disciples were afraid of future prospects, Jesus was encouraging them to live as fully and confidently as possible. His words are for not just for the future, but for now and not only for us but for all who will listen. Jesus was painfully aware of what lay in store for him, betrayal, scourging and crucifixion, but he spoke to reassure his followers that they should trust in him, even when all seemed lost, for only through his crucifixion and resurrection could humankind be saved. He knew that the Holy Spirit would guide and empower believers, so they could fulfil his Father's will.

I am sure all of us are worried about coronavirus and the ways in which it may change our lives, but a positive change COVID 19 has brought is a more neighbourly concern in most of our communities. We need to extend that concern to neighbours far away, too, so they can enjoy the fullness of life that independence offers. Some of you may think that our offerings won't make a difference, but remember how many Methodist churches relied upon members buying bricks so the building could take shape. Every donation, large or small is a brick to build up Christian Aid, or if you prefer it, a boulder to create a solid, water-retaining dam to give Rose and her grandchildren the chance to **live before they die**, to misquote Fred Pratt Green's "The Church of Christ, in every age".

Jesus assured his disciples, and that includes us, **'I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He or she will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.'** As we journey through Eastertide towards Pentecost, remember we don't act in our own strength, for Christ sent the Holy Spirit to work in us and through us, if we let him. Let us live faithfully, prayerfully and generously, seeking to build God's kingdom on unbreakable foundations of love. Amen.

Our next hymn was translated by Dermott Monahan, the son of a Methodist missionary who spent most of his life in what is now Pakistan. The words were originally written in Urdu, though they are based upon St. John's gospel, and the melody is a Pakistani folk-tune. We shall sing hymn number 252, 'Jesus the Lord said: "I am the bread"

STF 252 – Jesus the Lord

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| 1) 1. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,
The Bread of Life for the world am I.
The Bread of Life for the world am I,
The Bread of Life for the world am I.'
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,
The Bread of Life for the world am I'. | 3) Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Way,
The true and living Way am I.....' |
| 2) Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Vine,
The true and fruitful Vine am I.....' | 4) Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Light,
The one true Light of the world am I.....' |
| | 5) Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,
The Resurrection and the Life am I.....' |

Prayers of Intercession

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others. Let us pray.

Living Lord, we recognize the many blessings we receive from you, though at times we take your grace for granted. Create in us a willing, faithful heart, so we may serve as your earthly hands by caring for our neighbours. Grant us the necessary wisdom, courage, steadfastness, faith and compassion, so we may answer Jesus' call.

Lord, we pray for the peace of the world, that, through the governments of the world, mercy and justice may be established and endure, so peace shall reign on earth. Teach us the value of negotiation and compromise when disputes arise, so we can resist the temptation to take up arms. We remember, too, the victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution throughout the earth. Grant them effective support, courage and hope, so they may rebuild their broken lives.

We pray for the deliverance of victims of COVID 19 and we grieve with families who have lost loved ones in this pandemic. Heavenly Father, many of us are filled with anguish about the suffering of people here and abroad that we hear about in the Media. Our courage and faith are being tested by the bleakness of both the gloomy news and the strains of the lockdown. Take away our doubts and reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we all may face an uncertain, even threatening future, with grounded hope.

Loving heavenly Father, bless all doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, care workers, key-workers and kind-hearted volunteers in the United Kingdom who are potentially putting themselves in harm's way as they seek to help Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society. Hear our prayer for the NHS which we know is under immense pressure. May it receive all the support and equipment it needs to heal the sick and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society. We offer our thanks for the healing rendered at our local hospitals, especially New Cross, Russells Hall and The Corbett, as well as for our GPs and health workers in our community. Grant them the determination and courage to cope with the pressures they are facing and may they find safety in their work.

Lord of justice, we bring our concern to you for charities that are struggling to survive the coronavirus crisis, whose resources and funding are starting to fail. Today we think of the work of Christian Aid in many crisis-ridden and Developing Nations. We pray for all who lead the organization, for people who work for Christian Aid and all who support it through gifts and prayer. May it continue find support to help the world's poor, despite our preoccupation with COVID 19 at home. Indeed, we pray that nations that lack adequate healthcare systems will soon receive international aid to combat this virus.

Lord, hear our prayer for people in our community who are sick in body, mind or spirit, those bowed down by the pressures of life, failed relationships and bereavement, for all who live with a dementia and everybody who cares for their needs. Gracious God, where it is possible, let us be part of the answer of our prayer for those around us, by being sensitive to their needs and offering practical support. Nevertheless, hold everybody for whom we pray, so they may find comfort, courage, healing, hope and above all else your peace.

Lord hear our prayer for our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church, that guided by the Holy Spirit we may be bold in proclaiming and living out Good News. Help your Church to be a beacon of hope in a world made gloomy by despair and fear.

Abba, heavenly Father, keep us, our friends and families safe in your care. Bring us through these troubled times, trusting in your grace and sharing with neighbours nearby and far away the love you give us in such abundance, in the name of our risen Lord Jesus. **Amen.**

We close our worship as we sing a hymn which was written by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, a long-lived Methodist Minister and a prolific hymn-writer. We shall sing hymn number 415, 'The Church of Christ, in every age'.

STF 415 – The Church of Christ

- 1) The Church of Christ, in every age,
Beset by change, but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.
- 2) Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.
- 3) Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.
- 4) For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.
- 5) We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.

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Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. **Amen.**