

# 11<sup>th</sup> September 2022 – Morning Service

## Seeking the lost

Rev Michael Payne

### Call to Worship - Psalm 51:1-2

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

It was only when dating my document for this service that I realized the date, 11th of September. Using the British way of dating 11/9 does not automatically make us think back 21 years – expressing the date 9/11 is another matter. For those who were in New York, in America, indeed around the world watching television news broadcasts the images we saw, in part, will stay with us. What were you doing that day before 1.14 pm? Can you remember? At 1.14pm British Summer Time the event took place that killed 2977 people as two hijacked planes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Centres.

On this anniversary we pause and remember those who still live with the pain of that day 21 years on. In this moment we pause and remember the event of 21 years ago. We were all shocked by such an act of terror beyond our comprehension. On this anniversary we remember those deeply caught up in the events of that day. They need not reminding of the past but reach out and remind them in the present of your constant love and mercy. **Amen.**

### StF 55 – Immortal invisible

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|---|---|
| 1) Immortal, invisible, God only wise,<br>In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,<br>Most blessed, most glorious, the<br>Ancient of Days,<br>Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.               | 3) To all life thou givest, to both great and small;<br>In all life thou livest, the true life of all;<br>We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,<br>And wither and perish; but naught<br>changeth thee. |
| 2) Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,<br>Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might<br>Thy justice like mountains high soaring above<br>Thy clouds which are fountains of<br>goodness and love. | 4) Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,<br>Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;<br>All praise we would render: O help us to see<br>'Tis only the splendour of light hideth thee.           |

*Walter Chalmers Smith CCL No. 515642*

### Prayer of Adoration

We come as many or as one to worship you our God the One-in-Three.

We pause in our place to be encouraged and inspired, and to praise the one who gives us hope. Lord, your very being calls us here for you are the seeking God; we long to know more of your love.

Lord, who calls the lost to be found, who seeks to know us and be known, we worship you.

God of the infinite and the infinitesimal, God of the great and the small, we praise you for your constancy, your faithfulness, your unending love, and your undiminished passion for the wellbeing of all people.

We delight in your coming amongst humanity in the person of Jesus to show us what love is all about.

We praise you for his life, death and resurrection that demonstrated the power of love.

We rejoice in the presence of your Holy Spirit working within and through us to reveal your glory.

Accept our worship and speak into our hearts and minds through the words we hear, say, think and read in this special time. **Amen.**

Read the following Psalm carefully and make the desire of the author for forgiveness yours.

## Reading: Psalm 51

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgement. Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

## Assurance of forgiveness

Ever-loving God, you call us all into your family of grace. Where we were lost, you sought us. When we have wandered you desire to retrieve us, you untangle us from the mess that ensnare us. Your hands are kind; you restore us with joy. Thank you for not only accepting us but celebrating us, delighting in us as we discover what it means to belong to you. Once more may we accept your gracious words as words for us, "Your sins are forgiven." **Amen.**

## StF 440 – Amazing Grace

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|--|---|
| 1) Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)<br>That saved a wretch like me!<br>I once was lost, but now am found,<br>Was blind, but now I see.      | 4) The Lord has promised good to me,<br>His word my hope secures;<br>He will my shield and portion be<br>As long as life endures.                 |
| 2) God's grace has taught my heart to fear,<br>His grace my fears relived;<br>How precious did that grace appear<br>The hour I first believed. | 5) And, when this heart and flesh shall fail<br>And mortal life shall cease,<br>I shall possess within the veil<br>A life of joy and peace.       |
| 3) Through many dangers, toils and snares<br>I have already come;<br>God's grace has brought me safe thus far,<br>And he will lead me home.    | 6) When we've been there ten thousand years<br>Bright shining as the sun,<br>We've no less days to sing God's praise<br>Than when we first begun. |

*John Newton CCL No. 515642*

## Reading: Luke 15:1-10

### ***The Parable of the Lost Sheep***

Now all the tax-collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, 'This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable: 'Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbours, saying to them, "Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost." Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who need no repentance.

### ***The Parable of the Lost Coin***

'Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbours, saying, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost." Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.'

## Sermon

As I began to prepare for this service the words of one of our hymns came to mind:

*"I was lost but Jesus found me, found the sheep that went astray."*

It will be the final hymn of today's service. I want to reflect briefly on some of the themes of the hymn, one from each of the 5 verses. You now wish it was a shorter hymn!

### **Verse 1 - I will sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me**

He died for me. What an amazing statement. Do we truly believe it? Do you truly believe that Christ died for each "you"? It is so personal; it is so true. In the baptism service in the Methodist Worship Book there is an amazing statement said to each child being baptised:

*N and N (N),*

*for you Jesus Christ came into the world;*

*for you he lived and showed God's love;*

*for you he suffered death on the Cross;*

*for you he triumphed over death,*

*rising to newness of life;*

*for you he prays at God's right hand:*

*all this for you, before you could know anything of it.*

*In your Baptism, the word of Scripture is fulfilled: 'We love, because God first loved us.'*

I love holding a child in my arms and saying those words, personal words. If I am baptising children from more than one family I will say it to each child individually. These words express an important truth in Methodist Theology - Prevenient grace - God acts for us before we can act for him, an act of undeserved love for each of us, as bad as we are. Prevenient grace proceeds any and all of our conscious impulses. We may desire to do acts of love but we love because God first loved us. Jesus died for you, each you reading this or listening to it.

### **Verse 2 - I was lost but Jesus found me, found the sheep that went astray**

Jesus found me or did I find Jesus? An interesting question? As just mentioned God is the God of prevenient grace, the God who is seeking out the lost and the wayward. However "proper" we have been in our lives we have each needed finding. Seeking that which is lost can be part of our daily lives for those of us who are disorganised and have a poor memory. I will often say "I have lost ...." and Anita will say "it is not lost you just can't find it" or words to that effect.

How many of you have a device fitted to your keys that will help you find them. I have a link between my watch and my phone. I can press a button on my phone and I will hear my phone saying, "I'm here, I'm here". Last Sunday morning I was looking for my phone, I could not find it in my study, the bedroom, the living room or kitchen. I tried the bathroom to no avail so I pressed the link on my watch to here "I'm here" coming from my shirt pocket. When we cannot find what we are looking for it can become the most important thing for our mind at that moment; no peace until it is found, be it wallet, keys, passport or watch. That is how important you are to God, were to God, will ever be to God. A line from another hymn, "Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet, why do they roam?" We are part of God's flock but oh at times how we can wander. I wonder if God has a button he can press that means we say, "I'm here!"

I have two pictures that belong together. They are original paper-cut silhouettes. They are based upon a poem called Hound of Heaven by Francis Thompson. One picture is of a man running and the second is of a hound hunting. The idea of the two pictures is that they can be placed side-by-side or a long way apart. The man picture is placed to the left and the hound to the right. It appears that the man fears for his life and so is running away; yet there is nothing to fear for the hound represents God who is endlessly tracking him for he loves him so much. How much damage can be done to children by the time in which the statement "God is watching you" is said. It can be heard as a threat or a message of comfort.

### **Verse 3 - But his love has pardoned all**

There are many comments I have heard over the years that have stayed with me for I have found them helpful.

Ecclesiastes 11:1 reads, in the King James Version *“Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days.”* I remember a lovely older local preacher, Ted Moreton, in my first appointment paraphrasing it as *“Cast your bread upon the water and it will come back as a currant bun.”*

Jesus put it this way, *“Give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be poured in your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”* (Luke 6:38)

Another comment comes from reading, Micah 7:19 *“You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.”* Corrie Ten Boom, a Dutch writer added a rider to this *“thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea and put up a sign saying “no fishing.”*” We need to live accepting the grace and forgiveness of God and leaving our sins where God has placed them.

David asked of God in Psalm 51:9 – *blot out all my iniquities. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.*

That is what God does. Here are a couple more verses to hold onto and live by:

Psalm 103:12 *as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

Isa 43:25 *I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more.*

The God who in Jesus died upon a cross gives to us forgiveness,; he has the perfect memory for remembering and forgetting. To live in spiritual guilt is not to accept what Christ has done for us. We may need to deal with guilt on a physical level and God might call upon us to do so, but spiritually, in Christ, we are offered, by grace, forgiveness, so we can approach God and be near to him with confidence – *“No condemnation now I dread, Jesus and all in him is mine! Alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach the eternal throne, and claim, the crown, through Christ, my own.”* to quote Charles Wesley. To do less is to deny the grace and love of God for each of us; to count the price Christ paid as naught.

### **Verse 4 - Days of darkness still come o'er me, sorrow's paths I often tread**

Troubles still come our way but we are not alone. In some parts of the Church there is bad theology broadcast. *“Come to Jesus and all will be well.”* What does that say to those without homes and shelter? What does it say to those who struggle with mental health issues? What does it say to those living with long-term or terminal health conditions? To be a follower of Jesus is not an easy road through life with no difficulties, pain or suffering. It is to live life with God's presence. To complete the verse, *“But the Saviour still is with me, by his hand I'm safely led.”*

God says *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”* Hebrews 13:5.

Here is one who knows what to feel forsaken is like. As Jesus hung on a cross he cried out, *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken me”*. (Mark 15:34) There may well be times when we feel alone and abandoned; it is at such times we need to hang on to the truth, the promise of God, *“never will I forsake you.”* That is not always easy for so often we live by our feelings and not by known truth..

I remember when I was on a charity trekking trip to China – 21 years ago. We left Heathrow airport 33 days after 9/11 for a country with a border with Afghanistan. After 5 days of trekking and a couple of days relaxing in Beijing a group of us travelled to Xian. After an overnight train journey during which I had little sleep and a day visiting the Terracotta Army I went to my room feeling physically, emotionally, culturally and mentally exhausted. I felt nobody cared. I did not know where we were going to eat that evening. I felt like staying in my room and hiding away because I felt like nobody would notice if I did not appear at dinner, no one would come searching for me. I was wrong of course – and what an amazing meal we had that evening.

What we feel and reality are not always the same. God did not promise us an easy life – I refer to last week’s Gospel passage from Luke 14:25-35 on the cost of discipleship – but he did promise never to leave us alone without his presence. When the enemy tells us we are on our own and no one cares, and God has abandoned us we need to remind the enemy of the promise of God which is 100% reliable and trustworthy

**Verse 5 - He will keep me till the river rolls its waters at my feet**

We can so often be concerned with the here and now, and yes we should be, but we also need to remember the spiritual and eternal dimension of life. Once we have accepted God’s welcome into his family he does not want to let us go. Over the years we seemed to have forgotten the eternal destiny of our neighbours, the concept of heaven and hell and eternal separation from love has disappeared from our thinking, for God “loves all and will allow all into heaven” seems to be the attitude – well all apart from a few people who have been particularly bad. Is that the teaching of Jesus? Is that the teaching of the Church in history? Yet, once we have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour he will not let go of us – we may let go of him though he will keep seeking us. Not one of us knows what heaven will truly be like for it is beyond our understanding and experience. However, I lay out a possible idea. If whilst on earth we have only physical desires in a spiritual world of eternity those desires will still exist but can never be met. If on earth we have spiritual desires to be close to God in Jesus, they too will continue to exist eternally but can be fully met in the spiritual realm. Is that heaven?

**StF 481 – The Lord’s my shepherd**

1) The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;  
He makes me lie in pastures green,  
He leads me by the still, still waters,  
His goodness restores my soul.

Ch) *And I will trust in you alone,  
And I will trust in you alone,  
For your endless mercy follows me,  
Your goodness will lead me home.*

2) He guides my ways in righteousness,  
And he anoints my head with oil;  
And my cup - it overflows with joy,  
I feast on his pure delights.

3) And though I walk the darkest path -  
I will not fear the evil one,  
For you are with me, and your rod and staff  
Are the comfort I need to know.

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**Prayers of Intercession**

As we remember the God who seeks the lost let us pray for those involved in seeking and searching. We pray for those searching for victims of flooding and earthquakes; we remember the people in Pakistan enduring vast floods.

L: God who seeks **R: give us hearts and minds that seek too.**

We pray for those looking for missing people; in war zones, in disaster areas, at sea and on mountains, in local communities; children, adults and elderly.

L: God who seeks **R: give us hearts and minds that seek too.**

We pray for those seeking justice for the oppressed and for victims of crime.

L: God who seeks **R: give us hearts and minds that seek too.**

We pray for those in the area of medicine and science who through research are looking to bring cures to illnesses.

L: God who seeks **R: give us hearts and minds that seek too.**

We pray for governments, and in particular our parliament with a new Prime Minister. As they look for ways to help those impacted by economic hardship to face tomorrow with hope.

L: God who seeks **R: give us hearts and minds that seek too.**

We bring our prayers together as we share the prayer Jesus taught us to pray;-

### **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 Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are  
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **StF 323 – I will sing the wondrous story**

1) I will sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me  
How He left His home in glory  
For the cross of Calvary

*Ch) Yes I'll sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me  
Sing it with the saints in glory  
Gathered by the crystal sea*

2) I was lost but Jesus found me  
Found the sheep that went astray  
Threw His loving arms around me  
Drew me back into His way

3) Faint was I and fears possessed me  
Bruised was I from many a fall  
Hope was gone, and shame distressed me,  
But his love has pardoned all

4) Days of darkness still come o'er me  
Sorrow's paths I often tread  
But the Saviour still is with me  
By His hand I'm safely led

5) He will keep me till the river  
Rolls its waters at my feet  
Then He'll bear me safely over  
Where the loved ones I shall meet

*Francis Harold Rowley © HarperCollins Religious CCL No. 515642*

### **Dismissal prayer & Blessing**

God of the lost, open our eyes to see the world as you do. Forgive us when we fail to see the lost. Help us to seek those who need your love, and give to us the courage to offer them signs of your love by our actions and words. **Amen.**

May the Blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and lead you further into His truth. **Amen**