

12th October 2025 – Morning Service

Margaret Bradley

Call to Worship

God is here. God's Spirit is with us. Let us worship with all our heart, mind and strength.

StF 83 – Praise my soul the King of heaven

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| 1) Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King! | 3) Father-like, he tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame he knows;
In his hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows. |
| 2) Praise him for his grace and favour
To his people in distress;
Praise him, still the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness. | 4) Angels in the heights, adore him;
Ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace! |

Henry Francis Lyte

Prayer of Praise and Thanksgiving

Eternal God, source of the universe and all that exists; all praise and honour are due to you.
Eternal God, initiator of all love, compassion and hope; all praise and honour are due to you.
Eternal God, revealed to us in Jesus of Nazareth; all praise and honour are due to you.
Eternal God, constantly present in the world through your Holy Spirit; all praise and honour are due to you.
Eternal God, ceaselessly working in human history; all praise and honour are due to you.
So, lifting our voices before you, we sing your praise. Lifting our hearts before you, we rejoice in your being.
Lifting our lives before you, we offer you our allegiance. Accept our worship and continue your blessings upon us.

We give thanks for the rich variety in your world including the contrasts of nature and the diversity among people. We thank you that we have enough to eat, safe and stable homes in which to live, and a network of family and friends who make us feel that we belong. We thank you for revealing yourself in the life, teachings, death and resurrection of Jesus and that the chains of isolation, fear, anger, rejection and shame that bind us have been broken by your merciful grace. Unite us in love and service, we pray, so that we may share the gifts you have given us, until the whole earth lives as you intended. **Amen.**

Reading: 1 John 3: 16-18 (NRSV)

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers and sisters. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.

Reading: Matthew 25: 31-45 (NRSV)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You who are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels, for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness

Lord, we heard that you were hungry, and we did not share our food. Forgive us, Lord, forgive.

Lord, we heard that you were thirsty, and we kept our drink to ourselves. Forgive us, Lord, forgive.

Lord, we saw you as a stranger, and we closed our door and our heart. Forgive us, Lord, forgive.

Lord, we saw you go naked, and we fussed about our clothes. Forgive us, Lord, forgive.

Lord, we discovered that you were sick, and we avoided contact with you. Forgive us, Lord, forgive.

Lord, we heard that you were in prison, and we pretended that we did not know you. Forgive us, Lord, forgive.

Lord, you came to us again and again, and we were closed up in ourselves. Forgive us, Lord, forgive.

Forgive us if we have been unkind in our judgements, quick to condemn and slow to demonstrate compassion. Forgive us if we have given in to our worst and made it difficult for others to live up to their best. If we have come into your presence hard-hearted and cynical, send us out rejoicing, with big hearts, so that we may see you in those who are in need.

God of mercy and new beginnings, help us to trust your promises for the grace that we need, which you promise everyone, even the most undeserving. **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 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 94 – To God be the glory

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| 1) To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
Who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
And opened the life-gate that all may go in: | 2) O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives: |
| Ch) <i>Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
And give him the glory –
great things he has done!</i> | 3) Great things he has taught us, great
things he has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see: |

Frances Jane van Alstyne

Reflection – Prisons Week

Jesus said, 'I was in prison and you visited me.'

This Gospel imperative was picked up with enthusiasm by John Wesley and the Methodist movement that he started. John, and his brother Charles, regularly visited prisons during their time at Oxford University. Just after his conversion in 1738, Charles had himself locked up in a cell with a group of condemned criminals, all of whom he led to Christ before their execution. John not only preached, he raised money to provide clothing and blankets and bibles for prisoners, and he encouraged his followers to visit prisons too. He also campaigned for prison reform and was an inspiration to fellow-Christian John Howard, the leading penal reformer in the 18th Century. Women Quakers, like Elizabeth Fry, whose portrait was on the old £5 note, made prison visiting and helping the homeless fashionable in the early 19th Century.

The only time that I've been to prison was around 25 years ago, when I was managing a drop-in centre in Colley Gate on behalf of Overend. It ran for 5 years and in that time, it provided a Christian witness to a whole variety of people of different conditions, ages, ethnic groups and faiths. One woman came regularly with her young children, until she sadly ended her own life just before Christmas. She and her husband were drug users, and she'd taken to petty theft to provide gifts for the children when money had been spent on financing their habit. She was due to be sentenced for that offence and, rather than face the shame, had decided that she wanted to end her life. I conducted her funeral at Stourbridge Crematorium, which was attended by local drug dealers. Shortly afterwards her husband was also convicted, for the offence of drug-dealing, and so I went to visit him at the former Blakenhurst prison near Redditch. (The children moved to Australia to live with their grandmother.)

We may not all be able to visit those who have been imprisoned, but in 1975 a group of prison chaplains and other Christians involved in work with prisoners and their families in England and Wales were moved to encourage people to pray for the needs of prisoners for a week beginning on the second Sunday of October. It began as a Roman Catholic initiative, but quickly gained the support of other denominations. So, for 50 years, a small working-group has prepared prayers to enable the Christian community to pray for prisoners and their families, for victims of crime, for those working in the criminal justice system and the many people who are involved in caring for those affected by crime, whether inside or outside our prisons. The Methodist Church representative on that group is Gary Hopkins.

The UK has the largest prison population in Western Europe, with around 84,000 men and 4,000 women currently held inside the walls of our prisons. Jesus' words were probably against the thinking of the prevailing popular culture at the time he said them, and they are certainly so today. Some sections of the media report 'cushy jails' and people have a general animosity to those found guilty by the judicial system.

The vast majority of us have no first-hand experience of prison life, but we get glimpses which are often deeply worrying as we hear of a system in crisis. Lack of investment has led to chronic over-crowding, not enough staff, and crumbling infra-structure with insanitary buildings. There are increasing levels of violence, with assaults on the staff and on other prisoners. Inmates with depression, anxiety and other mental health conditions, who should be elsewhere, are harming themselves. The limited opportunities for work, education and training are hindering rehabilitation efforts. From a purely pragmatic view, a case can be made for change. More needs to be done to ensure that prisoners don't keep re-offending. We are told of initiatives to address the problems yet wonder if the underlying issue of an under-staffed and poorly-funded service is really being tackled. But prison reform doesn't win votes.

Today we affirm those who act as prison chaplains and visitors, as well as prison officers and those who work in probation services. They absorb the thoughts of some very sick folk into their heads and deserve our support. And we remember those locked up in our prisons. If we have any understanding of the theology of the cross of Christ it is that, when someone suffers, so too does God, who was incarnate in Jesus and enters into our pain and suffering. The Christian church also affirms that we are all created in the image of God, and that each incarcerated man or woman is a beloved child of God and as such is our brother and sister. When Jesus encountered people, he offered them hope and the possibility of making a fresh start. So, whatever their crimes, we should ensure that everyone is treated fairly, given dignity and helped to flourish.

Prayers for Prisoners with lighting of candles

We light a candle for those who are in custody in our prisons, especially those held in solitary confinement. We pray for those who have been made hard and cynical by life 'inside'; for those who feel no sorrow for the crimes they have committed; for those who are even now contemplating further crime. Open their hearts to your Spirit. We pray for those who are bullied and abused by the strong; for those who never receive a letter or visit; for those whose faith in Christ is mocked and who are taunted for going to chapel. Break the bonds of fear and isolation and support them with your love. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for the families and friends of those who have been detained. Support them with your love. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for those who have been hurt by the acts of others, especially victims of crime. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for all prison staff, and those who care for prisoners; for chaplains and for the prison fellowship that offers Christian ministry to prisons. We pray for the [National Association of Prison Visitors](#), and for those volunteers who go into penal establishments in the tradition of John Wesley and Elizabeth Fry to offer friendship, emotional support and understanding. We pray for the [Langley Trust](#), formed by a group of Christians spurred by the desire to see the lives of offenders changed for the better, which offers residential after-care and rehabilitation for ex-prisoners. We give thanks for their proven record of transforming lives, breaking addictions and restoring families, through its care and through the power of prayer. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for political prisoners and prisoners of conscience being held in detention overseas. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for those men, women and children who are imprisoned under threat of deportation as their claims for refugee status are considered. We hold before you all who have left their homes in search of new beginnings and possibilities. May they know your presence with them. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness. Amen.**

StF 672 – Where can we find you

- 1) Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We want to serve you, to answer your call.
Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?
What should we do in our service to all?
- 2) 'Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;
Go where the farmlands are empty and bare.
I broke the bread for the people around me;
Out of my plenty, think what you can share.
- 3) 'Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;
Go where my people sleep out in the rain.
I had no comforts but what others gave me;
Offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.
- 4) 'Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;
Go where my sheep are rejected and lost.
I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;
Go and do likewise, and don't count the cost.'
- 5) Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?
We are your servants who answer your call.
You go before us, and there we will follow,
Taking our cross in the service of all.

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Reflection – World Homelessness Day

On Friday it was World Homelessness Day and last Sunday, Churches were invited to observe Homelessness Sunday in acknowledgement that Jesus also said, 'I was hungry and you gave me some food. I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'

John Wesley was not only concerned with prisoners. He also engaged with homelessness and poverty through actively working to alleviate the suffering of the poor by providing practical aid and giving away much of his own money to the needy. I remember that in my oral examination at the Local Preachers' Meeting before being fully admitted as a Methodist Local Preacher, I was questioned on what Wesley had to say about money. The answer was '*Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can*'. His study of the Bible led him to believe that caring for those in need was a core aspect of Christian revelation. In ancient Rome, the statesman and lawyer Cicero was notable for having referred to the homeless as 'the poverty-stricken scum of the city, who should be driven off to the colonies.' With the rise of Christianity, attitudes changed drastically. The homeless were no longer 'scum', but people whom God loved deeply and with whom God identified. Rather than being excluded, they were embraced, to be treated with care and charity.

I share some concerning statistics. Almost 4,000 people sleep rough every night in England, with numbers increasing. The average life expectancy for such is 47 for men and 43 for women. 325,000 households are currently assessed as homeless. Without faith and community projects, like [Housing Justice](#), which advocate improved policies and provide funding to prevent homelessness, the count would be much higher. There is an urgent need for more social housing as there is a shortage of over 20,000 homes.

Members of the [Methodist Church Housing and Homelessness Group](#) encourage us to play our part to end homelessness and last July, the annual Methodist Conference meeting in Telford agreed to a proposal which included the words '*that genuinely affordable homes and emergency accommodation is an integral part of the mission of The Methodist Church as a sign of the gospel of Jesus Christ and as an outworking of our commitment to be a justice-seeking church. The Conference strongly encourages Methodist people to consider what more they can do to tackle the housing and homelessness crisis in their area.*'

One way in which our Circuit has done this is by offering the unused manse in Brierley Hill for use by the [Brierley Hill Project](#), which offers support to people in crisis. My daughter and sister, along with another member of the congregation at Kingswinford, have responded by giving support to [Saltbrook Place, Lye](#). This is a scheme of 58 units which provides accommodation for homeless people. Every month the church donates an Aldi voucher to support their Wednesday lunchtime 'Tea and Toast' get-together, which the

group attends to chat to the appreciative residents whilst serving them sandwiches, toast, fruit, home-baked cakes and drinks. They report that one of them said, 'These are the best bacon sarnies I've ever had.' Another man said it was the first thing he'd eaten in three days. However, the future of this scheme is uncertain. Midland Heart's contract is due to finish, and it is hoped that another contractor will take it on. Local councillors have been supportive, but we are asked to hold the staff and residents there in our prayers at this uncertain time for them.

Dudley Borough has services in place to ensure that no-one who sleeps rough spends a second night out on the streets. [The Homeless Prevention Team](#) provides an overnight place of warmth and safety and security in suitable long-term accommodation. [The Churches Housing Association of Dudley and District](#) provides accommodation, including a service for homeless young people aged 16 to 25, and there is a there is a Women's Refuge Service.

If we see someone who is homeless, we are urged not to ignore them. Homeless people often feel faceless and not valued. A simple 'hello' and a quick word could make all the difference. You could offer a drink or some food if you feel comfortable enough to do so. If you are concerned about someone who is sleeping rough, you can contact [Street Support Dudley](#). They will put them in touch with groups who can provide support.

Today we remember that Jesus said that he comes to us in each person who is in need, whether they are measured in statistics, estimated in development plans or argued about in political programmes. And we commit ourselves to doing what is right, what is just, what is compassionate, what is in line with God's will, as we fulfil our spiritual and ethical responsibilities.

Prayers for the Homeless with lighting of candles

Loving God, who has room for all, we light a candle to pray for all women and men, boys and girls, who cry out because they do not have a place to live, a home to belong to, or a place to keep their possessions, and who are homeless on the streets of our great and wealthy country. For those sleeping in doorways, parks or other risky places, and for those in hostels and night shelters. For families who have been evicted because they couldn't pay the rent. For those who have no relatives or friends to take them in. For all who are afraid and without hope. We pray for the residents and staff of Saltbrook Place, Lye in their uncertainty and for the Brierley Hill Project. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for all staff and volunteers who give their time and resources to provide love, care and support for those who are homeless. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for those who are in positions of power in our local council of Dudley, and those in central government. We pray they might be inspired to make housing a priority issue and so improve the housing situation in our nation and to provide accommodation for all that is dignified and affordable. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for the church, that it might help build communities where vulnerable, needy people are assisted and offered compassion and support rather than regarded with suspicion or despised. Help all who would follow Jesus see his face in the eyes of every homeless person and guide us in what we should do to help them. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness.**

We light a candle for those known to us who are sick and in need of restoration to health and wholeness. **May the light of hope shine in their darkness. Amen.**

StF 706 – Longing for light

- 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.
- Ch) *Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.*
- 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.
- 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.
- 4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.
- 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

Dedication of the Offering

We do not have to sit and beg and so we give thanks today that we have enough to help the needy and the stranger. And we ask, O God, that you will receive these gifts, offered in gratitude, praying that through this church, and our Circuit, others may come to know you as Saviour. **Amen.**

StF 715 – The right hand of God

- 1) The right hand of God is writing in our land,
Writing with power and with love;
Our conflicts and our fears,
Our triumphs and our tears,
Are recorded by the right hand of God.
- 2) The right hand of God is pointing in our land,
Pointing the way we must go;
So clouded is the way,
So easily we stray,
But we're guided by the right hand of God.
- 3) The right hand of God is striking in our land,
Striking out at envy, hate and greed;
Our selfishness and lust,
Our pride and deeds unjust,
Are destroyed by the right hand of God.
- 4) The right hand of God is lifting in our land,
Lifting the fallen one by one;
Each one is known by name,
And lifted now from shame,
By the lifting of the right hand of God.
- 5) The right hand of God is healing in our land,
Healing broken bodies, minds and souls;
So wondrous is its touch,
With love that means so much,
When we're healed by the right hand of God.
- 6) The right hand of God is planting in our land,
Planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
In these many-peopled lands,
Let his children all join hands,
And be one with the right hand of God.

Patrick Eugene Prescod © 1981 Caribbean Conference of Churches

Blessing

Go forth into the world in peace. Have courage. Hold fast to what is good. Return no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint-hearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honour all men and women. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, be with each one of us, this day and always. **Amen.**