

14th August 2022 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship

O magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name for ever.

StF 82 – O Lord my God

- 1) O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed!
 - 2) When through the woods and forest glades
I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur,
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;
 - 3) And when I think that God His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die -- I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin:
 - 4) When Christ shall come with shout
of acclamation
And take me home - what joy shall fill my heart!
Then shall I bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art!
- Ch) Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,
How great Thou art! How great Thou art!*

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Prayer of Adoration & Confession

God, our help and our shield, more powerful than earthquake, wind or fire, speak to us in the silence and draw us close to you...[Silence]

Heavenly Father, to you be all praise.

Gracious Redeemer, to you be all praise.

Comforting Spirit, to you be all praise:

Now and forever. **Amen.**

Have mercy upon us, O God, for we have grieved your Holy Spirit.

Forgive our lack of honesty, our failure to speak the truth. Pardon our lack of forgiveness, our anger and our bitterness. Forgive our lack of compassion, our slowness to love our neighbour. Pardon our lack of grace, our malice and our intolerance. Help us to love as Christ loved us, to be kind and tender hearted, forgiving one another as you in Christ have forgiven us. We ask it in his name and for his sake. **Amen.**

StF 518 – Father hear the prayer we offer

- 1) Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.
- 2) Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.
- 3) Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would strike the living fountains
From the rocks along our way
- 4) Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side.

Love M. Whitcomb Willis CCL No. 515642

Lesson: Isaiah 5: 1-7

I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard:
my loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside.
He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines.
He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.
Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit.

Now you dwellers in Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.
What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it?
When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?
Now I will tell you what I am going to do to my vineyard:
I will take away its hedge, and it will be destroyed;
I will break down its wall, and it will be trampled.
I will make it a wasteland, neither pruned nor cultivated, and briers and thorns will grow there.
I will command the clouds not to rain on it.

The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the nation of Israel, and the people of Judah are the vines he delighted in. And he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed; for righteousness, but heard cries of distress.

Lesson: Hebrews 11: 29 – 12: 2

By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched round them for seven days. By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and ill-treated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy that was set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Our hearts are glad in you, O God; we rejoice in your mighty acts. We have tasted and seen that you are good; we celebrate your kindness. To save the world from slavery to sin you sent your only Son. He gave himself up to death for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to you, and, in your boundless mercy, you give eternal life to all who confess that Jesus is Lord and believe in their hearts that you raised him from death. He is for us the Bread of Life, our nourishment and strength. He has prepared a place for us that we may be with him. He calls us to a life of faith and guides us by his Spirit. He gathers disciples from every land and makes us members of one another. He is our treasure and our joy, our saviour and our Lord; and in His name we give you thanks and rejoice for ever. **Amen.**

StF 564 – O Thou who camest from above

- 1) O Thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!
- 2) There let it for thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.
- 3) Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up thy gift in me -
- 4) Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Lesson: Luke 12: 49-56

'I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.'

He said to the crowd: 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, "It's going to rain," and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, "It's going to be hot," and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time?'

Sermon – Not peace but a fire

"Do you suppose that I came to bring peace to the world? No, not peace, but division." Luke 12: 51

Jesus said, "I came to set the world on fire." – and he wasn't kidding. In the name of Christ, cities have been raised to the ground, whole communities wiped out and some of the longest wars in history fought to their bitter inconclusive ends: Catholic against Protestant, Crusader against Moslem, Roundhead against Royalist and Christian against Jew. We destroyed Constantinople, fought over Jerusalem, marched the length and breadth of Europe and then massacred the civilisations of south and central America, not to mention inventing the Inquisition. And all in the name of Christ and his Church. Remember him? He was the chap who said "Peace be unto you", and taught us to make our peace at the Lord's Table. It's no good saying that all those terrible things happened long ago. Some of them happened within living memory; in Rwanda, the Balkans, the Middle East and Northern Ireland. On the face of it, Jesus' promise to set the earth on fire has been only too prophetic.

But of course, 'that is not what he meant,' we say. But the world says 'that is what happens when you get religion.' So, if it wasn't what he meant, what did he mean? It wasn't an isolated comment, because he returned to the theme of conflict – in family, nation and between nations – again and again. He never promised us an easy, comfortable way, but he did make clear that the mess we have made of things in the name of religion should be neither the way, the truth nor the life.

So what was the fire he promised? The disciples thought it was real. They even asked him if they should call down fire on a village which had turned them away, Old Testament style, and the answer was 'No'. Look at the readings which accompany this passage from Luke, and you will, I think, find something of the answer.

Fire, in the biblical tradition, meant either judgement or purifying through testing: “Tried in the fire”, you could say. In Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard there is the threat of judgement accompanying the promise of God’s care. If the vineyard is neglected, the Lord will destroy it. Likewise, if the people of Israel, God’s vineyard, fail to bear fruit, then that will be their fate and they will be judged accordingly. Jesus told his disciples what happened to the vines which do not bear fruit: they are pruned and burnt because they are useless.

It would be the same for those who could not recognise the times of crisis in which they lived. They could not see that what they wanted was not peace or justice or love or forgiveness, but power and double-dealing and greed, and in the end, it would lead them into open conflict with the Roman Empire, and the result would be a “no contest” with the dimensions of a holocaust. Jesus wants us to be able to read the signs of our own times, and act accordingly to declare that this is the world for which he died, and claim it for him.

In the letter to the Hebrews there is a second use of fire: the testing and the subsequent purification. Here we find the story of the saints who suffered for the faith, who have been tried in the fire, who have gone through torture and persecution and misery and death for the sake of God’s truth. The list given in Hebrews has increased immeasurably since the letter was written, of course. Such names as Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Mother Theresa, Desmond Tutu and a host of others. All of them people who have had to pass through the fire which is ignited when the call to a prophetic ministry is taken seriously.

Yet not one of them would have claimed the credit. They would follow the lead of the letter to the Hebrews which saw Jesus as the ultimate example. “He thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross”, because he saw this fire as his baptism which fulfilled his life’s work. There would be fire and not peace because the world did not want peace, and could only be brought to its senses by the fire of self-sacrifice which was proclaimed on the cross. It is not a comfortable doctrine nor an easy option, but it lies at the heart of our faith, and Jesus knew it when he spoke with his disciples and challenged the world around him.

So there is a fire of judgement which we cannot ignore; there is a fire of testing through which we may have to pass; but there is another fire. This is the fire that came with wind, and which inflamed the disciples’ hearts on the first Pentecost. It gave birth to the church and brought us here today. This is the fire of the Spirit which was Jesus’ promise and which he referred to as ‘The Comforter’ – the peace giver, if you like. This fiery power which defied description but which was all too evident on the life of the early church, and which, we believe, still burns with us today. It is the fire of the Spirit which would melt indifference and consume wickedness. No wonder Jesus said he was bringing fire, not peace.

And yet it is in this Spirit that he promises us comfort. And it is in our troubles, and testing times, that he offers us peace, because the source of that peace is in his baptism of fire. It is in those memories of his crucifixion, when we assemble round his table, and receive this peace, the peace that we then take out to a needy world. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Father God, we give thanks that we share in the inheritance of your saints. Grant us and your whole church a spirit of discipline and perseverance, let us not grow slack in well-doing or in our devotion to you.

Lord, make us a holy church, a healing church, a hospitable church. We pray for all who are new to the faith. And we remember any whose faith is wavering or who have lost the vision.

L: Holy and mighty God **R: We keep our hope fixed on you.**

Lord of righteousness, we pray for fair dealing and justice in our world: we remember before you all who are involved in commerce and world trade. We pray that the multinational companies may deal with integrity and with respect for all. We ask that all captives to debt and corruption may find freedom.

L: Holy and mighty God **R: We keep our hope fixed on you.**

We pray for all who work to provide us with our daily needs; all who work in the service industries, all who supply us with food, heat, light and shelter. We ask your blessing upon our loved ones and friends, upon our neighbourhood and our places of work.

L: Holy and mighty God **R: We keep our hope fixed on you.**

God of power, we pray for all people who are exhausted, and for people who live in areas where the land or resources are exhausted. We remember before you all who are weary and worn, all who are too tired to enjoy life. We pray for those who are suffering from a breakdown, and all who cannot cope. We pray for friends and loved ones who are in any sort of trouble, or who are ill.

L: Holy and mighty God **R: We keep our hope fixed on you.**

Lord, we give thanks that you renew, refresh and restore us. We pray for all who have passed through the shadow of death and entered life and light everlasting.

L: Holy and mighty God **R: We keep our hope fixed on you.**

These, and all our prayers, we bring to you in the name of your Son Jesus Christ, who taught us when to pray, to say:

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 412 – See how great a flame aspires

- 1) See how great a flame aspires,
Kindled by a spark of grace!
Jesu's love the nations fires,
Sets the kingdoms on a blaze.
To bring fire on earth he came;
Kindled in some hearts it is:
O that all might catch the flame,
All partake the glorious bliss!
- 2) When he first the work begun,
Small and feeble was his day:
Now the word doth swiftly run,
Now it wins its widen'ng way;
More and more it spreads and grows
Ever mighty to prevail;
Sin's strongholds it now o'erthrows,
Shakes the trembling gates of hell.
- 3) Heirs of God, your Saviour praise!
He the door has opened wide;
He has given the word of grace,
Jesu's word is glorified;
Jesus, mighty to redeem,
He alone the work has wrought;
Worthy is the work of him,
Him who spoke a world from nought.
- 4) Saw ye not the cloud arise,
Little as a human hand?
Now it spreads along the skies,
Hangs o'er all the thirsty land:
Lo, the promise of a shower
Drops already from above;
But the Lord will shortly pour
All the Spirit of his love!

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Blessing

The Almighty God give you strength to run the race that is set before you, give you power and hope to persevere to the end; And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and always. Amen.