

17th September 2023 – Morning Service

Tina Gittings

Call to Worship

We begin our time of worship with the words of Sarah Mallet, Methodist Preacher (1764-1846) taken from the current Methodist Prayer Handbook: Endue us with your power, O Lord, that our mouths may speak your word, our hearts reveal your grace, our lives proclaim your goodness, and our labours find fulfilment in heaven. **Amen.**

StF 609 – As we gather in your presence now

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| 1) As we gather in your presence now,
Lord, we will worship;
As we sing our thankful songs aloud;
Lord, we will worship.
When we go out in the name of Christ,
Lord, we will worship;
As your word and Spirit shape our lives,
Lord, we will worship. | 2) When we love our friends and families,
Lord, we will worship;
When we give ourselves to those in need,
Lord, we will worship.
When we take instruction cheerfully,
Lord, we will worship;
When we lead with Christ's humility,
Lord, we will worship. |
| <i>Ch) And whatever we do, in word or deed,
We do for the one who set us free;
When we're on our feet or on our knees,
Lord, we will worship,
Lord, we will worship.</i> | 3) In the course of every working day,
Lord, we will worship;
When our business takes us far away,
Lord, we will worship.
When we care for children in the home,
Lord, we will worship;
When our audience is you alone,
Lord, we will worship. |

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Prayer of Adoration, Confession and Thanksgiving

Lord, God our Father you create all things in your wisdom, love and power. We adore you and come to you with prayer and praise from the depths of our hearts. We are humbled before you as we struggle to understand the greatness of the glory that is yours alone. Give us eyes to see the wonder of your works, minds that are open to the height, depth and breadth of your creation, ears that listen for your voice so that we may know what you require of us, wills that are strong in your service and hearts that love you, the One who first loved us. You gave your Son Jesus Christ to show us the greatness of your love. We are overwhelmed by the love revealed, to us through his life and death on the cross and the triumph of his resurrection, so that we can know the glory of your kingdom.

Jesus Christ, through his sacrifice, taught us what love really is, how much it costs, how it digs deep into our selfish lives. We confess that we have not loved one another with the love we see in Christ. Father, forgive us for being so concerned about ourselves, for thinking so little about others, for doing so much less than we should in the cause of your kingdom, and in service to you. Fill our lives with the love that finds no service too costly, no rejection too hard to bear, that we may be ready to give all for your sake, and for the sake of others, even as Christ in his love gave all for us. **Amen.**

StF 113 – O worship the King

- 1) O Worship the King, all-glorious above;
O gratefully sing his power and his love:
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.
- 2) O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
His chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds
form,
And dark is his path on the wings of the storm.
- 3) The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, your power has founded of old;
Established it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.
- 4) Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.
- 5) Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In you do we trust, nor find you to fail;
Your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.
- 6) O measureless Might, ineffable Love,
While angels delight to hymn you above,
Your humbler creation, though feeble our praise,
With true adoration our voices we raise.

Robert Grant

Reading: Exodus 14 : 19-31

Then the angel of God, who had been travelling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other; so neither went near the other all night long.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, 'Let's get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.'

Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.' Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing towards it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen – the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

Reflection

In early 1957 I was taken to the pictures to see the latest big film to come out of Hollywood. Full of action and in colour, it was of course The Ten Commandments starring Charlton Heston and Yul Brynner. The special effects in the film are still talked about by film buffs, in particular the parting of the waters achieved with two walls of glass in the film. Of course, God had other ways of parting of the waters. The film is a Block Buster.

God had a task for his people to carry out; they were to tell the world of God's love but were in no position to do whilst still in Egypt. The Hebrews had arrived in Egypt some 400 hundred years earlier fleeing famine in their own land. Over the decades their social position had slipped until they were little more than slaves carrying out all the menial and hard work required to support a powerful prosperous nation. Their population numbers grew. The Egyptians lost the skills and ability to do the work carried out by the Hebrews. The Egyptians' enjoyed a much more pleasant way of life than the Hebrews, but they started to fear the Hebrews as the population numbers of Hebrews grew. Drastic steps were taken to curb this growth. Moses only just survived a cull of baby boys, and was reared within the royal court of Egypt. As he grew, he found his real family and God. He was the one to take God's words to the Pharaoh, that God required his people, the Hebrews, to quit Egypt and return to their own land.

Pharaoh, surrounded by wealth, power, the assurances of the priests of his false gods, felt able to refuse the request from God. The Hebrews were too useful to let go. Even the plagues that the Egyptian people suffered were not enough for him to surrender and obey God. Only the death of the first-born males throughout the land, which included his own son, caused Pharaoh to submit. Moses gathers the people together to start the journey across the desert to the promised land.

As the Hebrews make their way the first of the stops on their journey news comes that Pharaoh has changed his mind and his elite troops with horse drawn chariots are in pursuit. Can you imagine the horror and fear the people felt? They couldn't out run Pharaoh's army. There were a huge number of people, probably about 2 million including women, and children and babies. God sent his Angel who raised a vast cloud, in effect a smoke screen between the people and the army. The people moved forward into the light and on to the campsite God had instructed Moses to use. Some of the people began to complain. The site had mountains to the sides, Pharaoh's army battling forward through the darkness of the cloud behind them and in front of them the sea. They were trapped, some thinking that it would have been better to have stayed in Egypt. God is with them, rescue is at hand. Moses, at God's command, stretches his arm over the waters of the sea. They part revealing a causeway across, the sea bed dries out, and the people cross to safety. The following army plunge into the sea as God draws the waters together. Imagine the screams of men and horses as there is no escape from the thundering rising waters bringing death to all. This was witnessed by the Hebrews - they saw God in action with all his power and might used to protect and save them. Perhaps for the first time they saw his faithfulness and favour towards them and understood the love God has for his people.

As for Pharaoh his army was destroyed, his economy crashed due to lack of workers, his people were restless and his authority over them weakened. He was a laughing stock to surrounding nations and worse than that his land was easy prey for invasion. God had revealed his power, his greater authority and his love and protection for his people. So other nations note what God will do to save his people and he will not be thwarted by in his plans by petty rulers who seek to defy him.

I sat through the film in silence, I told you it was a Block Buster. As a ten-year-old I learned of the greatness of God and understood the meaning of the power and the glory said so easily in Sunday school through this film. God intended that the Hebrews should know that he is the One, the only God through his actions on that day and it worked for me as I sat in the dark, in the cinema.

StF 465 – Guide me O thou great Jehovah

- 1) Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.
Feed me now and evermore.
- 2) Open thou the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.
Be thou still my strength and shield.
- 3) When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.
I will ever give to thee.

William Williams

Reading: Matthew 18 : 21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?" "No, not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven, because the Kingdom of heaven is like this.

Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants' accounts. He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. The servant did not have enough to pay his debt, so the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. The servant fell on his knees before the king. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay you everything!' The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go.

Then the man went out and met one of his fellow servants who owed him a few dollars. He grabbed him and started choking him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he said. His fellow servant fell down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!' But he refused; instead, he had him thrown into jail until he should pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very upset and went to the king and told him everything. So he called the servant in. 'You worthless slave!' he said. 'I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.' The king was very angry, and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount."

And Jesus concluded, "That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Reflection

Peter always has something to say, most of the time without thinking. He asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother, and without giving Jesus time to answer, he replies to his own question. Seven was his answer thinking he was being generous as most of us struggle with forgiving once and Rabbis taught forgiveness on three occasions but not for a fourth time. It must have come as a bit of a shock to Peter to find that Jesus didn't praise him for his kindness. Jesus' answer of seventy times seven is the number of times to forgive which in fact means there is no countable limit. Just a thought - if you can keep count of the number of times you forgive someone up to four hundred and ninety are you really forgiving them or adding up resentments against them?

Jesus went on to tell a story of a servant who was forgiven a great debt by his master, instead of him and his family, along with all his possessions being sold to pay off the debt he owed to his master. He was unable to find within himself the mercy he had received towards a fellow servant who owed him a debt a very small fraction of that which he owed his master. This parable illustrates the lesson that that you must forgive in order to be forgiven. When the master heard that his mercy had not been extended to a fellow servant, he was angry and handed the debtor over to torturers until the debt could be paid. The debt was so huge that there was no chance it could ever be repaid.

Time and time again Jesus teaches us about mercy and forgiveness. In our reading from Exodus we learn of God's power, glory, authority and faithfulness to his people. As Christians we know of the sacrifice made to save us from the power of sin through Jesus Christ. I quote from a modern hymn written by Matt Boswell and Matt Papa, very active writers and performers on the American Christian music as well as being pastors and leaders in their local communities:

*"What riches of kindness he lavished on us, his blood was the payment, his life was the cost
We stood 'neath a debt we never could afford, our sins, they are many, his mercy is more"*

As we say together the Lord's Prayer and call on our Father in Heaven, we say the words which are central to the prayer "Forgive us our trespasses (sins) as we forgive those who trespass (sin) against us". If God has forgiven us the debt we owe him, we must forgive those who owe debts to us. Nothing we have to forgive can ever compare to that which we have been, are, and will be, forgiven.

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 693 – Beauty for brokenness

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| 1) Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in Your suffering world, this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset Your kingdom increase. | 3) Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth
to green,
Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain. |
| 2) Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills.
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't
speak | 4) Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,
Plundered and poisoned, our future,
our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed,
Make us content with the things that we need. |
| Ch) <i>God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray,
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain,
Come change our love from a spark to a flame.</i> | 5) Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until Your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of Your ways,
Seek Your salvation and bring You their praise. |

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty and merciful God, who through the love of Jesus Christ, we come to you as your children and call on you as Our Father, bringing to you our prayers for this hurting and troubled world.

Father, we pray that no powerful nation seeks to impose its will on poorer and smaller nations exploiting the people and natural resources in order to increase their own nation's prosperity and influence at the expense of poorer nation. We pray that warfare and violence will not be used to achieve their selfish ambitions.

Father, we pray that leaders of nations will be sensitive to the needs of their people and not seek to compete on the world stage with shows of might and power while their people are without food, shelter, medical care, education and live in ever increasing poverty. Bring them to understand that leadership is responsibility to care for others and not a way to wealth and self- serving power.

Father, we pray that no-one will be forced to flee their country, their town, their street, their home, because of war or violence. That no one will be uprooted from their homes and land for the profit of others. We pray that wise men and women will appear in places of war and strife and with love and wise words bring about resolution and peace.

Father, we pray for those suffering turmoil and hardship, loss of loved ones through natural disasters, fire, flood, and earthquake. We pray that the people of the world in richer nations will come to their aid not just with material and practical help but with love and comfort and the reassurance of your love.

Father, we pray that through the strength of the Holy Spirit we that we may be true followers of Jesus, followers of his example of love and obedience and always seeking to bring glory and honour to your name. **Amen.**

StF 351 – In Christ alone

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| 1) In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand. | 3) There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine-
Bought with the precious blood of Christ. |
| 2) In Christ alone! who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
The gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The word of God was satisfied -
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live. | 4) No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand! |

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Closing Prayer - 2 Thessalonians 2 : 16 & 17

May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. **Amen.**