

1st November 2020 – Morning Service

Martin Rider

Call to Worship - Psalm 43:3-4

Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Amen.

Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light and truth of Christ to guide us. It was written in 1993 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. |
| <i>Ch) Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
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. |

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Prayer

Almighty God, whose might is matched only by your boundless love, you are the Living Word who spoke the Universe into existence, who created the earth and all that lives on it. It is you who created mankind and entrusted the stewardship of this world into our care. You have granted us wisdom to make use of the resources this world offers and a conscience to discern between right and wrong. We thank you for the honour bestowed on us.

Heavenly Father, in your compassion you seek to sustain all life and you provide our daily needs. Although you know all our failings and flaws, you call us to be your earthly sons and daughters, a holy priesthood in an everlasting covenant of love. You understand us intimately, for you lived among us as Christ Jesus, who shared our very nature: our joys and woes, hopes and fears, our trials and temptations and who came to show us in words and deeds how you want us to live. Through his crucifixion and resurrection, our Saviour broke the power of sin and death and offers us everlasting life through faith in him.

Spirit of truth and love, it is good to be here to worship you. Take away all anxieties and distractions, so we may offer our praise and adoration with open hearts and minds and receive your blessing through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Heavenly Father, we offer heartfelt thanks for the many blessings we have received from you: our lives; homes, friends and family, things that we enjoy and experiences which bring us fulfilment. Most of all, thank you for loving us even when we are faithless, loveless and unlovable.

L: Gracious God **R: Have mercy on us**

Lord, pardon us when we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves and fail to love and serve you wholeheartedly. In Jesus' precious name, help us to change our ways, O Lord, so we lead Christ-centred lives. Forgive us for sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

L: Gracious God **R: Have mercy on us**

Merciful Lord, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us but call us to follow you once again unburdened by guilt. From now onward, may we serve you in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that, by caring for our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, we may honour you in Jesus' beautiful name. 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.**

We continue our worship with a beautiful hymn, written by Graham Kendrick in 1993. It is a prayer for God's love to warm our hearts, so we can transform our world.

StF 693 – Beauty for brokenness

- 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!
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- Ch) *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.*

Prayers of Intercession

God most gracious and holy, we thank you for your boundless, undying love that has sustained us throughout lockdown and which we are confident will bring us through this time of trial. Help us to reveal the light of your love in our daily lives, so we can drive away some of the darkness that has enveloped the world, as we care for neighbours both nearby and far away. Grant us courage, steadfastness, wisdom and compassion so we may answer your call, but there are many circumstances where we know we are powerless, so we turn to you, for to you all things are possible.

Lord of all, remember in your goodness, this church, the other churches in our Circuit and, indeed, the World Church. Help us as we begin to open our buildings and plan for the time when lockdown ends. Help us to manage and problems that have arisen during the past seven months, so we may share Christ's Good News, united in words and deeds with our neighbours.

Lord of reconciliation and forgiveness, we pray for peace around the world where acts of war, terrorism and persecution cause so many deaths, so much destruction and such profound despair. Inspire the leaders of the nations of the world to seek justice and peace, rather than resorting to violence when they cannot have their way. Compassionate God, help leaders resolve situations that seem hopeless, so your love will overcome the hatred in human hearts.

Lord of shalom, or wellbeing, may the light of your love shine upon people in our community who are sick in body, mind or spirit. May they feel your presence in their need and find healing, renewed strength, comfort and hope, throughout the treatment they receive. Gracious God, reach out to people who are living with a dementia, their families and carers, especially in these difficult times. Comfort them, reassure them and let them feel loved and valued for who they are, despite their brokenness.

Loving God, hear our prayer for neighbours whom coronavirus has caused to be lonely, afraid, depressed and anxious, for whom lockdown has strained their relationships to breaking point, besides people who are facing the loss of their jobs when furlough ends. We pray for everybody who mourns the loss of a loved one at a time when funerals are so constrained. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, confident that you will reach out to them.....

Lord, we ask you help us to offer them practical support and friendship, despite the social restrictions that are in force. We pray that you will hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, in which they may find healing, courage, strength and enduring peace.

Heavenly Father, grant national leaders wisdom to adopt policies that protect their peoples until COVID19 can be brought under control. Help us to remember that this crisis has no parallel in living memory, so we may be patient when honest mistakes occur, as they have done and will continue to do so. May we patiently observe guidelines laid down by the Government, even though we may find them difficult and confusing. Dispel scepticism and reckless behaviour in parts of the country where tighter restrictions have been imposed, so that, by obeying the rules, the rate of infection is controlled. We pray for the NHS, scientists and keyworkers as they continue their struggle to bring an end to this threat to humankind. Bless them and keep them safe in their duties until researchers successfully produce a vaccine, or vaccines that work. Lord, reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we can find comfort in your saving grace.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead Christ-centred lives but to boldly take the light of the gospel to a broken and needy world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Reading: 1 John 3:1-3

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies themselves, just as they are pure. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 5:1-12

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Amen

Our next hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. Most of their hymns are set to old Scots ballad melodies, but this hymn is set to 'O Waly, Waly', a traditional English melody from the early Eighteenth Century.

StF 746 – For all the saint who showed you love

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| 1) For all the saints who showed your love
In how they lived and where they moved,
For mindful women, caring men,
Accept our gratitude again. | 3) For all the saints who named your will,
And saw your kingdom coming still
Through selfless protest, prayer and praise,
Accept the gratitude we raise. |
| 2) For all the saints who loved your name,
Whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
Who sang your songs and shared your word,
Accept our gratitude, good Lord. | 4) Bless all whose will or name or love
Reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
Your life through theirs has hallowed ours. |

John L Bell & Graham Maule © 1996 WGRG CCL No. 515642

Sermon - The Beatitudes

Consider the Ten Commandments given to Moses: 'you shall have no other gods before me; you shall not worship false idols; you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain; you shall keep the Sabbath day holy; honour your mother and your father; you shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, his servants or his property.' Although some academics claim that they are outdated, these laws are designed to produce harmony in society – provided they are not broken. However, as an ex-teacher I do have reservations about the way they are set out. Each law is a prohibition – 'you shall not....' Just think what happens when you tell children that they must not do something, especially if they are in their teens! They'll often find your ban a challenge – which makes it all the more irresistible, so they defy you.

Jesus always tried to be positive, which is why his Beatitudes congratulate those who behave well in God's sight. The Greek word makarios, which many Bibles translate as 'blessed' or 'happy', really means congratulations, or well-off, or fortunate. In other words, we ought to read the first beatitude as, 'Fortunate are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!' Jesus is telling us what qualities and actions really please God. Let us consider what each beatitude means today.

Being spiritually poor means humbly trusting God, even when things go wrong, rather than setting oneself against the Lord, relying on one's own strength alone. Those who mourn are people who see worldly wrong and work to set it right – God will work alongside them. The humble or meek, refers to those of us who do not seek to achieve success by callously trampling over others, but who try to succeed by honest means. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means to be God-centred in our dealings with other people, the result of which will be to be fulfilled in our lives.

To be merciful means to honour the Commandment that we are to love other people as we love ourselves. If we do so, God's love will shine down on us. Now, the pure in heart does not mean moral or sexual purity, but making the love for God our chief priority, echoing the Greatest Commandment, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind'. If you do so, you will see God face-to-face in heaven. The peacemakers are not only those who seek to end wars, but those who work for God's shalom in our world: the well-being of all; for prosperity, good health, happiness, unity, peace and blessing. True peace requires all peoples feeling good about themselves, their neighbours and the future, so those who work for God's shalom are his true children, for this is what Jesus strove to do in his earthly ministry.

In the last two beatitudes Jesus warned his followers to expect to be persecuted by those who do not share their beliefs and values. He said, however, those who kept their resolve would inherit eternal life, because they witnessed to Jesus as the Messiah. Surely, you may say, saints like these must be very distinctive, yet I shall end by telling you about a lady who I firmly believe is a saint, though to many she was just plain, ordinary Joy!

Joy Broadhead was a former member of my church. She was born in Wordsley just over a century ago, but lost her parents as a young child and was taken into the workhouse orphanage. At eight she contracted meningitis and survived somehow, despite being given ice-baths and being badly-treated. Joy received the most basic education, began work in the hospital laundry at fourteen, before progressing to a ward-cleaner. She was not embittered by her early experiences, the only evidence of her hardships being an implacable opposition to cruelty towards anyone or anything.

Joy's working life was spent keeping the wards at Wordsley Hospital immaculate – she had to, for the one-eyed Matron was a terror – but she took great pride in her work. Her dedication to cleanliness continued to her eighties, for she always led the volunteers at the annual church spring-cleaning and she led by example. If ever I find myself flagging when a task threatens to overwhelm me, I can conjure up her battle-cry: 'Come on, my dears, we've work to do for the Lord!'

Although she never married, never owned a car, lived in a council bungalow with her beloved cat and had few worldly possessions, Joy was content and lived up to her name at home and in church. When she was stricken with cancer and spending her last few weeks at a hospice, she was visited by our Minister, Andrew Roberts. She considered her life and said, "I'm so happy. I have Jesus and I have my friends!" Andrew said her room radiated God's shalom: peace, fulfilment, well-being and peace, for Joy had found life's true fortune – the treasures of the heart in friendship and Christ Jesus. May we do the same. Amen.

We conclude our worship with hymn number 672, 'Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master'. It was written in 1993 by Allan Dickinson a lay preacher at a Baptist church in Cardiff and directs us to go out from our churches to take Good News to the poor, marginalised and needy – just as Jesus did.

StF 672 – Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master

- 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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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.