

20th September 2026 – Morning Service

Liam Hodgetts

Call to Worship

What if I told you you'll be OK? That there's nothing in your past that can't be forgiven. Nothing you've done, no matter how hurtful or shameful, can stop the power of God's grace. No matter the road you've walked, the places you've been, or the things you've seen. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So today, no matter what you're dealing with; no matter what burdens are weighing you down; know this, you will be OK.

StF 51 – Great is thy faithfulness

God can use the most ordinary folks to do great things. Because, while we might be ordinary, he is far from it. Everything we do can be taken by that extraordinary God and turned into something so beautifully used for his glory and honour. And, even when we fail and are faithless, our covenant-keeping, never-failing, mercy-giving, never-changing God will be faithful. *April Brover*

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| 1) Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions,
they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be: | 2) Summer and winter, and springtime
and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love: |
| Ch) <i>Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.</i> | 3) Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope
for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! |

Thomas O Chisholm

Opening Prayers

Faithful and generous God, we come before you this morning with grateful hearts. You are the God who leads your people, the God who provides for their needs, the God who hears when they cry out, and the God who never abandons those who belong to you.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are our guide and our companion on the journey. You call us to follow you, not knowing everything that lies ahead, but trusting the One who leads us.

Holy Spirit, open our hearts this morning. Help us to see God's goodness, to recognise his provision, and to rejoice in his grace.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are worthy of our praise, our worship and our trust. So we turn our eyes towards you now, and we worship you.

Loving God, as we come before you, we recognise how easily we lose sight of your goodness.

We grumble when things do not go as we expect. We focus on what we lack rather than giving thanks for what we have. We look at the lives of others and compare them with our own. We question why they have been given opportunities, blessings, or recognition that we would have liked for ourselves. Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us for forgetting how much you have already given us. Forgive us when we judge the journeys of others without knowing what they have been through. Forgive us when we struggle to rejoice when your grace reaches someone else.

Teach us to trust you with our own journey. Teach us to receive each day as a gift. And teach us to celebrate your generosity, even when it is given in ways we did not expect.

Thank you that your grace is greater than our failures, and that in Jesus Christ there is forgiveness and new life.

Generous God, we thank you for your faithfulness. Thank you for bringing us through the wildernesses of our lives. Thank you for the times when you have provided what we needed, even when we did not recognise it at first.

Thank you for the people you have placed around us, for our families and friends, for this church family, and for the places and opportunities you have given us.

We thank you for Jesus Christ. Thank you for your grace, which we cannot earn and do not deserve, but which you give freely.

Help us today to remember your goodness, to be grateful for what you have given us, to trust you with what lies ahead, and to rejoice whenever we see your grace at work in the lives of others.

Receive our worship, receive our thanks, and draw us closer to you. In Jesus' name we pray. **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.**

Reading: Exodus 16: 2-15 (ESV)

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against the LORD. For what are we, that you grumble against us?" And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the LORD has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him—what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the LORD."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.'" And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. And the LORD said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat.

Reading: Psalm 105: 1-6, 37-45 (ESV)

Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!

Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!
Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!
Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,
O offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!

Then he brought out Israel with silver and gold, and there was none among his tribes who stumbled.
Egypt was glad when they departed, for dread of them had fallen upon it.

He spread a cloud for a covering, and fire to give light by night.
They asked, and he brought quail, and gave them bread from heaven in abundance.
He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed through the desert like a river.
For he remembered his holy promise, and Abraham, his servant.

So he brought his people out with joy, his chosen ones with singing.
And he gave them the lands of the nations, and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil,
that they might keep his statutes and observe his laws.
Praise the LORD!

StF 77 – Give thanks to the Lord

1) Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King:
his love endures forever.
For he is good, he is above all things.
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.

*Ch) Forever God is faithful
forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us, forever.
Forever God is faithful,
forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us, forever. Forever*

2) With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm
his love endures forever.
For the life that's been reborn,
his love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.
Sing praise, sing praise.

3) From the rising to the setting sun,
his love endures forever.
By the grace of God, we will carry on,
his love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.
Sing praise, sing praise.

Chris Tomlin © 2000 worshiptogether.com songs

Reflection

The story of Exodus is perhaps one of my favourite stories in the Bible. It shows how human we are. The Israelites have been rescued from slavery in Egypt and are on their way to the land flowing with milk and honey. The bad times are gone, and the good times are on their way. What we're seeing here is the transition period between the two.

They have seen plagues, and they have crossed the Red Sea. They have watched God lead them by a pillar of cloud and fire. But, when things get a little difficult, what do they do? They grumble! Seven times the word "grumble" or "grumbling" is used in this passage.

But maybe we shouldn't be so quick to judge. Perhaps we recognise this same response in us. We know what it is like when the journey starts well but then becomes difficult. We know what it is like to be enthusiastic about moving forward — until moving forward becomes uncomfortable.

Last week, I attended the Sankey Evening in Pensnett, and as those gathered were singing, it made me think about this journey from Egypt. They very likely sang hymns and songs as they travelled. They had every reason to sing. One of my particular favourites is *Sound the Battle Cry*: "Onward, forward, shout aloud hosanna!"

It's easy to sing "Onward, forward" when things are going well. It's easy to say, "Yes Lord, lead me on your path." But when the road gets rough – food runs short, or water is bitter – "forward" might not be the most attractive direction.

How many times have we looked back fondly on the past? This is often known as The Golden Age or nostalgia. Psychologists call this "rosy retrospection" (or putting on the rose-tinted glasses). This is what we're seeing here with the Israelites. They say to Moses and Aaron: "Would that we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full." In other words: "Egypt wasn't so bad after all!"

The place where they had been slaves? The place where they had been oppressed? They're remembering the good bits and conveniently forgetting the difficult bits. The Israelites are looking backwards because they cannot yet see the benefit of moving forwards. And there's a lesson here for us: God may be leading us somewhere new, but that doesn't mean the journey will always be comfortable. Maybe that's in our personal lives, or in Church, or maybe our communities, or even our faith.

"Things used to be better." "People used to come." "We used to know what we were doing." "We used to have more." But, **where is God leading us now?** For the Israelites, that's out of Egypt and to the Promised Land... but at the moment, they're in the in-between. The old has gone, but the new isn't quite here. And they grumble.

God hears them, gives them instruction, and says, "I've got you". "I've heard your moaning, so here is what I am going to do..." He is giving them a test. Only gather what you need for the day; no more, no less. Will they obey, or will they succumb to the temptation to collect more than they require for the day?

God responds to their complaint about food in much the same way that he earlier responded to their complaint about bad water (Exodus 15: 24-25). In that case, he gave Moses the means to sweeten the water to make it potable. In this case, he promises Moses that he will "rain bread from the sky" to feed the people.

God tells the Israelites to gather the manna day by day. They are not to hoard it or gather more than they need. They are to trust God for what they need each day. And here, we hear echoes of the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." The words we pray in Matthew 6 and Luke 11 have their roots, in part, in this story. This should remind us to put tomorrow in God's hands when tomorrow comes. As humans, we like security and guarantee, but this is saying to hand all that over to God, because he will take care of us. You cannot live tomorrow's life today. You can only receive today's provision. Tomorrow, you will have to trust again.

So, they've been told all this, given these instructions, and the manna arrives. They receive what is promised, yet the people ask, "What is this?" I can imagine Moses and Aaron – "We told you what was going to happen... weren't you listening!?" The Lord provided what he promised. Perhaps they were expecting something different. How many times have we prayed for something, and received something we weren't quite expecting?

There's this quote from the 2007 film, *Evan Almighty*, where God (played by Morgan Freeman) is sitting at a bar with Joan Baxter, the wife of Evan Baxter (modern-day Noah). It goes like this:

If someone prays for patience, you think God gives them patience? Or does he give them the opportunity to be patient? If he prayed for courage, does God give him courage, or does he give him opportunities to be courageous? If someone prayed for the family to be closer, do you think God zaps them with warm fuzzy feelings, or does he give them opportunities to love each other?

Earlier in the film, Joan prays for the family to be closer together. Now I'm sure she wasn't expecting God to call Evan to build an ark to save them from a flood. This reflects that God provides for us in ways we don't immediately recognise. We pray for an answer, and the answer doesn't look like the one we imagined.

So when we pray, instead of saying "Why isn't God giving me what I expected?", perhaps we can ask ourselves "What is God giving me today?"

Perhaps there are two questions for us this morning.

The first is: **Are we looking backwards when God is calling us forwards?** Are we idealising something in the past simply because the present is difficult? Are we forgetting why God brought us out? Are we allowing the discomfort of the wilderness to make Egypt look better than it really was?

And the second question is: **What is our manna today?** What is the daily provision God is giving us? Maybe it is strength, or patience, or an opportunity. Maybe it is simply enough grace to get through today. We may not be able to see the whole journey, or know what tomorrow brings. But we don't need to. The Israelites were not given bread for the whole journey – they were given daily bread.

“Onward, forward, shout aloud hosanna!” - they are good words. But sometimes, “onward, forward” can look like complaining — but know that God hears us. The journey from Egypt to the Promised Land was not simply a journey; it was a journey in learning to trust God. We may not know exactly where the road leads, and we will be tempted to look back and grumble. We may sometimes wonder what on earth God is doing, but the God who brought his people out of Egypt did not abandon them in the wilderness. He remained faithful to his promise.

And when the road is difficult, may we still have the courage to say, “Onward, forward.” Not because we know exactly what lies ahead, but because we know the One who goes with us. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 20: 1-16 (ESV)

“For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire labourers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the labourers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too.’ And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the labourers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.’ And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?’ So the last will be first, and the first last.”

StF 416 – There’s a wideness in God’s mercy

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| 1) There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there’s a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty. | 4) For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind. |
| 2) There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head. | 5) But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own. |
| 3) There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss. | 6) If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord. |

Reflection

Here's another story where there is grumbling! The workers who have been out in the vineyard all day discover that those who have only worked for a few hours are being paid the same amount. And their response is understandable: "That's not fair."

Do you see what the landowner says to them? "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius?" They have received exactly what was promised. Nothing has been taken away from them. Their problem is that someone else has received the same.

And this is Jesus' challenge: Can we be grateful for what God has given us without measuring it against what God has given somebody else? That's not easy. The heard of the message here is: God's grace is not a limited resource. So what can we take away from this parable?

Firstly, **be grateful for what God has given you**. Don't look at what others have been blessed with and compare yourself to them. Don't forget your own blessings. Look at what God has done for you. Look at the people and places he has put around you. Give thanks.

At the end of each day, take a minute to name three things God has given you. They don't have to be big things: a person, a conversation, a place, an opportunity, something that went well, or simply the fact that God has carried you through another day. Write them down or thank God for them in prayer. Turns our eyes away from what others have and back towards what God has already given us.

Secondly, **resist comparison**. We don't know somebody else's story. We don't know what wildernesses they have been through, or what God is doing in their lives. And we certainly don't know what God has in store for us.

When you catch yourself thinking, "Why have they got that and I haven't?" or "Why is their life going better than mine?", stop and remind yourself: "I don't know their whole story, and I don't know God's whole plan for me." Then ask a different question: "What is God asking me to do with what he has given me today?" Moves us from comparing someone else's journey with ours to faithfully walking our own.

And finally, **learn to rejoice in God's generosity towards others**. This is perhaps the hardest one. When someone who has been away from church for years comes back, rejoice. When someone discovers faith late in life, rejoice. When someone who has made mistakes finds forgiveness, rejoice. When someone receives an opportunity that we would have liked, rejoice. When God's grace reaches someone we thought was beyond reach, rejoice. Because that is what grace looks like.

When something good happens to someone else, especially when you feel that little bit of envy or resentment rising, choose to say something positive and pray a prayer of thanks for them. Congratulate them. Tell them you're pleased for them. Thank God for what he is doing in their life. It may not be how you initially feel, but we can practise generosity of spirit. Instead of thinking, "Why them?", learn to say, "Thank you, God, that your grace has reached them."

And maybe this is particularly important for us as the Church. What sort of community do we want to be? A community where people feel they have to earn their place? Or a community where we can say to each and every person who walks through the door: "You've arrived? Wonderful. Come and join us. There is room for you."

The Church should be a place where God's grace is celebrated. There is room in the vineyard. There is enough grace. Isn't that wonderful news? We all come as people who have received. So let us be grateful for what God gives us. Let us resist the temptation to compare ourselves with one another. And when we see God's generosity poured out upon somebody else, may our response be: "Thank you, God, for your generosity." Because when we stop comparing, stop counting, and stop keeping score, we become free to receive God's grace with joy, and free to celebrate when that same grace reaches somebody else. Amen.

Song – Amazing grace (My chains are gone)

Chris Tomlin was invited to write this refrain for the film *Amazing Grace* (2007), which is mostly about William Wilberforce but also includes a depiction of John Newton. He was initially reluctant to amend the beloved hymn (“No, you do not mess with that,” he thought), but the idea of being released from bondage brought these words to mind.

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| 1) Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found;
was blind, but now I see. | 3) The Lord has promised good to me;
his word my hope secures.
He will my Shield and Portion be
as long as life endures. |
| 2) 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed. | 4) The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,
the sun forbear to shine.
But God, who called me here below,
will be forever mine,
will be forever mine;
you are forever mine. |
- Ch) *My chains are gone, I've been set free.
My God, my Savior has ransomed me.
And like a flood his mercy reigns;
unending love, amazing grace.*

Chris Tomlin, John Newton & Louie Giglio © 2006 Rising Springs Music; Vamos Publishing; worshiptogether.com songs

Prayers of Intercession

Generous and faithful God, we pray for those who are struggling today. For those who feel they have been forgotten, for those facing their own wilderness, and for those who are anxious about tomorrow. We pause and bring before God those people we know who need his help.

Silence

We pray for those who find themselves comparing their lives with others, who feel overlooked, disappointed or left behind. Help them to recognise your presence with them and to see the blessings that are already around them. In a moment of quiet, we bring these people before God.

Silence

We pray for our church and our community. Help us to be a people who welcome others, who rejoice when people discover faith, and who celebrate your grace wherever we see it at work. We pray for those who need to know that there is a place for them among us.

Silence

And finally, generous God, we pray for ourselves. Teach us to be grateful for what you have given us, to trust you with what lies ahead, and to rejoice when your goodness reaches others. In the silence, we offer God our own prayers.

Silence

Merciful God, receive all our prayers, spoken and unspoken, and help us to trust in your goodness and your grace. In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Song – 10,000 reasons (Bless the Lord)

In the verses of this song, Matt Redman tried to make a little list of our own of all these brilliant reasons why our hearts are full of worship for God, noting, of course, that we are hardly even scratching the surface of God's worth—there are 10,000 reasons for our hearts to find. In verse 2, we sing: *You're rich in love and you're slow to anger; your name is great, and your heart is kind. For all your goodness I will keep on singing: ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.*

*Ch) Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul,
worship his holy name;
sing like never before, O my soul—
I'll worship your holy name.*

- 1) The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning;
it's time to sing your song again.
Whatever may pass,
and whatever lies before me,
let me be singing when the evening comes.

- 2) You're rich in love and you're slow to anger;
your name is great, and your heart is kind.
For all your goodness I will keep on singing:
ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

- 3) And on that day when my strength is failing,
the end draws near, and my time has come;
still my soul will sing your praise unending,
ten thousand years, and then forevermore!

Jonas Myrin and Matt Redman © 2011 Thankyou Music

The Grace

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.**