

21st June 2020 – Morning Service

Martin Rider

Call to Worship – Psalm 89:1&2

I will sing of the LORD'S great love for ever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm for ever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Thomas Obadiah Chisholm, who was born in Kentucky in 1866 and died ninety-four years later in New Jersey. He trained at a newly-founded theological college and was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1903. Unfortunately, his health broke down within a year and he was forced to stand down. He became an insurance salesman in later life. But he began to write hymns – 1200 of them to be precise, 800 of which were printed in such publications as “Moody Monthly” and “The Sunday School Times”. Our hymn, ‘Great is thy faithfulness’ was written when he was living in Vineland, New Jersey

StF 51 – Great is thy faithfulness

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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!</i>
<i>Great is thy faithfulness!</i>
<i>Morning by morning new mercies I see</i>
<i>All I have needed thy hand hath provided</i>
<i>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 © 1951 Hope Publishing Company CCL No. 515642

Prayer

All powerful God, whose Word created our universe and all life throughout it. You revealed yourself to human beings through the Law and prophets, in order that we could draw close to you, but when we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, you displayed your amazing grace by sharing our lives through Jesus Christ, your Son. He not only brought Good News in words and deeds, but gave his life at Calvary to redeem the world from sin. Then, when he ascended to heaven, you sent your Holy Spirit to inspire, comfort and guide us through our life, because His power lives within us.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of gifts you offer us; for everyone who has brought light, love and joy into our lives and for those opportunities and experiences that have enriched our lives. As we look around on this Summer's day, we thank you for this beautiful world and for your enduring love, for even when we stray from you, we know that in love you seek us out and welcome us home.

Merciful God, we confess that whereas you are holy and true, our own lives are marred with failure and sin. We don't love others as we love ourselves and we are sometimes half-hearted in our love for you. We don't always answer your call to serve others in Jesus' name because of our laziness, fear, or sense of unworthiness. Often, we let you down because we try to act in our own strength, rather than calling on the Holy Spirit to empower, guide and encourage us. O Lord, in Jesus' lovely name help us to change our ways and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we know you hear and answer our prayers and we are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you once more. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you desire us to and use our gifts of the Spirit for the good of the Church and our neighbours, in Jesus' holy 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 hymn by John Bunyan, from "The Pilgrim's Progress" which he wrote in two parts between 1678 and 1684, whilst imprisoned for twelve years in Bedford Gaol for preaching without a licence. "Who would true valour see" is a poem recited by Mr. Valiant – for – Truth to Mr. Great-Heart as they approached the Enchanted Ground. We shall sing 'Who would true valour see'.

StF 486 – Who would true valour see

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| 1) Who would true valour see,
Let him come hither;
One here will constant be,
Come wind, come weather;
There's no discouragement
Shall make him once relent
His first avowed intent
To be a pilgrim. | 2) Whoso beset him round
With dismal stories
Do but themselves confound;
His strength the more is.
No lion can him fright;
He'll with a giant fight;
But he will have a right
To be a pilgrim. | 3) Hobgoblin nor foul fiend
Can daunt his spirit;
He knows he at the end
Shall life inherit.
Then fancies fly away,
He'll fear not what men say;
He'll labour night and day
To be a pilgrim. |
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John Bunyan CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Intercession

Heavenly Father, we rejoice in your Creation and for the great gift of life, but more than these we thank you for loving us so much that you came to save us through Christ Jesus, your Son. In response to your grace, help us to play what part, however small it be, to build a better world by seeking justice for all-comers, by striving to end poverty here and abroad, by sharing the earth's resources rather than fighting over them and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting our differences, rather than being divided by them. Help us to stand up against prejudice in any of its forms, remembering that Jesus in his own ministry was open to outcasts and Gentiles, offering them his love.

Gracious God, inspire and lead those who hold authority and power in the nations of the world: guide them and all people in the way of justice and peace, rather than using force of arms to have their own way. We pray for victims of war, terrorism and persecution: the families and friends of people who have been killed; those who have suffered life-changing injuries; others who are broken in mind and spirit; widows and orphans who are struggling to survive and refugees, many of whom are exploited and who face long, dangerous journeys. Grant them much needed support and steadfastness of spirit, so they may begin to rebuild their lives.

Lord of justice and mercy, hear our prayer for racial justice, particularly for the family and friends of George Floyd, whose death at the hands of a policeman has led to protests not only in the USA but in this country, too. Help us both spread and live out the message that, through Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, so every life counts, not least black lives.

Heavenly Father, as we pray for the deliverance of victims of COVID 19, many of us are filled with anguish at the deep suffering of people here and abroad. Lord, the strains of the present state of lockdown are severely testing our faith and resolve. Reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we all may face an uncertain, even threatening future, with hope grounded in your saving grace.

Lord of life, may the NHS receive all the support and equipment it needs to heal the sick and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society. Bless all doctors, nurses, ancillary staff, care workers, key-workers and kind-hearted volunteers, who are seeking to help Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society. Grant them the determination and courage they need to cope with the pressures they are facing and keep them safe in their work.

Spirit of healing, whose loving-kindness is boundless, let the light of your love shine upon people in our community who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them; grant them comfort in their distress, reassurance in their confusion and a sense of being valued for who they are.

Loving God, remember neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, or who are facing a broken relationship, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them..... Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, from which there is healing, courage, strength and peace.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: make us all one, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. Unite us in love and action, so we offer harmony, wellbeing, prosperity, security, reconciliation, love and the kind of peace which passes understanding to a world that dearly needs your shalom. May we bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and often hostile world in Jesus' name.

Abba, heavenly Father, look upon us, our friends and families with loving-kindness. In the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us from harm, help us resist the temptation to sin, and, most of all help us to live out the gospel message in all that we do and say, so our lives bring the gospel light into our sin-darkened world and we honour your holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Charles Wesley in 1762, from "Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures", a long title for a short hymn! We shall sing, 'Captain of Israel's host, and Guide'.

StF 459 – Captain of Israel's host and guide

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| 1) Captain of Israel's host, and Guide
Of all who seek the land above,
Beneath your shadow we abide,
The cloud of your protecting love;
Our strength, your grace; our rule, your word;
Our end, the glory of the Lord. | 2) By your unerring Spirit led,
We shall not in the desert stray;
We shall not full direction need,
Nor miss our providential way;
As far from danger as from fear,
While love, almighty love, is near. |
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Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-13

O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him." But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonour will never be forgotten. O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 10:24-39

"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge them before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before people, I will disown them before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever find their life will lose it, and whoever lose their life for my sake will find it." Amen.

Address – "Anyone who does not take their cross and follow me is not worthy of me."

Nobody guarantees that following the Lord is easy. Certainly, for Jeremiah God's call was very demanding. He began a forty-year ministry when he was as young as sixteen, possibly slightly younger, knowing that the message he was to preach would bring him trouble, not blessings. Jeremiah warned the people of Judah that they would be crushed and exiled by the Babylonians, although the Jews reasoned that, since the Ark of the Covenant resided in Solomon's temple in Jerusalem, the Lord would not permit Gentile aggressors to triumph over them. However, Jeremiah preached that they had broken their covenant with the Lord Jehovah, so they would suffer the same humiliation as the Northern kingdom had experienced about a hundred and fifty years earlier when Assyria conquered its capital, Samaria.

In order to try to warn the rulers of Judea that God was tired of their infidelity, Jeremiah took a clay pot to the Potsherd Gate in Jerusalem and broke it in the presence of priests and elders, declaring that, just as a potter will break and remould a defective pot, so the Lord God would break and remould his unfaithful people of Judah. Consequently, Pashhur, the priest and Chief Officer in the Temple arrested Jeremiah, had him beaten and put in the stocks for a day, which is where today's lament begins.

The prophet complained that he had suffered both physically and spiritually for doing the Lord's bidding – even his friends mocked him for his warnings of doom and destruction unless the Judeans repented their evil ways. He found it impossible to keep quiet, even though he knew silence would make life easier, for 'his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones.' He knew that the Spirit within compelled him to obedience and, despite his complaints, he recognised that God would help him triumph over those who mocked and persecuted him.

Our gospel reading also seems gloom-laden, for Jesus was warning his followers of hard times to come, when opponents would liken them to Satan's servants, just as they had already labelled Christ as Beelzebub. They would persecute and threaten them, but he told them to remain faithful in their discipleship, for human opponents could only destroy the body, not the soul of the faithful. He said them that, as even the commonest of wild birds was precious to God, who knows our every detail, he would bring them through their troubles into his glory. Jesus warned them not to allow fear of persecution to make them deny either him or the Good News he was commissioning them to take to the world, for if they denied him, he would deny them in turn. Like good soldiers, they were to remain steady in the face of the enemy.

The next part of Jesus' discourse is often misinterpreted, so I shall try to explain precisely what Jesus meant by the sentences, 'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.' The Greek word Matthew used for peace, *eirene*, is not the same as the Hebrew, *Shalom*, which is the peace Jesus offers to the world. *Eirene* means non-conflict, while *Shalom* means a new relationship between human beings and God where there is harmony, prosperity, well-being, rest and fulfilment as well as an absence of conflict. Christ's reference to the sword is not a direct allusion to warfare, but to deep division between those who accepted discipleship and others who would reject it. "For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household,'" is a paraphrase of Micah chapter 7, in which the prophet lamented about the divided society in which he was living, with those faithful to God opposed by their nearest and dearest.

Don't forget, Matthew's gospel was aimed at a mainly Jewish audience and early Judeo-Christians faced profound hostility from families and neighbours, especially after the Council of Jamnia in 70AD banned Christian Jews from worshipping in synagogues. From then on Jewish families turned their backs on Christian relatives, because they proclaimed not only the Lordship of Christ, but his death and resurrection, too – claims that are blasphemous to Jews. Like Jesus, Matthew knew that early followers would have to make agonising choices which could split their families irrevocably, but Jesus claims his followers above all human and familial claims. We're either for him, or against him: there is no third way! If we won't accept the consequences of discipleship, then we are not fit to consider ourselves Christ's people. Jesus is not saying that we have to fight and die for him, but we must be wholehearted in our commitment, including at times when our faith makes life difficult. Here is an example of faith in extremis.

After serving as a U-boat commander during the Great War, Martin Niemoller resigned from the navy 1918, married and soon felt a call to join the Lutheran church as a Pastor. He believed faith in Jesus could make a vital difference in post war Germany, where poverty, unemployment and social unrest made life extremely grim for ordinary citizens. After he was appointed Chief Pastor at a major church in Dahlem, a suburb of Berlin, his future seemed secure. However, when Adolf Hitler became Chancellor, in 1933, promising to make Germany great again, Naziism became a threat, for though Hitler was an atheist, he feared the power of organised religion, so he tried to subvert the Church by forming a Nazi version, which perverted the Gospel message to fit in with its philosophy.

Pastor Niemoller was outraged, so like Martin Luther, centuries before, he nailed notices condemning the Nazi church to trees in Wittenberg. He organised leading priests and pastors to resist Hitler's cynical attempts to subvert Christ's message. Naturally, Hitler was furious, so Martin Niemoller was taken before the Fuhrer, who sought to intimidate him by shouting, 'You look after your church. I'll look after the German people!' Niemoller calmly replied, 'But the church must also look after the German people.' The Fuhrer made no reply, but stamped out of the room in a fury.

In 1937, Pastor Niemoller was arrested by the Gestapo, was given a show trial and incarcerated in Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, with only his Bible as company. Despite being transferred to Dachau, he continued to live out his Christian faith, so at Christmas 1944, the Nazis allowed him to lead worship in the camp, for the first time in seven years. At the War's end, Rev Niemoller was freed and began to work promoting church unity, as a result of which he became the President of the World Council of Churches. We may never have to face trials like Martin Niemoller, but we are challenged to be willing to be Christ's witnesses in a wicked world. Let us, therefore, not set aside kingdom values in favour of quick-fixes, or cheap popularity. Let us continue to campaign for a better world, even when it means making sacrifices,

for without sacrifices change will not happen. And if you hesitate at the idea of making sacrifices, think of the sacrifice Christ made for our redemption! May we remember that we are God's ambassadors whose words and deeds should reflect the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so people we meet have the opportunity to receive him as their Saviour and friend, too. Amen.

We close our worship as we sing John Bell and Graham Maule's, 'Will you come and follow me' which is sung to the Scots ballad tune, "Kelvingrove".

StF 673 – Will you come and follow me

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| <p>1) Will you come and follow Me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let My love be shown?
Will you let My name be known,
Will you let My life be grown in you and you in Me?</p> <p>2) Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let Me answer prayer in you and you in Me?</p> <p>3) Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in Me?</p> | <p>4) Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through My sight and touch and sound in you and you in Me?</p> <p>5) Lord, Your summons echoes true when You but call my name,
Let me turn and follow You and never be the same.
In Your company I'll go
Where Your love and footsteps show
Thus I'll move and live and grow in You and You in me.</p> |
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John L Bell & Graham Maule © 1987 WGRG, Iona Community CCL No. 515642

Closing Prayer/Blessing

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.**