

22nd August 2021 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship - Psalm 84:1-2

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord;
My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

StF 34 – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

- 1) O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim -
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.
- 2) Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
High on his heart he will bear it for you,
Comfort your sorrows, and answer your
prayerfulness,
Showing the pathway your feet should pursue.
- 3) Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth you would count as
your own.
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to bring to his throne.
- 4) These, though we bring them in trembling
and fearfulness,
He will accept for the name that is dear;
Mornings of joy give for evenings of
tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.
- 5) O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense of
lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell CCL No. 515642

Prayer of adoration and praise

Loving God, giver of life; Lord Jesus, friend and Saviour; Holy Spirit, living water – we worship and adore you. We come today, not having or expecting all the answers but knowing that you are the way. We come to focus our hearts and minds upon you, to recognize in this place and time you as our God. We come to praise you for your faithful love. When your people turn away from you, you seek them out. When your people reject you, you offer a way back to a close relationship. When your people are confused you demonstrate your truth in the tangible. Holy God we pause to worship you. We pause to know you more fully. We pause to know who we are in you. **Amen.**

Prayer of confession and assurance of forgiveness

In that realization of who you are O God, we come to realize once more our need for forgiveness. When we turn away from you, O God, **forgive us, and turn us back to you.** When the way ahead is not clear, and we seek our way forward **forgive us, and turn us back to you.** When our choice and our actions hurt others: **forgive us, and turn us back to you.** When we want to give up because faith seems too hard: **forgive us, and turn us back to you.** When we put ourselves before all else: **forgive us, and turn us back to you. Amen.**

Lord you have offered to us the assurance that when we turn to you, you will not turn from us. In confession we have turned to you may we hear those gracious words of truth in our hearts and minds, “your sins are forgiven.” **Amen.**

Reading: Joshua 24:1-2a, 14-18

Then Joshua assembled all the tribes of Israel at Shechem. He summoned the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel, and they presented themselves before God. Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your ancestors, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the Euphrates River and worshiped other gods.'

"Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Then the people answered, "Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! It was the Lord our God himself who brought us and our parents up out of Egypt, from that land of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we travelled. And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because he is our God."

StF 463 – Deep in the shadows of the past

- 1) Deep in the shadows of the past,
Far out from settled lands,
Some nomads travelled with their God
Across the desert sands.
The dawning hope of humankind
By them was sensed and shown:
A promise calling them ahead,
A future yet unknown.
- 2) While others bowed to changeless gods,
They met a mystery:
Invisible, without a name:
'I AM WHAT I WILL BE';
And by their tents, around their fires,
In story, song and law,
They praised, remembered, handed on
A past that promised more.
- 3) From Exodus to Pentecost
The promise changed and grew,
While some, remembering the past,
Recorded what they knew,
And some, in letters or laments,
In prophecy and praise,
Recovered, kindled and expressed
New hope for changing days.
- 4) For all the writings that survived,
For leaders, long ago,
Who sifted, copied and preserved
The Bible that we know,
Give thanks, and find its story yet
Our promise, strength, and call,
The model of emerging faith,
Alive with hope for all.

Brian Wren © 1975, 1995 Stainer & Bell Ltd CCL No. 515642

Reading: John 6:56-69

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever." He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them." From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God."

Sermon

Joshua the chosen leader

There are situations that we associate with different characters. If I was to say the name of Joshua to you what event in his life would come to mind first of all? Probably you would start humming to yourself “Joshua fought the battle of Jericho.” Was that the biggest event in his life? Is that he would like to be remembered for?

In the history of God’s people there are a number of characters that come to mind as outstanding figures. Abraham and Moses were part of Israel’s early history. They belonged to a time when the people were desert nomads. They lived with their flocks, moving on when they needed new pasture. When they became settler in the land of Canaan it was a dramatic change to their way of life. They were to give up their tents and their mobility and build houses. Their previous security had been based on being a travelling people; in this new age their security was to be centred more upon the land. They became property owners. It was at this point in history a man called Joshua became a towering figure; the man who succeeded Moses as the leader of his people, Israel.

We know how Moses led the people of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and how he led them for 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the nomadic people. He moulded them through the Law into an organised community. God did not permit Moses to enter the Promised Land. The person given the responsibility to lead the people into their new homeland was his apprentice, Joshua. Joshua led the people across the river Jordan and commanded the invasion and conquest of Canaan. After the invasion Joshua divided the land into regions and these defined areas were allocated to each of the Israelite tribes. The story of Joshua is one long military adventure, or, a long tale of violence depending upon how it is looked upon.

There are leaders for different times; leaders with different skills. Having the rightly skilled and gifted person at the helm is of importance, Winston Churchill was the war leader in the 1940’s but at the end of the war he was quickly replaced in July 1945.

The football season has begun; when will the first manager lose their position? No club appoints a manager who they think will fail. There are clubs who appoint a manager who is successful but at some point they lose their way and the team loses matches and so the search goes on for a new person to manage the team; one with some similar but also some different gifts and talents.

In many sectors of society the same is true.

I like the theory of the “Peter Principle” which says a person gets promoted until they reach their level of incompetence and then stays put. Extrapolating that further can imply we are eventually lead by incompetents. In Church communities as in other areas of life finding the right people to lead is of importance, lay and ordained . “The God person for the now,” is what is needed. Is God calling you to stand up and become a leader – or to sit down from leading?

Joshua and a choosing people

When Joshua is an old man and the country is resting from war he calls the leaders of the tribes together. He calls them to gather at Shechem, an ancient Sanctuary. We heard the story in our reading. The elders, leaders, judges and scribes are called to listen to the last farewell of their distinguished leader; his stepping aside speech; his assessing of his achievements. Joshua does not recall his military victories; he does not ask the people to cherish what he has done for them. Instead he asks the people to make a choice as to whom they would serve. Would they follow the false gods of the land in which they lived or the God who had led them to the land. It was not an easy choice. Remember the people’s understanding of God was not like ours. They did not have a written “history’ of a people to refer to. They had no Jesus to refer to – though Jesus is the same name as Joshua. In their years of wandering their God had provided for their needs. Canaan was a fertile and agriculturally wealthy country. The people worshipped fertility gods. Therein lay a challenge for Joshua’s people. Were they to trust that their nomadic God could grow crops or worship the local fertility gods? They had no concept of one universal creator God.

Did Joshua want to be remembered as a great military leader who brought his people to the Promised Land or as the prophet who brought his people to choose God again? Joshua is tired, old, facing death. He has seen a great amount of bloodshed; he has seen many buildings and towns destroyed; he has seen countless disfigured bodies. He could not sing of the glories of war. He is more concerned, at this point in his life, with the decisions of the heart. Joshua knew that decisions and allegiances need renewing. People do not just stay loyal to a cause by continuing to exist.

Israel Zangwill, a British author at the forefront of cultural Zionism during the 19th Century, who went on to reject the search for a Jewish homeland in Palestine, observed about the Jewish tradition; "We are not the chosen people, but the choosing people."

Joshua asked his people to choose, and as he does so he declares before them his own choice to serve the Lord. It was here that Joshua won the most important battle of his life; he leads his people to a choice of fidelity and faithfulness as they declare; "we too will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

In the Methodist Church ministers do not retire, they ask permission of their peers to "sit down", to stop being a person of travel going wherever the church desires them to go. They find a place to settle. When asking for such permission many will tell something of their story of ministry, perhaps how they want to be remembered. Some can be very amusing depending upon how the story is told others can be very challenging.

One story I remember spoke of a ministry that saw the closure of at least one church building in every appointment in which he served. It could seem that the story was of failure. That was far from the truth for when he left each appointment the church was better equipped for growth than when he arrived. The story of this ministry was a challenge to those who listened. To be faithful to God does not always bring immediate earthly success but the longer-term is of importance. How would you like to be remembered?

Jesus People – choosing to stay

The choice placed before the people by Joshua is also echoed in the Gospel reading from John 6. Jesus asks his followers whether they wish to stay with him or join the community of unbelievers. After hearing the teaching of Jesus on the bread of life many of the followers express their complete confusion. They find what he is saying disturbing and many, who have followed, choose to walk away. As Joshua placed a choice before the tribes of Israel so Jesus places the choice before the 12 apostles, his closest followers. They could choose to walk away, no blame attached, closing the book on the past, or they could choose to stick with him.

The twelve tribes said they could not reject the Lord after all he had done for them, Peter turns to Jesus and asks "to whom would we go, you have the words of eternal life, you are the truth about God."

The apostles exercise their freedom of choice and choose to stay with Jesus.

Jesus respects freedom of choice; he knows that past choices can become old and tired and can be abandoned in the melee of life. The parable of the sower comes to mind.

Past choices have to be kept alive by new commitment. The value of the Methodist Covenant Service is that it reminds us to reassess our commitment to Christ; our choice of allegiance.

The Old Testament prophets called the people of God to return to the Lord again and again. Peter recommitted to following Jesus on the beach after the resurrection.

In our faith journey there will be times when our faith is challenged and we have to make a choice; do we abandon the God who has brought us thus far, or trust him to bring our journey to a safe conclusion. Keep choosing Jesus; "as for me and my household we will serve the Lord."

StF 663 – I the Lord of sea and sky

1) I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry;
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Ch) Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
If You lead me;
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

2) I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone;
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

3) I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts are satisfied;
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

Daniel L Schutte © OCP Publications CCL No. 515642

Prayers of intercession

Think of the street on which you live - is there a need to bring to God? [*Silence*]

Think of the community in which you live – pray for the community leaders. [*Silence*]

Think of the country in which you live – what is your biggest concern for it? Place it before God. [*Silence*]

Think of a country around the world with which you have a special link or affinity – share it with God
[*Silence*]

Think of a situation around the world that is on your heart – share it with God. [*Silence*]

Think of the Church around the world seeking to express the love of God where it is. [*Silence*]

Remember the nature of our God and place all needs into his ultimate being. [*Silence*]

We join our silent thoughts and prayers in the words Jesus gave us as we say together:

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 164 – Your words to me are life and health

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Your words to me are life and health;
They fortify my soul,
Enable, guide, and teach my heart
To reach its perfect goal. | 3) Your words to me are full of joy,
Of beauty, peace, and grace;
From them I learn your blessed will,
Through them I see your face. |
| 2) Your words to me are light and truth;
From day to day they show
Their wisdom, passing earthly lore,
As in their truth I grow. | 4) Your words are perfected in One,
Yourself, the living Word;
Within my heart your image print
In clearest lines, O Lord. |

George Currie Martin CCL No. 515642

A prayer of commitment

Generous God, always loving; Loving God, always wanting our best;

Perfect God inspire us to grow more like Jesus.

You offer us life in all its fullness, and the freedom to choose how we respond.

We offer our life and love back to you, accept us as we are and change us by your grace, into the people we were formed to be in Christ. **Amen.**

A prayer of dismissal

Lord Jesus Christ, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life, and we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God. You desire to go with us, may we always desire go with you. Blessed and protected in the name of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, **Amen.**