

22nd June 2025 – Morning Service

Andy Haynes

Call to Worship - Psalm 42:1 & 2a

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.

Our first hymn is one of commitment and dedication following on from our call to worship.

StF 544 – As the deer

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| 1) As the deer pants for the water,
So my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You. | 2) I want You more than gold or silver,
Only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
And the apple of my eye. |
| Ch) <i>You alone are my strength, my shield,
To You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship You.</i> | 3) You're my Friend and You are my Brother,
Even though You are a King.
I love You more than any other,
So much more than anything. |

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Prayer of Adoration & Confession

Gracious and Loving God, we gather in Your presence with praise on our lips and thanksgiving in our hearts this morning. For You are the God of all creation. The beauty we experience in nature, the wonder of it all, from the tiniest living organism to the vastness of the universe - we marvel at the works of Your hand. We adore You, for You are majestic, Holy and true. You are rich in mercy, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

We long to be in Your presence, to gather together, leaving the concerns and worries of the week behind to focus on things eternal. And so, just like the psalmist thirsts for the living God, so we ask that You draw us into a deeper fellowship with You, empowering us to live as beacons of light in our darkened world. Stir our hearts and kindle the fire of love within us that we may serve You as we ought.

We thank You for Your unchanging grace, for the hope and strength we receive from You. We pray now that You will receive our adoration and appreciation, not just from our lips as we sing Your praises, but also from our hearts and in our everyday lives as we seek to do Your will. We thank You for all that You have provided to enable us to succeed, to find our calling, to glorify You in all we say and do.

But as we offer our sincere thanks, we also recognise our unworthiness, our sinful nature, our fallen moments of regret and shame; the things we've said and done – the things we've left unsaid and undone! So with all this in mind we ask for Your forgiveness as we bring our prayers of confession before You now in silence ...[Silence]

We adore You Lord, and want to bring our heartfelt thanks that we can know forgiveness by Your greatest gift to us, the gift of Your one and only Son, the Lord Jesus, whose life was an example for all to follow, whose death shows the depth of love as He paid the price of our sin, and whose resurrection brings hope and new life to all who believe. We praise You for Jesus, who taught us when we pray, to 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.**

Our next hymn ties in with today's reading when it says 're clothe us in our rightful mind'

StF 495 – Dear Lord and Father of mankind

- 1) Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Re clothe us in our rightful mind;
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.
- 2) In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow thee.
- 3) O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!
- 4) With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of thy call,
As noiseless let thy blessing fall
As fell thy manna down.
- 5) Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.
- 6) Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier

Reading: Luke 8:26 – 39

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don't torture me!' For Jesus had commanded the impure spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' 'Legion,' he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged Jesus repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss. A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into the pigs, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus' feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured.

Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, 'Return home and tell how much God has done for you.' So the man went away and told all over the town how much Jesus had done for him.

The hymn following our reading speaks of Jesus, from whom 'devils fear and fly'.

StF 357 – Jesus the name high over all

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| 1) Jesus - the name high over all,
In hell, or earth, or sky!
Angels revere, and nations fall,
And devils fear and fly. | 4) O that the world might taste and see
The riches of his grace!
The arms of love that compass me
Would all the earth embrace. |
| 2) Jesus - the name to sinners dear,
The name to sinners given!
It scatters all their guilty fear,
It turns their hell to heaven. | 5) His only righteousness I show,
His saving grace proclaim;
'Tis all my business here below
To cry: 'Behold the Lamb!' |
| 3) Jesus - the prisoner's fetters breaks,
And bruises Satan's head;
Power into strengthless souls it speaks,
And life into the dead. | 6) Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
Preach him to all, and cry in death:
'Behold, behold the Lamb!' |

Charles Wesley

Sermon

Today's reading is a difficult subject to deal with. It's the lectionary reading, but it's not an easy or desirable topic. 'Best to avoid such matters', one would be tempted to think. But it is a truly amazing incident that Luke records for us in his gospel, and therefore much worthy of study.

There was a farmer who had a sick horse, which was lying down and had lost the will to live. He sent for the vet who said I'll give him a course of medicine. If he doesn't recover I'll have to put him down. There was a calf in the same field who appreciated the horse's company and overheard the conversation. So he decided he must urgently encourage the horse to quit lying around, and to get up and get well! The horse quickly responded to the calf's words of inspiration and began to fight the sickness until he was soon on his feet once again. A couple of days later when the farmer saw the progress the horse had made, he said to the vet, "Let's have a big party to celebrate – I'll kill the calf and we'll have a good feast!"

Today's story has a similar shocking response as the people, having seen what Jesus did, then ask Him to leave that place! And yet, Jesus was the only one in control – He deals with a situation that no one else had been able to cope with previously. It's a bit like the amateurs who built God's Ark – and it floated and saved all on board. Whilst experts built the Titanic! So let's look at the story in more detail and see what lessons we can learn from it.

Prior to this episode, (also recorded in Matthew & Mark), Jesus had been teaching beside Lake Galilee. In fact, the crowds that gathered were so large that Jesus got into a boat to speak to them from offshore. On that evening Jesus said to His disciples, 'Let us go across to the other side of the Lake'. You might remember, this is the occasion when Jesus fell asleep in the boat, and a storm came upon them. The disciples woke Him in a panic, and Jesus gives the command and calms the storm. "Who is this?" they said, "That even the wind and waves obey Him?"

Our reading picks up the story as Jesus arrives on the shore, the other side of the Lake, and as soon as He got out of the boat this man in our story comes to meet Him.

We then have a vivid description of this man:-

- He lived in the burial caves and amongst the tombs.
- He was possessed by evil spirits.
- No one could keep him chained up.
- He was too strong for anyone to control.
- He went around screaming.
- He cut himself with stones as Mark's gospel tells us.
- A frightening character.
- No medication to sedate him in those days.
- No psychiatric hospital.
- No one to protect him from self-harm.

And yet this scary monster of a man approaches Jesus and *falls on his knees, and says "Jesus, Son of the Most High God..."* (Luke 8 v 28 – NIV). That's my first observation. He falls on his knees before Jesus. 'At the name of Jesus every knee will bow.' All of us will have to fall on our knees in His presence. Have you done this yet? Fallen on your knees before the Christ? This man did. Not only did he fall on his knees before Jesus, but he then quite clearly exclaims who Jesus is: "Jesus, Son of the most High God!.."

Where's our belief this morning? Do we recognise Jesus and who He is? If we do, that's good – but it's no better than the demons! We see here, that even the demons believe in the existence of Jesus – and they know who He is! This may astonish some people. But it begs the question 'does our faith take us beyond this point?' Jesus does not want us to just know of Him, but to fully and personally know Him as our friend and Saviour. Do you merely believe – or do you have real faith and belief? The hymn says 'Trust and obey, for there's no other way.. '

The next thing to note in this story is that this strong man that no one could control now starts begging Jesus not to punish him. Luke 8 v 28 *"Jesus, Son of the most High God!.... I beg you, don't torture me!"* This is another point that makes us question where we are with Jesus. This evil spirit knows about sin and its punishment. If we are not careful, we become like the Pharisee that Jesus speaks of in Luke 18 v 9 – 14, who prays out loud in the temple, whilst the sinner on the other hand beat his breast and hung his head asking God to have pity on him. God hears humble sinners who know they have sinned!

Jesus then asks for his name. 'Legion,' he says – in verse 30 – 'because we are many.' Evil attracts evil. Possessed not by one evil spirit but by many. It begins with the little harmless sin – and grows from there! We are told that he could not be restrained – he broke the chains and iron fetters that held him – and yet he feared the Lord because he begged Him for mercy. That's something that worries me these days. We've lost our fear of the Lord. We enjoy hearing about the love of God and ignore the judgement of God. This I believe, leads to us losing respect for our God and having no reverence before Him, which in turn leads to Christian apathy resulting in the decline of the church.

The next part of our reading shows God's mercy as Jesus responds to the begging cries of the demons. The day of final judgement has not come yet, and so He grants them their wishes, and sends them into the heard of pigs as they requested. If Jesus hears the cries of begging demons, how much more does he want to hear from us, His children? Remember the parable of the persistent widow which Jesus told His disciples to encourage them to pray earnestly? Recorded for us in Luke 18 v 1 – 8. Jesus explains that if the corrupt judge gave in and helped the widow, how much more will God hear the cry of those who call upon Him?

Which leads me to another lesson we can learn from our reading. Jesus doesn't just see the possession, He sees the person. This is very difficult for us to do, but we should not only pray for the victims of evil, but those who commit the crime, that they will be freed from the evil which possesses them in the first place. I heard a Christian in the Middle East being interviewed who said he and others in the faith were in hiding for fear of their lives, but they were praying for the very people who were pursuing them!

Love is powerful – we don't love with the same love as Jesus. If we did, the world would be a better place and we would bring about the change that is needed. It's a big ask. It's a big task. But it's what Jesus calls us to do. He even tells us in John 14 v 12 *'I am telling you the truth: those who believe in me will do what I do – yes, they will do even greater things...'* Jesus overcomes evil with love. The demons are driven out – all of them, and they enter the pigs. Those who saw this ran to tell the people there what had happened. Then it says in verse 37 *"So they asked Jesus to leave their region."* What? Why? I hear you ask. Jesus drives out evil and they ask Him to leave? It's unbelievable! Or is it? Don't people do the same today? They prefer sin, so they ask Jesus to leave. This can happen for church goers too. We also hear how Christians are persecuted the world over because people don't want to know about Jesus?

Jesus breaks the bond of Satan's power and releases this man, restoring him to his right mind; and the people asked Him to leave the area. Not much has changed in our world. But people everywhere need to be set free from the bondage of sin. The powers of darkness still rule the lives of many. In verse 38, our cured man now asks Jesus if he can go with Him. But notice that Jesus does not let him, but tells him in verse 39 to *'Return home and tell how much God has done for you.'* Luke then records how he went all over the town telling how much Jesus had done for him. That's our final lesson from this passage. We need to tell people about what Jesus has done for us. People today, will never know unless someone tells them. When they seek and find Jesus for themselves, they will be amazed! Amen.

StF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful love

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| <p>1) Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
Tender and true;
Out of the heart of the Father above,
Streaming to me and to you:
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.</p> | <p>3) Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
Why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
Home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.</p> |
| <p>2) Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
Joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
Sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost,
Saving, redeeming at measureless cost.</p> | <p>4) Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
Come and abide,
Lifting my life, till it rises above
Envy and falsehood and pride,
Seeking to be
Lowly and humble, a learner of thee.</p> |

Robert Walmsley

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God, the Father of all humanity, we pray for all the nations of the world, that justice may flow like a river upon barren lands, bringing peace to all parts of our globe through the outpouring of Your Holy Spirit. We think especially of the escalating troubles in the Middle East and the devastation in Gaza. We also keep in our prayers the people of Ukraine as Russian aggression continues. Turn the hearts of all people and their rulers from greed and hatred, that love and compassion may be established in its place. Help us to embrace the cry of heaven, to see humanity filled with light, cleansed from the darkness of sin and brokenness being restored to whom they were intended to be, in oneness with God the Father. Lord in Your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our nation. Help us not to criticize those in authority, but rather get on our knees and pray for them, that You will steer and guide them in the decisions they face, that they may be honourable and honest in the positions they hold, that they will serve the people of this country in an unselfish manner protecting the freedoms we enjoy and preserving our stability and peace. We pray for the current financial situation, both for businesses and local councils, plus the strain on families and the poorest in society who struggle to make ends meet. We ask for Your blessing and guidance, that men and women may once again seek Your ways bringing a more prosperous future for us all. Lord in Your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our churches and our communities. We ask that we may live as You lead us to live, that we become loyal and true servants in this place. May we go where You would have us go, and be what You would have us be, inspire us to serve others and teach us to give of our time and effort to the Glory of God, that others will see and know Your love through us. Grant us serenity to accept the things we cannot change, grant us courage to change the things You would have us change, and grant us wisdom to know the difference. Lord in Your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves, that we will be strong in the faith whatever our circumstances. Sovereign Lord, help us to know You are in control, to not despair when things overwhelm us, but to trust and obey You in all things, for everything we have is Yours. We give You thanks for the many blessings You shower upon us. Help us to remember that one touch from You can restore the sick, can heal the broken hearted and can free lives forever by severing the chains of sin and oppression. We pray now for Your healing touch upon all those of our congregation who are in need at this time, strengthen and encourage them as You draw near, may they know Your peace and comfort. God of love, God of grace, Great God of mercy, we pray that You hear and respond to all our prayers this day; in and through the precious name of Jesus we ask it, Lord in Your mercy **hear our prayer. Amen.**

StF 322 – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

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| 1) How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer's ear!
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away our fear. | 4) Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King,
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
Accept the praise I bring. |
| 2) It makes the wounded spirit whole,
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest. | 5) Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought. |
| 3) Dear name - the rock on which I build,
My shield and hiding-place,
My never-failing treasury, filled
With boundless stores of grace! | 6) Till then I would thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath;
And may the music of thy name
Refresh my soul in death. |

John Newton

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.**