

# 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2023 – Morning Service

## Hidden Treasure

Rev Helen Croft

### Call to Worship - Psalm 119:105-108

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances. I am severely afflicted; give me life, O Lord, according to your word. Accept my offerings of praise, O Lord.

### StF 11 – Holy, Holy, Holy

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!<br>Early in the morning our song shall rise to thee:<br>Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty.<br>God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity.                                  | 3) Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness<br>hide thee,<br>Though the sinful human eye thy glory<br>may not see,<br>Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee.<br>Perfect in power, in love, and purity. |
| 2) Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,<br>Casting down their golden crowns around<br>the glassy sea;<br>Cherubim and seraphim, falling down<br>before thee,<br>Who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be. | 4) Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!<br>All thy works shall praise thy name in earth<br>and sky and sea;<br>Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,<br>God in three Persons, blessed Trinity              |

*Reginald Heber*

### Prayer of Praise<sup>1</sup>

Lord, we come into your presence, aware of your holiness but drawn by your gentleness. We come because we have heard of your mercy, and we come bringing our sinfulness. We come confessing that you are Creator, aware of our need of your re-creation. We come declaring your sovereignty and majesty, and ready to offer thanksgiving and glory. We come knowing that you are our judge, but trusting your mercy and the grace of Christ. We come because you are worthy of our worship and commitment. We come because you called us. We come because in you we have life, hope and eternal life. We come in Christ's name. Amen

### Song – You are here (Waymaker)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) You are here, moving in our midst<br>I worship You, I worship You<br>You are here, working in this place<br>I worship You, I worship You | 2) You are here, turning lives around<br>I worship You, I worship You<br>You are here, healing every heart<br>I worship You, I worship You.             |
| Ch) <i>And you are, Waymaker,<br/>Miracle worker, promise keeper,<br/>Light in the darkness<br/>My God, that is who You are</i>             | Br) Even when I don't see it, You're working<br>Even when I don't feel it, You're working<br>You never stop,<br>You never stop working, You never stop. |

*Osinachi Okoro* © Capitol Cmg Publishing CCL No. 515642

## Prayer of Confession<sup>1</sup>

Father, you have never promised that life would be easy or trouble free. But we had come to expect that it was our right that everything should always work out just as we wanted. We become angry when people are difficult and we are easily frustrated when things go wrong. We say that we have put our trust in you, but we are often afraid of the future's uncertainties and overwhelmed by the troubles of today. Forgive our foolishness and our hard-heartedness. Forgive our self-deceit, our indifference towards others and our apathy over the things that really matter. Forgive, cleanse and renew us, Lord. For your glory's sake. **Amen**

## StF 161 – Speak O Lord

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you  
To receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;  
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
That the light of Christ might be seen today  
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
All your purposes, for your glory.
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
Holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
In the radiance of your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
Your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail;  
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;  
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
That will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,  
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built  
And the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty & Stuart Townend © 2005 Thankyou Music CCL No. 515642

## Reading: Isaiah 45:1-8

Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him— and the gates shall not be closed: I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron, I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name. For the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by your name, I surname you, though you do not know me. I am the Lord, and there is no other; besides me there is no god. I arm you, though you do not know me, so that they may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is no one besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make weal and create woe; I the Lord do all these things. Shower, O heavens, from above, and let the skies rain down righteousness; let the earth open, that salvation may spring up, and let it cause righteousness to sprout up also; I the Lord have created it.

## Reflection

A couple of weeks ago, I attended The Methodist Conference. In it the President, Rev Gill Newton & Vice-President, Deacon Kerry Scarlett introduced their theme for this year - **Hidden Treasure**. This theme has struck a profound chord with me because I believe in each of us individually, churches and as a circuit, there is hidden treasure that we have either lost, not found or maybe even ignored and so it's time to do some digging to unearth these hidden treasures. So, using their inspiration I want to help us try and find hidden treasure.

I wonder how many of you, when you saw a rainbow would hear someone - or even you yourself might have said - 'there's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow'. The legend to this saying is that when the Vikings invaded Ireland in the 8th century, they would bury their gold in places where it was hoped it wouldn't be found from looters. When they left Ireland, they left some of this gold behind and the legend suggests that Irish leprechauns found the gold and buried it again, so that humans could never find it. And so the folklore suggests there is a pot of gold hidden where the rainbow touches earth. But of course, we know that's an illusion, and rainbows usually seem to move away as we move towards them. How frustrating! But it serves as a reminder of how easy and tempting it can be to look for treasure in the wrong places.

- I wonder where you are looking for your treasure?
- Are you looking in (all) the wrong places? Are you looking to things that the world can offer instead of looking to Christ wholly?
- We live in a hurting world, which is looking for treasure in (all) the wrong places - alcohol, drugs, appearance (identity), food, other lives - a world which feels unloved and uncared for

I believe there is a desire deep within each of us to find what is hidden, to uncover what is secret, to discover treasure. Otherwise, why would we be interested, and for some even fascinated, by getting to the bottom of things - whether that be metal detecting, geo-caching, wandering along the coast lines. We love to get to the bottom of things, to solve the mystery, to bring into light what is currently in the darkness. We each have our own personal treasure which if our house was on fire we would rescue - photos or photo album, an article of clothing, maybe a special item (e.g. clock, carving). Some of you might be thinking well I wouldn't rescue that but you know the saying 'one person's rubbish is another person's treasure'.

But what is 'treasure'? The current Treasure Act says that newly discovered artefacts are legal treasure if more than 300 years old and made of precious metal or part of a collection of valuable objects. If you find anything like that, we are required to notify the relevant authorities within 14 days because treasure is owned by the Crown, effectively the King. But I'm not interested in treasures owned by Kings Charles, but the treasure that is offered to us by the creator of the world - the King of Kings. Why spend time looking for worldly treasures when there are untold treasures awaiting us through a deepening relationship in God in Christ, treasure we've not yet dreamt or imagined hidden in God.

There are around 77 Scripture verses which mention hidden treasures. Some of those verses maybe familiar to you - the parables in Matthew 13 where Jesus spoke of people giving up everything to acquire treasure buried in a field or a precious pearl or the encouragement from Jesus to store up treasures in heaven included in the Sermon on the mount in Matthew 6. But the hidden treasure verse that has been selected by the President/Vice-President and which I'm going to pick up on this morning is found in Isaiah 45:3 - *I will give you the treasures of darkness and riches hidden in secret places, so that you may know that it is I the Lord God, the God of Israel, who call you by your name.*

I believe this is a verse where God wants us to open our eyes to things we would not otherwise see and to take hold of things that would otherwise remain hidden and even unclaimed. The treasure is currently hidden in dark places and riches are hidden in secret places. It means there is treasure all around us. God isn't trying to hide it, but we are not searching or looking for it. Isaiah wrote this prophecy 200 years before King Cyrus was born. He foresaw Cyrus invading Babylon, liberating the Jewish people from captivity and repatriating them in their homeland - just as history unfolded. The prophet Daniel was among those Jewish exiles experiencing captivity and while studying the prophecies of Jeremiah and Isaiah he discovered the Jewish people had completed their 70 years in captivity and that Isaiah had predicted that King Cyrus would liberate them. So he took the scroll of Isaiah to Cyrus and showed him that long ago, God had named him. Cyrus, a heathen king, was undoubtedly shocked, but this revelation gave him confidence to liberate the Jews, return them to Israel and announce the rebuilding of Solomon's temple.

But there was more. God promised that when Cyrus freed the Jewish people, he would *'give the treasure of darkness and riches hidden in secret places'*. And Jewish records confirm that when Cyrus declared the temple could be rebuilt, the soldiers in Babylon uncovered vast amounts of treasure that the King of Babylon had hidden under the Euphrates River. The Jewish people were in an extraordinarily difficult place. The temple had been destroyed. They had been in exile for 70 years. Life as they had known it had been turned upside down. Destruction and darkness were their lot, but amid this pain and anguish, treasure is discovered and life takes on a different perspective. God was at work using Cyrus' desire for earthly treasure to free his people, but doing it in such a way that Cyrus knew it was God who had called him by name.

The terrain they had to navigate was challenging, and as we look around the world, this nation, our neighbourhood, the Church, the terrain we must navigate is also challenging. The world groans with war, famine, earthquakes, climate crisis. Our nation struggles with welcoming society in which all have enough, not all our neighbourhoods have a sense of community and caring and the Church - fragile, declining, vulnerable, irrelevant - these are the words we hear used to describe us today.

Catherine Booth (along with her husband William Booth who founded the Salvation Army) said 'if we are to better the future, we must disturb the present'. Whether we like it or not, I believe the present has been disturbed for us - by Covid, the cost-of-living crisis, by the contracting Methodist membership, by fewer available ministers - the list could continue. But the Jewish people found 'treasure in the darkness and riches in the secret places'. Beloved, I believe that it's time for us to find the 'treasure in the darkness and riches in the secret places'. I believe it's time for us to uncover today's treasure even in the middle of all that is challenging, painful and dark. I believe beloved, it's time to see brought to birth in our own lives and in the lives of the Church this treasure.

I recently went to the cinema to see the new Indiana Jones film. The treasure is locked away and he must embark on all kinds of adventures to discover what is hidden. Indiana Jones must face many perils and risk his life to find the treasure. That's extreme but it's that kind of passion we need for God if we are going to discover the treasure he has hidden for us today. The more we spend 'being' with God, reading his word and searching for him the more our awareness of God being present and active grows.

Beloved, I believe it's time that we started to tell new stories of and about God, not rehash and retell the old stories. It's time to observe and receive from God new stories that he wants to reveal to us. In the early part of this year, I was on Sabbatical and did a fair amount of travelling but during these times, I had a great amount of time and opportunity to 'be' and to find the new story that God wanted to share with me - meeting new people, seeing new places, walking in the apostles footsteps - God was showing me new treasure and secrets. Even today, I make sure I take time to 'be' and to find the new treasure that God wants to reveal so that I can grow deeper into him and to find the treasures of the next adventures that he has for me. Beloved, I believe (in the words of Catherine Booth) that God is disturbing the present in me but he also wants to do it in you.

The present and future isn't daunting with God by your side. Beloved, it's time to reach out to God, to seek him, dig deep into him, into his Word - spending time quietly reading and meditating upon it. The treasures of faith, perseverance, patience, empathy and trust are all there to discover because God is working, even in the darkness. It's time to discover what these treasures are - to take seriously being treasurer seekers and discover the treasure - maybe this might be new Christian communities which doesn't look like the church we know now but it'll display the characteristics of the kingdom. We can expect life to change.

The treasure that God has hidden for us is waiting to be discovered and used, not hidden away. As we open our eyes and attune our ears to be more alert to where God is placing treasure in the darkness, let us never forget that we ourselves are God's treasure. Scripture reminds us that we are God's chosen treasure and that he has called us out of darkness into the light.

As treasure, God longs for us to discover the treasure he has hidden for us, not from us, even when life is hard, painful and confusing. No, there isn't treasure at the end of the rainbow but maybe the rainbow itself is the treasure; that wonderful reminder to us of God's continuing faithfulness. So may we be a church that traces the rainbow through the rain, discover the treasures in the darkness and the riches hidden in the secret places for us and for the church to be revived and flourish.

### StF 689 – Summoned by the God who made us

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1) Summoned by the God who made us<br>Rich in our diversity,<br>Gathered in the name of Jesus,<br>Richer still in unity.                                | 3) Trust the goodness of creation;<br>Trust the Spirit strong within,<br>Dare to dream the vision promised<br>Sprung from seed of what has been.  |
| Ch) <i>Let us bring the gifts that differ<br/>And, in splendid, varied ways,<br/>Sing a new Church into being<br/>One in faith and love and praise.</i> | 4) Bring the hopes of every nation;<br>Bring the art of every race.<br>Weave a song of peace and justice;<br>Let it sound through time and space. |
| 2) Radiant risen from the water,<br>Robed in holiness and light,<br>Male and female in God's image,<br>Male and female, God's delight.                  | 5) Draw together at one table<br>All the human family;<br>Shape a circle ever wider<br>And a people ever free.                                    |

Delores Dufner © 1991 Delores Dufner CCL No. 515642

### Prayers of Intercession<sup>2</sup>

Merciful God, you call us and challenge us to live in the world, to be part of the world, to belong the world and now for the world we bring our prayers.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for the world's people who go hungry through failure of crops, through bad land management or climate change, flood and drought, heat and cold, through the greed of others, through lack of money and resources. We pray for those who offer training and support to train others in food and farming, for those who run soup kitchens and food banks.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who hunger for more than food, for those who are hungry for love, care, support and shelter. For those who are hungry for justice and fairness. Dignity and worth.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who are hungry for peace and stability, security and safety. We pray for those who fear the enemy who walks with them, who lives among them, who tries to influence and change them.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who have struggled and still struggle with excessive heat across Europe and America, may those with cool spaces offer a welcome and support. May those without shelter be offered a roof, a haven, a hope of comfort and safety.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for those adversely affected by ongoing and seemingly never-ending strikes to transport and health services. Those who can't travel to places they need to get to. For those who can't get the care they need, whose illnesses get worse, whose pain increases and who frailty becomes harder to recover from.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for our youngsters, being brought up in a digital age where good and bad, truth and falsehood, right and wrong seem hard to navigate with so much on-line influence. For those who see the world as a frightening uncertain place and wonder how they will step out and navigate it themselves.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

We pray for ourselves that we may tread the world carefully and seek what is right and good and truthful. We pray that we may be the scatterer of good deeds and words, kind thoughts and love in action. We pray that we may do our best each step of the way, that we may be the best followers of Jesus that we can be, that we may seek and find the Kingdom of God.

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers.**

And in a moment of stillness, we offer our unspoken prayers for ourselves and others...[*Silence*]

Merciful and loving God, **hear our prayers. 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.**

### **StF 548 – Blessed Assurance**

1) Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine:  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;  
Born of his Spirit, washed in his blood:

*Ch) This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my Saviour all the day long.*

2) Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
Visions of rapture burst on my sight;  
Angels descending bring from above  
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love:

3) Perfect submission, all is at rest,  
I in my Saviour am happy and blest -  
Watching and waiting, looking above,  
Filled with his goodness, lost in his love:

*Frances Jane van Alstyne*

### **Closing Prayer/Blessing<sup>1</sup>**

We can go, because he came. We can be sent, because he goes with us. We can stand, because he is Lord. We can do all things in Christ who gives us the strength. **Amen**

<sup>1</sup> *500 Prayers for All Occasions - David Clowes (Kingsway; Eastbourne, 2003)*

<sup>2</sup> *Roots on the Web*