

23rd October 2022 – Morning Service

Rev Helen Croft

Call to Worship - 1 Chronicles 29:11

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. Everything in the heavens and on earth is yours, O Lord, and this is your kingdom. We adore you as the one who is over all things.

StF 293 – All heaven declares

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| 1) All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord.
Who can compare with the beauty of the Lord?
Forever He will be the Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee and worship Him alone. | 2) I will proclaim the glory of the risen Lord.
Who once was slain to reconcile us to God.
Forever You will be the Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee and worship You alone. |
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Prayer of Praise

Lord, you do not change; you are always there, and you always will be. We praise you for your greatness, which holds our smallness; for your majesty, which was once clothed with our humanity; for your sovereignty, which embraces our frailty; for your holiness, which exposes our sinfulness; for your wholeness, which heals our brokenness; for your glory, which fills our emptiness; for your love, which gives us life; for your Son, who claims us for his own; for your Spirit, who empowers us for worship, witness and service. Lord of all time and space and all things, we praise you that in Christ you came and share all that life means to us so that we, by your grace, might enter into all that heaven is with him. We have come to praise you for the coming of Christ our Saviour, and the Saviour of the world. In his name. Amen¹

StF 343 – All my days

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| 1) All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
Give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
For in my helplessness You heard my cry,
And waves of mercy poured down on my life. | <i>Ch) Beautiful Saviour, wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the way, the truth, the life.
Star of the morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the Risen One, heaven's champion,
And You reign, You reign over all!</i> |
| 2) I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails,
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
Of death defeated and life without end. | 3) I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades,
Where countless worshippers will share one song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb! |

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Prayer of Confession

1 John 1:9 - *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*

Take a moment to come before God in silence and confession

Lord, we thank you for the love and power and mercy that have brought us to this moment in our lives and our life together. We confess that we have not always wanted the best for each other or for those around us. We confess that we have too often and too easily pleased ourselves, and put our own wants and needs before those of others. We confess that we have memories of the past that still hurt us; that we do not always find it easy to cope with what is happening today and that tomorrow's uncertainty sometimes makes us afraid. Lord, we ask not only for forgiveness, but for the desire and strength to begin again.

Amen¹

Reading: Genesis 32:22-31

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man.

Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

Sermon

Look out, here comes trouble! I wonder how many of us have heard this saying or something similar of us? But when it comes to Jacob, he really was trouble! Our reading from Genesis 32, tells us that Jacob is at the River Jabbok – he is returning home after being away 20 years and he hears that Esau, his brother, is coming to meet him with 400 men. Jacob is worried.

For those unfamiliar with the Biblical story, let me do a little bit of scene or background setting. Jacob and Esau are twins born to Isaac and Rebekah. Esau, the first to be born, 'came out red all over, like a hairy garment' (Gen 25:25). Jacob, the second to be born, 'came out, and his hand had hold on Esau's heel' (Gen 25:27). It was a hint of the rivalry that would happen later. Esau grew up to be a hunter, but Jacob was a quiet man. 'Now Isaac loved Esau, because he ate his venison. Rebekah loved Jacob' (Gen 25:28). As the elder son, Esau enjoyed the privileges of the firstborn – the birthright and the blessing. However, he took his birthright casually, in fact, he sold it to Jacob for a bowl of stew (Gen 25:29-34), thus losing one of his two significant advantages as the firstborn and he only had himself to blame!

On a later occasion, Jacob (with Rebekah's help) deceived elderly Isaac into believing that he was Esau. They tricked Isaac into giving Jacob Esau's blessing (Gen 27:1-29). When Esau discovered this treachery, he was crushed (Gen 27:30-40) and was determined to kill Jacob (Gen 27:41). Rebekah warned Jacob of Esau's plan and he fled to his Uncle Laban's. On the journey north to Haran, where his Uncle Laban lived, he stopped to sleep and this was the first encounter he had with God – it's the famous 'Jacob's ladder' encounter at Bethel where he saw angels ascending and descending on a ladder reaching into heaven (Gen 28:10-27). In that encounter, God made Jacob the one through whom God's promises to Abraham would be fulfilled.

In Haran, Jacob met Rachel and worked for his Uncle Laban in order that he might marry her but Laban tricked him and he ended up married to Leah instead. He then worked additional years to marry Rachel. During this time, Jacob was estranged from his brother (Gen 29:1-30:24). Jacob then tricked Laban, becoming rich at Laban's expense (Gen 30:25-43). He fled from Laban and Laban's sons (Gen 31:1-21) just as he had earlier fled from Esau. Laban pursued Jacob (Gen 31:22-42) and the two men eventually were able to make a covenant and to depart on good terms (Gen 31:43-55). At that point, Jacob sent messengers to Esau in an attempt to reconcile (Gen 32:1-5). The messengers returned with the news that Esau was coming with 400 men to meet Jacob (Gen 32:6).

Jacob feared that Esau was coming to kill him, and sent messengers ahead with a grand gift of livestock in an attempt to appease Esau (Gen 32:7-21).

So, we now pick up our Scripture reading - Jacob separates himself from his family by sending them on ahead. He is now all alone – he believes trouble is coming but doesn't know what form that trouble will take. At this point, Jacob has his second encounter with God (although he doesn't yet know it). Unexpectedly, a man comes to wrestle Jacob.

Out of the blue, he is thrown into a battle that lasts throughout the whole night. This must have been some battle – bloody nose for bloody nose, blow for blow, head-lock for head-lock. No one is giving up, they are equally matched. Until the man touches Jacob's hip and dislocates it. The man asks to be let go but Jacob wants a blessing – this suggests that he understands that his opponent is God.

The man asks 'What's your name?' 'Jacob,' he replies. 'You are no longer called Jacob. You are Israel. You have struggled with God and have prevailed.' In order to give a blessing, the one giving the blessing needs to know the name of the one to be blessed. As Jacob reveals his name, he is also revealing his identity and character. What the man was really asking, was 'are you going to continue living up to your name, deceiving yourself and others; or will you admit what you are and let me change you?' In Biblical times, receiving a new name signifies making a new beginning and this was Jacob's opportunity to make a fresh start in life.

The new name God gives Jacob is Israel which means 'God preserves' or 'God protects'. With the new name, comes a new identity, a new purpose, a new people has been formed and called forth. Jacob knows that God knows who he is and accepts him and his life is changed (physically and spiritually). This is the good news of the River Jabbok. It is also the good news of the gospel, that God engages us as we are and, having named our name, preserves us in order to transform us.

Jacob is weakened by his encounter with God but strangely, he is also now much stronger – stronger because he leans on God's power. Whatever our past, whatever our previous priorities, Jesus never gives up on us. It is his strength that comes to us and makes us strong for the struggles we will face yet in this life. Just like Jacob, we are assured that God's forgiveness is greater than our greatest sin; his renewal is greater than our deepest failing and the life he gives is more secure than death, and he will be there when we have to wrestle with some of life's disappointments, doubts and confusions.

We wrestle looking for answers, for help, for strength and in his grace God allows us to wrestle with him as we try to come to terms with what has or is happening. Like Jacob, we may come away from it with some lasting injury but like Jacob, in our wrestling we will encounter God's power and learn to lean on him and again experience his grace and mercy, and like Jacob, we are made new with trust in God and refreshed in our relationship with God, assured of the blessing of God. May God's Spirit use the struggles that we have in this life to draw us closer to our Lord. May God's Spirit use the problems we wrestle with to once again reassure us of the love and grace of our God.

Once again, Jacob gave a special name to a significant place, this time Peniel – 'the face of God'. He thought that seeing God's face would bring death but it actually brought him new life and prepared him for the great test that was about to come – meeting Esau. Will our encounter with God bring us new revelation and relationship with God that will help us face our next great test?

StF 636 – O love that wilt not let me go

- 1) O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.
- 2) O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee:
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.
- 3) O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.
- 4) O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

George Matheson

Prayers of Intercession

The New Person

Think of an area of your life that is causing you some concern, and ask God to give you wisdom

[Silence] The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God**

Think about a relationship that is causing you hurt or concern, and ask God to give you understanding

[Silence] The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God**

Think about a part of your life that is cause of great joy, and ask God to share it with you.

[Silence] The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God**

Think of some challenge you are facing, a time of uncertainty, and ask God to grant you peace and strength. *[Silence]* The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God**

Think of an area of the church's life that frustrates or disappoints you, and ask God to give you peace and hope. *[Silence]* The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God**

Think of someone for whom you are concerned – maybe someone who is ill or in need.

[Silence] The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God**

Think of the church's life – its worship, its witness, its service in the community, and through prayer and fasting let us be open to seeking his will. *[Silence]* The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God**

Think about yourself. Perhaps you are becoming more aware of God's presence in your life and more open to his purposes for you. Ask him to fill you with his power.

[Silence] The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God. Amen¹**

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 476 – One more step along the world I go

- 1) One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new
Keep me travelling along with you:
- 2) Round the corners of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me:
- 3) As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me travelling the way I should;
Where I see no way to go
You'll be telling me the way, I know:
- 4) Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me travelling along with you:
- 5) You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me travelling along with you:

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Closing Prayer - Psalm 121:5-8

Jehovah himself will watch over you; he's always at your side to shelter you safely in his presence. He's protecting you from all danger both day and night. He will keep you from every form of evil or calamity as he continuously watches over you. You will be guarded by God himself. You will be safe when you leave your home, and safely you will return. He will protect you now, and he'll protect you for evermore! Amen

¹ D Clowes, *500 Prayers for All Occasions*, David Cook: Eastbourne, 2003