

# 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021 – Morning Service

## God is present in every good deed

Rev Alan Combes

### Call to Worship

Come, for all are invited. Come, praise and worship the one who accepts us all.  
Come, for all are welcome, all are valued, all are called.

### StF 87 – Praise to the living God

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| 1) Praise to the living God!<br>All praised be his name,<br>Who was, and is, and is to be,<br>For e'er the same!<br>The one eternal God<br>Ere aught that now appears:<br>The First, the Last, beyond all thought<br>His timeless years! | 3) His Spirit flowing free,<br>High surging where it will:<br>In prophet's word he spoke of old,<br>Is speaking still.<br>Established is his law,<br>And changeless it shall stand,<br>Deep writ upon the human heart,<br>On sea, on land. |
| 2) Formless, all lovely forms<br>Declare his loveliness;<br>Holy, no holiness of earth<br>Can his express.<br>Lo, he is Lord of all!<br>Creation speaks his praise,<br>And everywhere, above, below,<br>His will obeys.                  | 4) Eternal life has he<br>Implanted in the soul;<br>His love shall be our strength and stay,<br>While ages roll.<br>Praise to the living God!<br>All praised be his name,<br>Who was, and is, and is to be,<br>For e'er the same.          |

*Mediaeval Jewish Doxology translated by Max Landsberg & Newton Main CCL No. 515642*

### Opening Prayers

Inclusive God, we gather together. Welcoming God, we come to you. Valuing God, we see our worth in you. Challenging God, open our ears to your words, open our minds to explore our ways, open our hearts to receive all that you offer. Loving God, we come to you. Lord God, you call us to live our best lives – for you, with you, in you. We may sometimes pause to smell the coffee or the roses, but we are often too busy to take time to be aware of you – that you are with us, in us, and in those around us. Quieten our hearts now to recognise you in this place today. Help us to reach out to one another with love, care and compassion, so that we can all live our best life for you.

### Prayer of Adoration

God of eternity, you are at the very heart of our lives: we adore you. God of miracles, you add flavour to our world. You are the salt that seasons us, you preserve all that is good and make us whole: we worship you. God of humanity, you look on us with love and we cannot help but love you back: we bless you, Lord. **Amen.**

*“There is always light, if only we are brave enough to see it. If only we are brave enough to BE it.” -*



### **Amanda Gorman – The Hill We Climb**

Time to reflect:

- How do you respond to this quote from Amanda Gorman's poem at the 2021 US presidential inauguration?
- How easy do you find it to see the light of God in others? Especially those who are different from you?
- How do you feel about the call to be brave enough to BE the light?

## **A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

For the times I don't live my best life, or even recognise what that might be:

**I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.**

For the times I sulk because I think my nose is out of joint, and I'm too blinkered to see you in others:

**I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.**

For the times I just don't understand your word;

when I haven't the patience to work out what it really means:

**I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.**

For the times when I try and water down your Gospel because I don't like what it is saying to me:

**I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.**

For the times I judge others harshly, and try to stop them because I don't agree with what they are doing – even though it may be for good:

**I'm sorry, Lord, please forgive me.**

Loving Lord God, you care so much for each one of us. You are there for us whenever we turn to you. When we are truly sorry, and intend to move forward, to live our best life. In Jesus – who lived and died for us / me, you graciously forgive us all our sins. We gratefully and humbly accept your forgiveness and peace. **Amen.**

## **StF 248 – I heard the voice of Jesus say**

1) I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'Come unto me and rest;  
Lay down, O weary one, lay down  
Your head upon my breast.'  
I came to Jesus as I was,  
Weary and worn and sad,  
I found in him a resting-place,  
And he has made me glad.

2) I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'Behold, I freely give  
The living water; thirsty one,  
Stoop down and drink and live.'  
I came to Jesus, and I drank  
Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
And now I live in him.

3) I heard the voice of Jesus say:  
'I am this dark world's Light;  
Look unto me, your morn shall rise,  
And all your day be bright.'  
I looked to Jesus, and I found  
In him my star, my sun;  
And in that light of life I'll walk,  
Till travelling days are done.

*Horatius N Bonar CCL No. 515642*

## **Reading: James 5:13–20**

This passage is a set of questions that goes like this:

Voice 1: Are any among you suffering?

Voice 2: They should pray.

Voice 1: Are any cheerful?

Voice 2: They should sing songs of praise.

Voice 1: Are any among you sick?

Voice 2: They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

Voice 1: The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Voice 2: Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

Voice 1: Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.

Voice 2: Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

Voice 2: My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another...

Voice 1: ...know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

In preparing to hear our challenging Gospel reading we imagine the testimony of the disciple John...

*'We thought we were doing the right thing, telling Jesus that we saw someone casting out demons in his name. We thought he'd be a bit annoyed and have words with him because he wasn't one of us. But what happened? It was me that got it wrong, that's what. Jesus let me know in no uncertain terms that people doing things in his name shouldn't be turned away. I don't think it was the first time he had said something like that to us, either. But I was a bit confused when he started going on about stumbling blocks. More than that, I thought he'd lost the plot. Yes, I get it (now!) that I shouldn't get in the way of those who want to do the things they saw Jesus do, even if they are not part of our group. But, surely it's going a bit far to suggest putting a millstone round my neck and jumping in the sea? Or cutting off bits of my body – it's more than a bit extreme! Just how important is this kingdom living? I got the bit about the salt, I think. Something that looks like salt but isn't salty is no good to anyone. Anyway, see what you think...'*

### **Reading: Mark 9:38–50**

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. "If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell., And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

### **Reflection**

In the period just before Covid-19 hit at the beginning of 2020, if someone had suggested that we were about to enter a world of 'social distancing', 'lockdown', 'furlough' and 'self-isolation', we probably would have thought it was the plot of a new dystopian novel or TV drama.

The disciples hearing Jesus say the words we heard in this week's Gospel reading may have had the equivalent first-century reaction. Better to throw yourself in the sea or cut off your limbs...what was Jesus talking about? Surely this cannot be real?

Just as, in hindsight, those pandemic words and phrases – and the rules and way of life associated with them – now make sense, Jesus’ very graphic language begins to make sense as we look at the example of kingdom living given in the passage from James’ letter. Here we see people being encouraged to pray with those who suffer, sing with those who are cheerful, and anoint those who are sick.

Jesus is speaking passionately in Mark’s account about making sure we don’t get in the way of good deeds being done, of Kingdom values being lived out. James backs this up by saying - live as Jesus lived –share and care, treat and value everyone equally, and all the time trusting and having faith in God.

Jesus’ graphic imagery emphasises the importance of these kingdom values, which are so important that life without them is not really life at all – or not life as God intends it to be. Life is where the things that are not part of kingdom living are eliminated – greed, self-centredness, exclusion, bullying and many other things that hurt, belittle or damage people.

Is this possible for us today? James refers to the story of Elijah. Elijah prayed for something that seemed impossible – specifically for the rain to stop and then start again; you can read the full story in 1 Kings 17. It may seem impossible to us that, given the way the world and society is now, God’s kingdom will come to fruition anytime soon. The task is surely overwhelming. Elijah thought the same. But that didn’t stop him or put him off.

And we should not be put off. Let’s pray for the impossible. Let’s look for God at work in what we are doing, of course, but also in what others are doing – especially those of whom we might be tempted to say ‘They are not with us.’ Let us be open to hearing Jesus’ words speak into our experience: ‘Whoever is not against us is with us.’ Let us encourage and welcome everyone and anyone who is living and promoting God’s kingdom values – or, if you prefer, way of living.

God is present in every good deed – so let us encourage each other to be the best people we can be – and never to be a stumbling block to one of God’s beloved children.

## **Response – Reflection**

Take time to think about what ‘seeing God in ourselves and others’ means.

- Where do you see God?
- Reflect back on the last few days – can you see where God was present through unexpected people / words or situations?

## **StF 416 – There’s a wideness in God’s mercy**

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| 1) There's a wideness in God's mercy<br>Like the wideness of the sea;<br>There's a kindness in his justice<br>Which is more than liberty.      | 4) For the love of God is broader<br>Than the measures of the mind;<br>And the heart of the Eternal<br>Is most wonderfully kind.           |
| 2) There is plentiful redemption<br>In the blood that has been shed;<br>There is joy for all the members<br>In the sorrows of the Head.        | 5) But we make his love too narrow<br>By false limits of our own;<br>And we magnify his strictness<br>With a zeal he will not own.         |
| 3) There is grace enough for thousands<br>Of new worlds as great as this;<br>There is room for fresh creations<br>In that upper home of bliss. | 6) If our love were but more simple<br>We should take him at his word;<br>And our lives would be illumined<br>By the presence of our Lord. |

*Frederick William Faber CCL No. 515642*

## Prayers Intercession

God, sometimes I feel time slipping by, and I feel it dragging. Let me feel you with me, that I may find meaning in each moment. Smooth away my fear so that I can find blessings in these circumstances and beauty in my longing for company, for agency, for sacraments and singing.

**Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.**

God, with you the future is always full of possibility. Knowing you are with me stirs my love. You banish resentment. Help me to make the most of the strange opportunities Covid life may be offering, so that I will not merely hand back to you the 'talent' of this time, but in my thanksgiving, give you back your abundant gifts with interest.

**Teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.**

God, we pray for the church and the world:  
exhausted by restraint, subdued by loneliness,  
disorientated by diagnosis, dumbfounded by incompetence,  
hurt by casual prejudice, dismayed by politics,  
bewildered by bereavement, imprisoned by fear.  
We do not want you to explain these away.  
We name them candidly to you.

In these frustrating times, we pray that world leaders and all people may have the patience to let the richness of your time show through, that we may be:  
humbled by courage, amazed by generosity, touched by affection, moved by empathy, surprised by neighbourliness, inspired by ingenuity, healed by gratitude, enlivened by hope. **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 685 – In Christ there is no east or west

- 1) In Christ there is no east or west,  
In him no south or north,  
But one great fellowship of love  
Throughout the whole wide earth.
- 2) In him shall true hearts everywhere  
Their high communion find,  
His service is the golden cord  
Close-binding humankind.
- 3) Join hands then all the human race,  
Whate'er your nation be;  
All children of the living God  
Are surely kin to me.
- 4) In Christ now meet both east and west,  
In him meet south and north,  
All Christlike souls are one in him,  
Throughout the whole wide earth.

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## A sending out prayer

Lord God, bless us and keep us. And may we be a blessing to others in all we think and say and do. **Amen.**