

28th September 2025 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship

Why are we here?

We come together to glorify God, through song, prayer, quiet, and reflection on the Word of God. We come together as family, brothers and sisters joined together by the hand of fellowship.

We come together in God's presence, as those who want to praise God, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. **Amen.**

StF 81 – Now thank we all our God

- 1) Now thank we all our God,
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom his world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.
- 2) O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in his grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.
- 3) All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore,
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore.

MarOn Rinkart translated by Catherine Winkworth

Prayer of Approach

As we come before you today, Lord, we prepare to contemplate the treasure contained in your Word, and immerse ourselves in the riches of your love. This abundance is all we require for this sacred time when we lay our worldly thoughts aside to worship you. We are blessed indeed. **Amen.**

Prayer of Adoration

Lord, you came among us in lowliness and simplicity. We adore you as the babe born in a stable, as the boy raised a refugee in Egypt, as the wandering preacher with no possessions. You show us what true riches are. Lord, we adore you and humbly bow before you.

Lord, you came amongst us as fully God, personified love, Living Word, expression of grace. We adore you as a crucified and risen Saviour. Lord, you come amongst us as Spirit of life. We adore you as the expression of God within and through us. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

Heavenly Father, we confess that we are rarely content, for we crave things that we think will bring us status or make us happy. We covet that which others have, whilst not sharing the wealth we have received. Father, we repent of our dependence on material things and the seeking of self-sufficiency. Turn our thoughts instead to the generosity of your loving heart.

May we commit ourselves to treasuring the abundance of love and joy with which you bless us, and to sharing it, so that a greater contentment may be known by all. Pour into our hearts that assurance of your grace and mercy that will overwhelm us into forgiving others as you forgive us. **Amen.**

Reading: 1 Timothy 6: 6-19

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

In the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep the commandment without spot or blame until the manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will bring about at the right time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen. As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

StF 706 – Longing for light

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| 1) Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see. | 3) Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed. |
| <i>Ch) Christ, be our light! Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.</i> | 4) Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone. |
| 2) Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. | 5) Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come. |

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Reading: Luke 16: 19-31

“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man’s table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that

those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.' He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.' He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'

Sermon

The story/parable Jesus told, which we have just read, can lead us to thinking about many subjects including the nature of heaven and hell. Today it is not my intention to address such a subject. Like many of the parables of Jesus it is really about Kingdom living. At a simpler level it makes us think about how we treat our neighbour and value people in society.

During Covid times we started to value the people who did the everyday jobs we took for granted, like shop assistants and health and social care workers. But now with less focus upon the virus, though the virus still lingers, have attitudes to staff in such jobs reverted to what it was? Treating people with respect is sadly not the way of the world. All around we see notices saying that "we expect our employees to be treated with respect, and no abuse will be tolerated." Recently I was accused of being "too nice" in how I treated other people and my expectation of honesty. Should I change my way of treating others, to conform to the way of the world or continue to seek to challenge the way others live?

In Birmingham, the Methodist Church is at the heart of a project called [Street Banquet](https://www.streetbanquet.org.uk/) - their website is <https://www.streetbanquet.org.uk/> - challenging attitudes of value for the marginalised in our society. Street Banquet is rooted in another Jesus parable, the Parable of the Great Feast as recorded in Luke 14: 15-24. (Go on, if you are at home reading this, open your bible and find it.) Here is a vision of a table where the most marginalised and disempowered people are invited and welcomed as honoured guests. The parable challenges social norms, breaks down barriers and turns conventional roles upside-down. Street Banquet is a place where hosts become guests and guests become hosts – a sign of the New World of God.

We are about invitation

an invitation to people living on the margins of our communities
an invitation for them to come and share food
and when we do this together
we challenge our prejudices
we break down the barriers between us
and we have a taste of a better life
a New World
where everyone is welcome
where everyone is empowered
where everyone can flourish
a New World where justice reigns
so please accept your invitation to help us

Earthly wealth and heavenly riches

A 2024 Oxfam report on global economic inequality found that, between 2020 and 2024, roughly five billion people had become poorer, while the fortunes of the world's five richest individuals had doubled. This 'yawning gap' is also evident in our Gospel reading, which contrasts the fortunes of an unnamed rich man who dresses in fine array and dines sumptuously every day while ignoring the poor, starving Lazarus, who lies at his gate. The gap between rich and poor has always been present but can we find a way to narrow it?

A number of years ago, Michael Gove said he wanted all schools to be above average – impossibility. Likewise, not all can be above average income. The difference in society between poor and rich is the big problem, the proximity of wealth and poverty. The problem is in many cases how the rich became so. On 10th September, Larry Ellison, the 81-year-old founder of the technology giant Oracle, overtook Musk as the richest man in the world – a title Elon Musk has held for almost a year – when shares in Oracle rose by 40%, valuing Ellison's fortune at \$393bn, just ahead of Musk's \$384bn. To earn this title, Ellison did... nothing.

There are dozens of countries around the world with a lower GDP than the wealth of one person. 24 years ago, I was trekking in China for a hospice in the community where I was living. One night, we were staying in a hotel in Chengde. We were in a very comfortable hotel – a little different to the one we had stayed in a couple of days earlier. A short distance from the hotel we walked through areas of poverty; there was a vehicle, like an old VW Campervan, concreted onto the ground and this was a family home. People often misquote the bible on this subject “the love of money is the root of (all) evil” as this was how it was translated in the KJV. A more accurate translation is *For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains.*

Wealth is not in itself a bad thing – what matters is what we do with it. Paul wrote to Timothy,
As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

To be Content

Paul wrote about being Content in all situations.

I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

(Philippians 4: 10-13)

Contentment is not something our world strives for. In the western world, we live in a consumerist society, where we always want the next thing and can't rest until we have it. We live in a throwaway society where many think of their own convenience rather than the impact on a wider world. One of the things Anita and I have noticed in our recent look at houses is that new houses have very little storage space whilst around us we are encouraged to buy, buy, and buy, but where do we put it?

Can we truly be content whilst seeing others suffering?

In what areas in your life are you content/satisfied? The Epistle reading today asks us to look to God for our contentment. God's generous nature gives us all we need. Our happiness is in all that God has generously provided, rather than the ever-changing gimmicks the world offers. We perhaps need to change our mind-set to that which Paul encouraged Timothy to have and to share.

Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. (1 Timothy 6: 6-8)

As the writer of this week's Thought for the Week in the Roots material put it:

We didn't bring any money into the world with us, and we can't take it out with us – that is not where our wealth lies. Rather, our wealth lies in the knowledge that by grace we are saved. We can't do anything to

make God love us more and nothing we do can make God love us less. This knowledge brings us freedom, peace, joy and contentment. This knowledge helps us to spend our monetary wealth in ways that please God, and helps us to share the skills and abilities we have in a generous way. This is true wealth.

StF 723 – Who can sound the depths of sorrow

- 1) Who can sound the depths of sorrow
in the Father heart of God,
for the children we've rejected,
for the lives so deeply scarred?
And each light that we've extinguished
has brought darkness to our land:
upon our nation, upon our nation
have mercy, Lord.
- 2) We have scorned the truth You gave us,
we have bowed to other lords.
we have sacrificed the children
on the altars of our gods.
O let truth again shine on us,
let Your holy fear descend:
upon our nation, upon our nation
have mercy, Lord.
- 3) Who can stand before Your anger?
Who can face Your piercing eyes?
For You love the weak and helpless,
and You hear the victims' cries.
Yes, you are a God of justice,
and Your judgement surely comes:
upon our nation, upon our nation
have mercy, Lord.
- 4) Who will stand against the violence?
Who will comfort those who mourn?
In an age of cruel rejection,
who will build for love a home?
Come and shake us into action,
come and melt our hearts of stone:
upon your people, upon your people
have mercy, Lord.

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Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, **we pray for those who wait at the gate.**

For those who wait at the gate in poverty, seeking essentials from foodbanks, unable to afford to turn their heating on, walking the streets to save using fuel at home. We pray for all in poverty and need that those who have will see and respond to the needs of those who have not.

Loving God, **we pray for those who wait at the gate.**

For those who wait at the gate because they have nowhere else to wait for those whose homes have been destroyed by flood, fire or earthquake; for those whose home has been bombed and destroyed by war. We pray for all who are homeless or whose homes are insanitary or unsatisfactory, and those who have no country to call home

Loving God, **we pray for those who wait at the gate.**

For those who wait at the gate in sadness, grief and pain; for those whose lives have been torn apart through the death of a loved one, and those who sit by the bed of a loved one who is unwell. We pray for those who struggle to cope, and who cannot find a way to fit in.

Loving God, **we pray for those who wait at the gate.**

For those who wait at the gate of the church, and feel it is not a place for them; for those who have been rejected and those who fear they will be turned away. We pray that our churches may be the inviting, welcoming places you call them to be where no-one is turned away and all are helped to experience the grace and peace that you offer.

As your people let us be people of open doors and hearts and not closed and locked gates, in the name of our Saviour Jesus. **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 707 – Make me a channel of your peace

1) Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt, true faith in you:

*Ch) O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

2) Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy:

3) Make me a channel of your peace.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving unto all that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

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Blessing

Go forth from here to open gates, break down barriers and be a blessing to others as Christ has welcomed you, blessed you and enriched you by his grace. **Amen.**