

# 29<sup>th</sup> August 2021 – Morning Service

Martin Rider

## Call to Worship - Psalm 95:1 - 3

Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the LORD is the great God, the great King above all gods. Amen.

Our first hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community and, like many of their hymns, it is set to an old Gaelic melody from the Isle of Lewis.

## StF 28 – Jesus calls us here to meet him

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| 1) Jesus calls us here to meet him<br>As, through word and song and prayer,<br>We affirm God's promised presence<br>Where his people live and care.<br>Praise the God who keeps his promise;<br>Praise the Son who calls us friends;<br>Praise the Spirit who, among us,<br>To our hopes and fears attends. | 3) Jesus calls us to each other,<br>Vastly different though we are;<br>Creed and colour, class and gender<br>Neither limit nor debar.<br>Join the hand of friend and stranger;<br>Join the hands of age and youth;<br>Join the faithful and the doubter<br>In their common search for truth. |
| 2) Jesus calls us to confess him<br>Word of life and Lord of all,<br>Sharer of our flesh and frailness,<br>Saving all who fail or fall.<br>Tell his holy human story;<br>Tell his tales that all may hear;<br>Tell the world that Christ in glory<br>Came to earth to meet us here.                         |  |

*John L Bell & Graham Maule © 1989 WGRG Iona Community CCL No. 515642*

## Prayers

Lord of life, your Word transformed darkness and chaos into this vast swirling universe of stars, planets and moons. You not only created life but formed eco-systems which enable life to continue. Your wisdom and might are fathomless, so we are amazed that you reached out to feeble and flawed humankind, offering us guidance through the patriarchs and prophets. Even when we rebelled against your teaching and set ourselves in opposition to you, your love for us is so great that you did not abandon us, but instead took our mortal flesh and lived among us as Christ Jesus. He came to show us how we should live fulfilled and holy lives by his words and actions, but he also came to bear the judgment for the sins of the whole world by becoming the one perfect sacrifice on a cross at Calvary.

By dying Jesus broke the power of sin and when he was raised, he offers us everlasting life as his great gift of grace, not something we can grasp by works, nor which we deserve. Death no longer has the final word. Lord, we come to worship you with joy and awe. May all honour, glory, power and praise be yours, now and for evermore. **Amen.**

Lord, we have come to thank you for your gift of life, for this beautiful world in which we live, for the many good things we enjoy, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, for experiences and opportunities that have delighted us, but above all things, thank you for being our Good Shepherd, for we know that even when we stray from you, when we are loveless and unlovable, you will seek us out and save us from our folly.

L: Gracious God      **R: Have mercy on us**

Holy God, when we consider ourselves as straying sheep, we remember our failures to love and serve you wholeheartedly and to love our neighbours as we know we should. .... For the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do, forgive us O Lord and bring us back to you in our deeds and words, so we may be your holy people.

L: Gracious God      **R: Have mercy on us**

Merciful Lord, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have already pardoned us. Lord God, teach us to share your gift of love with all-comers, so we may honour you in the beautiful name of 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.**

Our next hymn was written by John Greenleaf Whittier, an American journalist and anti-slavery campaigner before the American Civil War. This was not intended to be a hymn, but was part of a long poem criticising the use by Vedic priests of an hallucinogenic drink called soma. Moreover, Mr. Whittier was a Quaker and they do not usually sing hymns. Fortunately, his words were set to the melody "Repton" composed by Sir Hubert Parry, when he was organist at Repton Public School and the combination has made it one of the nation's favourite hymns.

### **StF 495 - Dear Lord and Father of mankind**

- 1) Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways;  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,  
In purer lives thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.  
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.  
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.  
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.  
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.  
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!  
O still small voice of calm!

*John Greenleaf Whittier      CCL No. 515642*

## Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Heavenly Father, we offer praise and thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet on which we live. However, whenever we hear or read the news, we are reminded about the world's brokenness, much of which is the result of human failure, greed, cruelty, pride, foolishness, selfishness and worst of all, indifference. Lord, we know that you have blessed us and as a result offer ourselves to serve as your earthly hands as we seek to help neighbours who are in trouble or in need. Grant us the patience, wisdom, courage and compassion to act as Jesus would act, but in situations where our best is not enough, we pray that you will reach out to others who can bring about healing and wholeness, for to you all things are possible.

Holy God, we ask you to revive our church and churches throughout the world, particularly as restrictions caused by COVID19 are eased, so that we may have a blessing to our communities and to people further afield. Help us set aside our divisions and differences, so we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him as a united body of believers. Bless and use our love, gifts and graces to share Good News in all we do and say, so our lives reveal the grace of Jesus.

Almighty God, recent events like the terrible floods and wildfires on several continents, are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We remember, too, Haitians affected by the latest earthquake, followed by a severe storm. We offer our prayer for all these stricken people and pray for them to receive swift, practical aid. May governments listen to people who are campaigning against pollution and irresponsible use of resources and may they take action to protect the ecosystem we share. We pray that humankind come to recognize the need for change before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world to inherit.

God of shalom, of peace and harmony, we pray for peace across a world defiled with conflicts, persecution, terrorism, prejudice and sectarianism. Hear our prayer for Afghanistan which is under threat as allied troops leave. Lord, guide national leaders to seek justice and mercy in their dealings, so peace may flow like a healing river and we pray heal the divisions we see in our own society. Let your peace begin with us, so our lives reflect what we ask for the world.

Author of wellbeing, we pray for people who are ill including those whose lives are blighted with pain and anxiety when treatment has been held up because of the pandemic. May they receive treatment to restore their health, or at least mitigate the results of neglect and delay. We pray for everybody whose mental and spiritual health has been adversely affected by lockdown restrictions. May they not only seek but receive the support they need.

Remember, too, people who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned. [*Silence*] Lord, help us to offer them both friendship and practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be blessed with courage, hope, healing and enduring peace.

Gracious God, we continue to ask your blessing upon everybody who has been working for our wellbeing during this crisis, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and key-workers. Dearest Lord, grant them success in their work and keep them safe.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us be beacons of good news, day by day. May we learn to share the living bread you give us in such abundance with our neighbours, in Jesus' holy name. **Amen**

For the love of God is broader / Than the measures of the mind; / And the heart of the Eternal / Is most wonderfully kind. // But we make his love too narrow / By false limits of our own; / And we magnify his strictness / With a zeal he will not own.' Wonderful words by Frederick Faber who founded Brompton Oratory after falling out with Cardinal Newman at the Oratory in Edgbaston.

## StF 416 - There's a wideness in God's mercy

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

*Frederick William Faber CCL No. 515642*

## Reading: Mark 7:1 - 23

The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: "'These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.' You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men."

And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honour your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that."

Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, "Listen to me, everyone, and understand this. Nothing outside a person can make them 'unclean' by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of people that make them 'unclean.'"

After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. "Are you so dull?" he asked. "Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him 'unclean'? For it doesn't go into his heart but into his stomach, and then out of his body." (In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean.")

He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" Amen.

## **Sermon: “You put aside God’s command and obey human teachings.” Mark 7:8**

The film, “The Fiddler on the Roof”, opened with Tevye, the milkman, singing “Tradition”, about a society, where everybody knew his or her station in life and did not expect anything to change, as if everything was predestined. The rest of the film is about Tevye’s daughters’ attempts to escape the straightjacket of tradition – and, of course, the heartbreak of programs that drove many Jews across Europe and to the USA. Useful traditions include Trooping the Colour each June, because it instils a sense of pride in our armed forces, whilst Remembrance Sunday is beneficial, as reminds us of the cost of the freedom we enjoy. However, some traditions, such as the Orange Order marches in Ulster each July, are neither harmless, nor helpful, because they usually belittle Republican communities, often resulting in violence. It is particularly awkward when traditions are confused with law.

Many of the food and hygiene rules were formulated for the Israelites when they were nomads, for outbreaks of disease would have jeopardized the whole community. Moreover, after Jews returned from exile in Babylon, Ezra and Nehemiah re-enforced Torah in order to re-establish the separateness of the people from other dwellers in surrounding countries. Thus, by the time of Jesus, tradition and Torah had been twisted together, like strands of a rope, into 613 Rules of Righteousness which Pharisees tried harder than most to fulfil by diligent observance. Although the gospel-writers gave them a bad press, Pharisees really tried to be covenant people. They studied the scriptures faithfully, honoured their religious commitments, tithed and fasted. Indeed, after the Jewish Revolt, which led to the destruction of the Temple and Rome’s attempt to destroy the nation, it was the Pharisees who upheld Judaism and made it what it is today. The main reason why gospel writers like Mark were so critical is that at the Council of Jamnia in 70AD, Christians were excluded from synagogue worship and, as a result of being declared outside Judaism, Christian persecution by Rome intensified dramatically. Under those circumstances, it is understandable why Mark was so bitter about Pharisees.

The conflict over Jesus’ disciples failing to observe the cleansing ritual before they ate occurred just after the third Passover in Christ’s ministry. He had not gone to Jerusalem for the festival, so Pharisees had travelled to observe him, because they envisaged him as a dangerous revolutionary – Galileans were notorious for leading uprisings against Rome. The Pharisees were looking for any deviation from Torah and they questioned why Jesus’ disciples failed to wash their hands ceremonially before they ate. Mark explained to his Gentile readers about Hebrew hygiene and food traditions. Note that I say traditions, not laws, because the Pharisees were not questioning any breach of what is kosher. Instead, they were challenging the disciples’ breach of a deeply ingrained custom that most Jews regarded as binding as the Law given to Moses.

Jesus turned on the Pharisees with a quotation from Isaiah, declaring that they set human traditions as highly as though they were God’s Law. He gave an example of how they perverted the law, ‘Respect your father and your mother,’ by vowing all the money they would normally have spent on looking after their ageing parents to the temple, thus avoiding the demands of their duty to them. This vowed donation was called “Corban”. Having silenced his critics, Jesus told the crowd that we are not made unclean by failing to observe traditions, but what comes from within us: later, he explained to his slow-witted followers that it is our sinful thoughts that defile us, not the food we eat nor, indeed, whether or not we ritually clean our hands before we eat.

What can we draw from this reading? Like all denominations – indeed, like all faiths – Methodism has quite a number of traditions and individual Methodist churches have a few of their own. Wordsley Methodist Church used blackcurrant squash at communions, Wordsley having been a Primitive Methodist chapel, with a strong teetotal tradition, even to the point of not using non-alcoholic sacramental wine. After the untimely death of one of our Ministers, the Rector of Wordsley agreed to take Holy Communion, but he could only use alcoholic wine! Nevertheless, most, but not all the congregation took communion and none of us were struck by lightning or turned into pillars of salt!

Methodist traditions of classes, where we support one another, study the scriptures, sing hymns with gusto and grow together are to be encouraged, as is social outreach. What isn't helpful is when Christians allow our traditions to exclude others, or when we regard ourselves primarily as members of a particular denomination, thus making a barrier to other denominations. If we do, we fall into the same trap as the Corinthians had according to Chloe's household. Paul wrote, 'One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?' My friends, we must not allow ourselves to create artificial divisions, when we ought to be bound together in the love of Christ Jesus, who was crucified and was raised for everyone, not just people who share our views and follow our customs.

Instead, let us keep open minds and open, welcoming hearts, so we not only engage in dialogue with other denominations and different faith groups, but seek partnerships in serving some of the needs of our community. This is particularly important in this time of pandemic. After all, we are disciples, serving as Christ's earthly hands, honouring God's greatest Commandment in Jesus' own words: "'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" May our words, actions and lives fulfil this commandment and may none of our traditions become an impediment to our service of him whose grace is perfect and everlasting. Amen.

We shall close our worship with a hymn by Jacqui Jones, a South African Christian composer and singer, who now lives as a vicar's wife in New Zealand.

### **StF 662 – Have you heard God's voice**

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|---|---|
| 1) Have you heard God's voice;<br>Has your heart been stirred?<br>Are you still prepared to follow?<br>Have you made a choice to remain and serve,<br>Though the way be rough and narrow? | 3) In your city streets will you be God's heart?<br>Will you listen to the voiceless?<br>Will you stop and eat, and when friendships<br>start,<br>Will you share your faith with the faithless? |
| Ch) <i>Will you walk the path that will cost you much<br/>And embrace the pain and sorrow?<br/>Will you trust in One who entrusts to you<br/>The disciples of tomorrow?</i>               | 4) Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith<br>And believe it could be different?<br>Will you share your views using words of grace?<br>Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?              |
| 2) Will you use your voice; will you not sit down<br>When the multitudes are silent?<br>Will you make a choice to stand your ground<br>When the crowds are turning violent?               | E) <i>We will walk the path that will cost us much<br/>And embrace the pain and sorrow.<br/>We will trust in One who entrusts to us<br/>The disciples of tomorrow.</i>                          |

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### **Benediction**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.**