

## 29<sup>th</sup> October 2023 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

### Call to Worship - Psalm 95:1-2

Come, let us raise a joyful song to the Lord, a shout of triumph to the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving and sing psalms of triumph to him.

### Song – I will enter his gates

I will enter His gates with thanksgiving in my heart,	He has made me glad,
I will enter His courts with praise,	He has made me glad,
I will say this is the day that the Lord has made,	I will rejoice for He has made me glad.
I will rejoice for He has made me glad.	He has made me glad,
	He has made me glad,
	I will rejoice for He has made me glad.

Leona von Brethorst   © 1976 Maranatha! Music   CCL No. 515642

### Prayers of Adoration and Confession

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. God, our Father, you commanded the Israelites at festival time to be joyful. As we gather today, not all of us will feel happy. Some of us may feel under the weather, or burdened, or embattled, yet we choose to count our blessings and be thankful. We cast off our burden of heaviness and put on a garment of praise. We worship you, Lord, simply because you are good, and you are worthy to be worshipped. You reign unchallenged on the throne of the Universe, far above time and space, and yet you are also right here with us on earth. No circumstance in our own lives or in the world can challenge your sovereignty and kingship. You are higher than all the rulers of the earth and yet you hear the cry of the poor and needy. You came into our world in your Son and through him brought salvation to all who are willing to accept your free gift. Receive our worship and adoration today, through our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Lord, you are God above all and the provider of all that we need. You promise to be with us in all of our trials and struggles, yet often we still find it hard to trust. Our faith wavers and we try to find our own solutions without asking you for help. Forgive us for our self-sufficiency and help us to trust in you and follow your guidance. You are the perfect God and you sent your Son to be our perfect humanity so that through faith our sins are exchanged for his righteousness. Forgive us when we try to earn our way to salvation by our own efforts. We acknowledge that although in Christ we have righteousness, we still get it wrong and fall short in our words and deeds, in things that we do and in things that we fail to do. Yet we know that because we trust in Christ we are already forgiven. Grant us a fresh awareness of forgiveness and of our eternal standing as members of your family, that we may rest in the security of belonging to you for ever. Our sins are forgiven! Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

### StF 113 – O worship the King

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| 1) O Worship the King, all-glorious above;<br>O gratefully sing his power and his love:<br>Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,<br>Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.              | 3) The earth with its store of wonders untold,<br>Almighty, your power has founded of old;<br>Established it fast by a changeless decree,<br>And round it has cast, like a mantle, the sea.               |
| 2) O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,<br>Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;<br>His chariots of wrath the deep<br>thunder-clouds form,<br>And dark is his path on the wings of the storm. | 4) Your bountiful care what tongue can recite?<br>It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;<br>It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,<br>And sweetly distils in the dew and the rain. |

5) Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
In you do we trust, nor find you to fail;  
Your mercies how tender, how firm to the end,  
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend.

6) O measureless Might, ineffable Love,  
While angels delight to hymn you above,  
Your humbler creation, though feeble our praise,  
With true adoration our voices we raise.

*Robert Grant*

### **Reading: Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18**

The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favouritism to the great, but judge your neighbour fairly. Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so that you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord."'

In this passage, we (it was addressed to the Hebrew people, but equally applies to Gentile followers of Jesus) are commanded to be holy, as the Lord is holy. The definition of "holy" means set apart. It's not just about right behaviour, it's about dedication. For example, holy vessels for Temple worship as described in the Bible would be set apart only for that purpose. They would not be used for common activities. In the same way, all of our strength and ability are dedicated to God and are not used for malign purposes. This is worked out in two ways:

#### **1. In our relationship to God**

We must not have any idols. You may think that people don't worship idols today, especially in western culture, but it's not only about objects made out of metal or some other material. An idol is anything that can be worshipped instead of the true God. Anything that keeps us from the true God is an idol. The Lord makes it clear that he alone is the God of the Israelites, and nothing else can take his place.

#### **2. In our relationship to others**

If God is our focus then this will work out in our relationships with others too. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Jesus takes up this theme in our Gospel reading which we will hear shortly after our next worship song.

### **StF 333 – Majesty**

Majesty, worship His majesty,  
Unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.  
Majesty, kingdom authority,  
Flows from His throne, unto His own, His anthem raise.

So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus;  
Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus the King.  
Majesty, worship His majesty,  
Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.

*Jack Hayford    © 1981 Rocksmith Music    CCL No. 515642*

### **Reading: Matthew 22:34-46**

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?'

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'" This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbour as yourself." All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.'

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 'What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?' 'The son of David,' they replied. He said to them, 'How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him "Lord"?'

For he says, “The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.’” If then David calls him “Lord”, how can he be his son?’ No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

## Sermon

This is part of a longer passage where various religious groups try to catch Jesus out with difficult questions. Each time, Jesus gets the better of them. In this passage, Jesus was approached by the Pharisees, a Jewish group that believed in the resurrection and were also experts in the Law. One of them tried to trap Jesus with a question of what is the greatest commandment. Jesus responds by stating that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul and all of your mind. He then goes on to say that the second is like it: “Love your neighbour as yourself”. This echoes the Leviticus passage, which shows that nothing must take God’s place, and that our relationships with others are part of our response to God.

Jesus then speaks to the assembled Pharisees with a question of his own: Whose son is the Messiah? The Pharisees reply that he is David’s son. Jesus shows, by quoting Psalm 110, that the Messiah is greater than King David, since David calls him “Lord”, and that therefore the Pharisees have misunderstood who the Messiah is. It’s not enough to call him the Son of David. Perhaps the implication is that only the title “Son of God” will convey the meaning. After this, no one dares to challenge Jesus with further questions! Back to the first part of the passage, let us examine those two greatest commandments. The first is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind. It’s worth examining this in detail.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart! In our culture, heart is usually associated with feelings, and that’s why hearts often decorate Valentine’s cards. However, in the Hebrew concept world in which Jesus lives, the heart is not about emotions, but the seat of thoughts, imaginations and decisions. It is the source of life. All thoughts, words, desires and actions flow from the heart of a person. This is not about loving God only when we feel like it. It’s making a conscious choice to love God, a choice that works itself out in our actions.

Love the Lord your God with all your soul! In Hebrew thought the soul is the combination of the physical body with the life-giving spirit (breath) of God. It is the source of emotions and passions. We can also love God with our emotions. It’s not wrong to be exuberant in worship because we feel the closeness of God, or to approach him with joy or even tears. He knows us completely and understands our feelings. What does it mean to love the Lord your God with all your mind? Some people who want to criticise religion will say that in order to be a Christian you have to hold a set of beliefs that are illogical and unreasonable and contradict scientific evidence. This is very far from the truth! To find Christian faith is to follow a path not only of divine revelation but one that is scientifically robust and intellectually reasonable. It stands up to evidence and indeed is upheld by it!

Loving the Lord with all of our mind doesn’t mean that anyone in church who doesn’t have a PhD is somehow inferior. Not all of us consider ourselves to be academic, but we are all smart in different ways, whether with words, logic, pictures, music, movement and touch, patterns, people, reflective thought.<sup>1</sup> We all have minds with which to love the Lord in a way that is unique to each of us. There is no need to compare ourselves with others or try to emulate their pattern of intelligence. We are commanded to love the Lord with OUR mind, not someone else’s! It can be with academic study but doesn’t have to be. We can love the Lord with our music, or art, or garden design, or sport, or accounting, or with the way that we relate to and understand other people.

Secondly Jesus speaks about the relationships that we have with other people. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves. Some of us struggle with loving others, or maybe find some people easier to love than others. This reminds us that love is a decision, not necessarily a warm fuzzy feeling. However, to trace the origins of our struggles more deeply, some people find it difficult to love others because they don’t love themselves! We are called to love ourselves too!

This doesn't imply self-absorption or selfishness; it's an imperative to see ourselves as God sees us, and to know that we are secure in his love. Only then can we begin to see others as God sees them, and love them too. The starting point for us is to know that we are loved by God with a perfect love. Once we begin to grasp this, we can respond with love to the God who loved us first, and reach out to our neighbour.

Thanks be to God, who has loved us with an everlasting love!

In our hymn we are reminded of how we can see God and serve him even in the most mundane of tasks.

### **StF 668 – Teach me, my God and King**

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| 1) Teach me, my God and King,<br>In all things thee to see,<br>And what I do in anything,<br>To do it as for thee.                     | 4) A servant with this clause<br>Makes drudgery divine;<br>Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,<br>Makes that and the action fine. |
| 2) A man that looks on glass<br>On it may stay his eye;<br>Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,<br>And then the heaven espy.            | 5) This is the famous stone<br>That turneth all to gold;<br>For that which God doth touch and own<br>Cannot for less be told.     |
| 3) All may of thee partake:<br>Nothing can be so mean,<br>Which with this tincture, 'For thy sake',<br>Will not grow bright and clean. |   |

*George Herbert*

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

God our Lord and Father, we give you thanks that we are justified through faith in Christ and not through obeying a set of commands, yet you enable us to express our gratitude through loving you and those around us. Thank-you that we have the assurance of eternal life through your Son. **Amen.**

We pray for the world, which is our mission field and opportunity to serve and bless others. We pray for our neighbour in lands afar, especially where there are wars and famines. May the war in Israel and Gaza be brought to a swift conclusion. We remember also the Ukraine war, which is still there even though no longer number one in the news headlines, and the many other conflicts in the world. We pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are persecuted for their beliefs. May they be strengthened to stand firm. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Hear also our prayer for our nation. We pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to revive your Church and for many to be brought to faith in Jesus through our words and actions that bear witness to your goodness, and hence may our very culture be transformed and healed. Guide our King and Prime Minister and the Government so that their influence is for the good of this nation and the world. We also pray for our national institutions of health, social care, local government, justice and education, and for voluntary and community enterprise organisations, and for the private sector, all those who provide for the essentials of life. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Hear our prayer for our local churches and Circuit, that we may follow your Holy Spirit's leading as we move forward. Strengthen our Ministers as they lead our congregations. May all preachers of your Word be empowered so that they can feed your flock with life-transforming truths. We pray for your blessing upon all who serve you in our churches and circuit whether ordained or lay, salaried or volunteers, including all who worship in our congregations and those who are unable to attend but support the church from a distance. Let our service and witness be the overflowing of our love for you and for others.

May all in this region who proclaim Jesus as Lord be united in love, regardless of denominational labels. We pray for anyone in our congregations or otherwise known to us who needs your touch of healing, comfort, provision or guidance. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **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 562 – O God what offering shall I give**

- 1) O God, what offering shall I give  
To you, the Lord of earth and skies?  
My spirit, soul, and flesh receive,  
A holy, living sacrifice:  
Small as it is, 'tis all my store;  
More would you have, if I had more.
- 2) Now, O my God, you have my soul,  
No longer mine, but yours I am;  
O guard your own, possess it whole,  
Cheer it with hope, with love inflame;  
You have my spirit, there display  
Your glory to the perfect day.
- 3) You have my flesh, your hallowed shrine,  
Devoted solely to your will;  
Here let your light for ever shine,  
This house still let your presence fill;  
O source of life, live, dwell, and move  
In me, till all my life be love!
- 4) Send down your likeness from above,  
And let this my adorning be;  
Clothe me with wisdom, patience, love,  
With lowliness and purity,  
Than gold and pearls more precious far,  
And brighter than the morning star.
- 5) Lord, arm me with your Spirit's might,  
Since I am called by your great name;  
In you let all my thoughts unite,  
Of all my works be you the aim:  
Your love attend me all my days,  
And my sole business be your praise.

*Joachim Lange translated by Charles Wesley*

### **Blessing**

May the God of love fill our lives with his goodness, so that we are set free to worship in our words and actions. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. **Amen.**

<sup>1</sup> These are examined in the book “8 Great Smarts” by Kathy Koch PhD