

30th October 2022 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship - Psalm 145:1-2

I shall extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I shall bless you and praise your name forever and ever.

StF 17 – With gladness we worship

- 1) With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
Free hearts and free voices how blessed to bring;
The old, thankful story shall scale thine abode,
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.
- 2) Thy right would we give thee-true homage thy due,
And honour eternal, the universe through,
With all thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
In one acclamation we celebrate thee.
- 3) Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,
Thy children revere thee for all thou hast done.
O Father! Returning to love and to light,
Thy children are yearning to praise thee aright.
- 4) We join with the angels, and so there is given
From earth Alleluia, in answer to heaven.
Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,
Redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

George Rawson

Prayer of Adoration & Confession

Lord our God, we gather together in your glorious presence to worship you. We come to you, our Rock and our Stronghold. There is no one like you, who are faithful and dependable. Your covenant love reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your mercy is higher than the stars and deeper than the oceans. Great are the works of your hands, but greater still the work of salvation that you have wrought. You have sent your Son to pay the price of the grace that we now receive. Through faith in him we are assured of a relationship with you that will last for ever. Through your Spirit whom you have sent to be our companion we have guidance and assurance of a place in your family.

Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship and adore you. **Amen.**

Our God and Redeemer, we come to you in the assurance that comes not from our own goodness but from yours. We fall short of your standards and our own in many ways. We have often done what ought not to be done and failed to do that which would have been a blessing to another. We have left unsaid the word of encouragement or the seed that can lead a person to faith. We have spoken words that pull down rather than raise up. In a world of turmoil and uncertainty we have given in to fear and doubt through focusing more on the events around us than on you and your dependable love and your unfailing promises. Yet you continue to love us and call us to better things. We confess our sins and shortcomings and ask for the assurance that we are washed clean. We hear the truth of salvation: The sacrifice of your Son cleanses us continually from our sin. We are forgiven! Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

StF 565 – Only by grace can we enter

Only by grace can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand;
Not by our human endeavour,
But by the blood of the Lamb.
Into Your presence You call us, You call us to come.
Into Your presence You draw us,
And now by Your grace we come,
Now by Your grace we come.

Lord if You mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.
Lord if You mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.

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Reading: Habakkuk 1:1-4, 2:1-4

The prophecy that Habakkuk the prophet received.

How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? Why do you make me look at injustice? Why do you tolerate wrongdoing? Destruction and violence are before me; there is strife, and conflict abounds. Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never prevails. The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

I will stand at my watch and station myself on the ramparts; I will look to see what he will say to me, and what answer I am to give to this complaint.

Then the Lord replied: "Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it linger, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay. See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness."

The passage that we have just heard shows that although the prophet had many questions and concerns about all that was going on the world around him, God had an answer! God already knew all of Habakkuk's concerns, and had a word and a vision for him. We too can be assured that God knows everything about us. We cannot hide anything from him, and he continues to love us no matter what happens.

StF 482 – There is no moment of my life

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| 1) There is no moment of my life,
No place where I may go,
No action which God does not see,
No thought he does not know. | 3) If I should close my eyes to God,
Then I am given sight;
If I should go where all is dark,
My darkness is made light. |
| 2) Before I speak, my words are known,
And all that I decide,
To come or go: God knows my choice,
And makes himself my guide. | 4) God knew my days before all days,
Before I came to be;
He keeps me, loves me, in my ways
Through all eternity. |

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Reading: Luke 19:1-10

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner."

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Sermon

That last hymn also links us to the second reading in the sense that Jesus already knew about Zacchaeus before ever meeting him. He knew which tree he was in and sought him out.

I was in Jericho in 1979 as part of a tour of Israel, and a couple of things stand out in my memory. One is that it's hot in Jericho, much hotter than Jerusalem. Jericho is a long way down in altitude from Jerusalem, and it's in the desert! The other thing is that Jericho is very green. It stands out as a verdant oasis in an otherwise dry place, and there are many trees there! Deuteronomy 34:3 refers to Jericho as "city of palm trees". However, it wasn't one of these palm trees that the diminutive Zacchaeus climbed in order to obtain a better view of Jesus, but a sycamore. I guess that palm trees aren't easy to climb!

When Jesus reaches the tree that Zacchaeus is in, he looks up. I think that he already had Zacchaeus in mind before even going to Jericho. He already had the knowledge of where to find him and already had plans for going to the home of Zacchaeus and for the transformation of his life. Jesus saw things differently from most people! Would any of us have even thought to look up into a tree that we are next to, yet Jesus looked up to where Zacchaeus was. Most Israelites would have seen tax-collectors like Zacchaeus as collaborators with the occupying Roman power, and maybe beyond redemption, but Jesus saw something different. He saw a person he loved and who needed grace, and whose life had great potential for good.

This message is about vision! It's about seeing things as God sees them. It's about knowing that God sees us in a way that nobody else does. He loves us and knows our joys, concerns and potential, and he has plans for our lives! Likewise if we can see the world, other people and ourselves the way that God does, we will have a different perspective altogether!

The prophet Habakkuk looked around at the world he lived in and saw its problems and injustices and questioned whether there was any purpose in it. He did not see as God sees, yet God listened to the prophet's plea and questionings and had an answer. He assures Habakkuk that there is more order and purpose in the world than is immediately evident. There is a moral order at work. The future of the wicked is very shaky indeed, while the righteous, by their faith, shall experience true life. There is a greater plan, a vision, which will be worked out in God's appointed time and not on any humanly-devised timescale.

Vision is important! I'm not talking about our physical sight. Some of us have better physical sight than others and there are people that have no physical sight at all, yet this may not correlate with depth of spiritual vision that those people have. I'm talking about seeing things the way that God does. This is about responding to something that God is placing into our hearts. This may not necessarily be a picture, although it can be. It may be an idea of what God plans to do. It may be a word of direction. It may be a sense of where we will be in the future if we follow God's word.

Here's an example of the latter. Let me tell you about a lady called Joyce. When Joyce was 9 years old she became a Christian by accepting Jesus as her personal saviour. However, life wasn't easy. She was part of a dysfunctional family where she was frequently abused by her father. Her mother knew about the abuse but was too afraid to do anything about it so she let it continue. Joyce longed to be out of the situation but was unable to break free. However, she used to say to herself, "One day I'm going to do something great!" Things didn't improve at once. It took many years and a lot of emotional healing, but she tentatively began to teach the Word of God to a group of people. Later in life, while her teaching and preaching ministry was yet restricted to small groups, she received further direction to take that ministry to the north, south, east and west. It took further time and determination to make this happen, but now Joyce Meyer has a ministry of Bible teaching and preaching that is broadcast on TV in many countries and in over 100 languages, and runs an organisation that helps many people to be free from oppression and find relief in times of difficulty.

Her books, audio recordings, videos, TV programmes and conferences have helped to set perhaps many thousands of people free to be who God wants them to be, releasing them from the negative effects of past trials and into the fullness of God's blessing. I believe that the idea and determination in her heart to do something great was granted by God, and this is what I mean by vision.

As Joyce's life story shows, vision from God goes beyond the circumstances we find ourselves in and enables us to see something that can't be seen with human eyes, something amazing and miraculous. Proverbs 29:18 tells us that where there is no vision, the people perish. As a church and circuit we need vision and direction from God if we are to grow and flourish. Human wisdom and knowledge can never be enough. Words and pictures and ideas from God, when acted upon, can propel us to unimagined heights. How are we to have this vision? God gives it, but is there anything that we can do or learn to make ourselves more open to receiving God's vision? I believe that there is!

We need to make sure that the Word of God, the Bible, is more deeply at work in us than secular ideas. We can easily absorb the negative ideas of modern culture and try to go forward in human wisdom. Although not everything in human wisdom is negative – sometimes we can learn good things from it – there is no substitute for divine inspiration and guidance. A thorough knowledge of the Bible through reading and study and learning and meditation can make us more sensitive to God's ways and his voice. We need to pray to God and listen for his answers. The letter of James says that if we need wisdom we should pray for it, and God, who is generous, will grant it.

As individuals and as a church and as a circuit, let us listen to what God is saying and follow it. Human ideas can only take us so far. God's vision can take us much further! It can take us into miracle territory. It enables us to stand on the mountain of faith and look ahead to see a land of abundance and prosperity, of peace and joy, of growth, of unimagined blessing, and move forward so that we make it a reality and experience its fullness.

StF 668 – Teach me, my God and King

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

George Herbert

Thanksgiving, Dedication of offering and Intercession

Our perfect Lord and Father, we thank you that you looked upon the human race and saw a people worth saving. Through faith in your Son we are assured of eternal life and we give you praise. Receive our monetary gifts and the offering of ourselves in dedication to your service. **Amen.**

Hear our prayer for the needs of the world. We bring before you nations at war, especially the Ukraine and Russia, and we pray that the purposes of those who desire aggression and domination will be brought to nothing. We pray for nations experiencing extremes of weather, such as floods or droughts, that have destroyed crops or made the land unproductive. Help those who are seeking to meet needs by providing food or seed or education or livestock, and grant that we may live our lives keeping in mind the needs of our brothers and sisters across the globe.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

Hear our prayer for this nation. After a time of political turmoil we pray for stability. We ask for wisdom for our new Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and ask that you give him and his ministers courage to do what is right for the nation and the world and pleasing in your sight. Surround King Charles with your blessing. May he reign with the same trust as that known by the late Queen, and likewise may he serve with recognition that there is a greater, heavenly King. We remember citizens of our nation that are struggling to thrive in our current economic system and pray that support will be there for them, that all people may live in peace and flourish.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

Hear our prayer for this church and for the Vale of Stour Circuit. Grant us a vision that comes from you and not from ourselves, that we may go forward in your strength and under your guidance. Grant us growth in spirituality, numbers and prosperity. We pray for the unity of the wider Church of all denominations, in order that we may walk together in fellowship and allow the Gospel to transform society.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

Hear our prayer for people who need a touch from you: ourselves, our friends and family and others known or unknown to us. We think of the lonely, those who have suffered loss, people who need healing of the body or emotions, anyone who is anxious or afraid and people needing wisdom to know how to go forward. Grant them comfort, healing, peace, inward vision and practical resources.

L: Lord, hear us. **R: Lord, graciously hear us.**

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 545 – Be thou my vision

- 1) Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2) Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
- 3) Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4) Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
Be thou mine inheritance now and always, -
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5) High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Traditional Irish – translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne and versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hall

Prayer & Blessing

God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, confer on us the spiritual gifts of wisdom and vision, with the knowledge of him that they bring. Open the eyes of our hearts, so that we may understand more fully the hope to which we are called and the resources of your power available to us who have faith. **Amen.**

The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us now and evermore. **Amen.**