

4th July 2021 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship - Psalm 48:1

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise in the city of our God.
His holy mountain is fair and lofty, the joy of the whole earth.

StF 34 – O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

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| 1) O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim -
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name. | 4) These, though we bring them in trembling
and fearfulness,
He will accept for the name that is dear;
Mornings of joy give for evenings
of tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear. |
| 2) Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
High on his heart he will bear it for you,
Comfort your sorrows, and answer your
prayerfulness,
Showing the pathway your feet should pursue. | 5) O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense
of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name. |
| 3) Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth you would count as
your own.
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to bring to his throne. | |

John Samuel Bewley Monsell CCL No. 515642

Prayers

Most perfect Lord, we come to you in the poverty of all that we can offer you, yet assured of your glad welcome as we worship. Each moment we are in need of your grace, yet that grace is abundantly supplied through Christ Jesus. Knowing that you are pleased by our very desire to know you more deeply, we come with humble hearts to offer ourselves in thought, word and deed as our act of adoration. In worship we offer to you our sorrows, joys, failures and successes. We bow before the One who is both perfectly holy and perfectly loving. We trust in the love of the Father expressed in Christ Jesus and released into our lives through the Holy Spirit. Take all that we have and are and transform us into your likeness, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your Holy Name.

For our failures, and especially for allowing our failures to bring us to a despairing standstill:

Lord, forgive us.

For our lack of love, especially for times when we do not look to the source of perfect love to make up for our lack:

Lord, forgive us.

For our poverty of trust, especially when we fail to ponder the wondrous acts of the One who merits our total confidence:

Lord, forgive us.

We have trusted in the one and only Saviour, Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can be assured that our sins are forgiven and that the Lord remembers them no more. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Reading: Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness;

come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. **Give thanks to him, bless his name.**

For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures for ever, **and his faithfulness to all generations.**

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be for ever. Amen.

Reading: Mark 6:1-13

Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits. These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them." They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

StF 405 – Great is the darkness

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| 1) Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain.
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many come in Your name.
Watching while sanity dies,
Touched by the madness and lies. | 2) May now Your church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim,
In every nation salvation will come
To those who believe in Your name.
Help us bring light to this world,
That we might speed Your return. |
| Ch) <i>Come Lord Jesus,
Come Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit we pray.
Come Lord Jesus,
Come Lord Jesus,
Pour out Your Spirit on us today.</i> | 3) Great celebrations on that final day,
When out of the heavens You come.
Darkness will vanish, all sorrows will end,
And rulers will bow at Your throne.
Our great commission complete,
Then face to face we shall meet. |

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Sermon

In this passage we have two stories that contain warnings for those who would proclaim the gospel and for those who listen to it: Some people will reject the messenger, while some people will reject the message. There are also many positives here. Jesus was still able to heal some people in his home town despite the lack of faith that he found there. The disciples on their missionary travels were clearly accepted and able to perform miracles among many to whom they went.

In the first part of the passage Jesus was in his home town. It seems that his healings and miracles and wisdom were known to the people and they were amazed, but when they started to talk about his background and family, familiarity set in and they turned against him! Jesus was astonished at their lack of faith and his miracle-working ministry there was inhibited accordingly. Beware of familiarity! Let's not limit God by trying to decide for ourselves who can and cannot be a channel of God's blessing. He can work through anyone he chooses. He can even do remarkable things through people that we think we know well.

In the second story Jesus sends the Twelve out to the surrounding area but instructs them not to stay in areas where they are not welcomed, but to move on. Why might they be rejected? Maybe it's because the gospel of Grace itself can be offensive to some people. They don't understand it. Surely, they say, God should accept those who are respectable and live good lives, contributing to society and being well-thought-of. Such people (preferably) go to church, at least once in a while, and they give to charity. Surely, they think, God ought to have nothing to do with people who drop out of respectable society and do things that we wouldn't approve of. But that's the essence of the gospel. It shows us that outside of Christ we are all in the wrong. It challenges a sense of self-righteousness and shows us that we all need a Saviour. We all need healing of some kind or another.

Jesus tells a story (in Luke 18) illustrating the kind of gospel that challenges the proud Pharisee who looks up to heaven and trumpets his own good deeds while thanking God that he is not like other people and especially the tax collector nearby. The said tax collector wouldn't even lift his face to heaven but prayed, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." Jesus declares that the tax collector was the one who went home forgiven! Grace offends the self-righteous but exalts the humble!

If we think that we are accepted by God because we are respectable people who go to church and try to do good and don't do (much) harm, then we don't understand the Gospel. The Good News is that we can come to God and say: "Lord, I know that I can never be good enough to be accepted by you, but I believe that Jesus died for my sins and rose from the dead. I receive Jesus into my life. I receive his free grace and forgiveness and believe that I am now a child of God forever." It's glorious! It's unfair! It's nothing to do with my self-righteousness, but that is why it's so wonderful!

Some people object and claim that preaching grace gives people a licence to sin, but no, that's not the message of the Bible. Grace doesn't give people a licence to sin, it gives them freedom to let God transform their lives and clean them up! It gives hope where there was none before. Just ask one of the myriads of former criminals, addicts, all kinds of "sinners" who have heard the gospel of grace, responded to it, known their sins to be forgiven and are now ministers, evangelists, support workers and doing all kinds of good things.

Not everyone accepts the gospel message. There are certainly many who reject it, yet Jesus commands his disciples not to linger with these people but to move on to another place where the response may be different.

I'm reminded of a mission team of which I was part during my time as a student at Cliff College. It was almost time for the summer missions of 1997 and our team had not yet been invited to link with a church in the area to which we were going. Eventually one Methodist church whose minister was not in sympathy with what we were doing, reluctantly accepted us and gave us a place to stay. Around that time some of us read a Bible devotional that said: "Don't stay where you're tolerated, go where you're celebrated." On the first evening after arrival we looked around the town and came to a United Reformed Church where there was a coffee shop being run with an evangelistic purpose. We introduced ourselves, met the Minister, and were promptly welcomed and invited to run the coffee shop for the duration of our mission. We accepted and were able to have many fruitful conversations with people about Jesus.

In conclusion:

Let's not miss what God is doing because we are too familiar with the messenger. We think that God cannot work through that person because he/she is not exotic enough. Remember that God works through the ordinary and familiar as well as the unusual and the new and exciting people from far-off places. Remember that a person's past is not necessarily a guide to the future. Someone's background may look ordinary but God can do extraordinary things through that person.

Let's not miss what God is doing for the reason that we perceive that a person's background (before coming to Christ) is not "respectable" or is even criminal. God can transform lives and surely does so. We are worshipping God today largely because of a man who called himself "chief of sinners", the former persecutor of Christians who we know as the apostle Paul.

Let us be messengers who are faithful to the gospel of grace, continuing to proclaim it wherever it is received.

Let us be open to God's wonderful message of grace and his life-changing, miracle-working power, welcoming any genuine messenger that God chooses to use.

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Heavenly Lord, we give thanks that you have placed us in an eternal family with you as head. Trusting in you, we are assured that you are with us now and that we have everlasting life.

We pray for the nations of the world and for wisdom for their leaders. May they make good decisions under your lordship on dealing with the issues that we all face, so that the integrity of the natural world be preserved, peoples live together in peace, disease be controlled and eradicated, and all the inhabitants of the earth have the freedom to live together in peace, fellowship and prosperity.

L: Through all the earth **R: Let your word bring healing.**

We pray for our own government and public institutions, for our Prime Minister and his advisers as decisions are made about emerging from restrictions. Bless our NHS and especially the continuing rollout of vaccinations. We pray for the protection of school staff and pupils and of all who work for the service of society.

L: Through all the earth **R: Let your word bring healing.**

We pray for your Church throughout the earth to be a channel of love and truth and healing for individuals, the nations and the planet. May our differences become strengths as we are united in the love of the One who died for us. Show forth your power in our lives and open our lips to proclaim the Good News of Jesus. We pray for the Methodist Connexion, the URC Synod and governing bodies of all branches of the Church. Guide the decisions made in our own Circuit so that we follow your way of truth and renewal.

L: Through all the earth **R: Let your word bring healing.**

We pray for those in our congregations and those known to us who are in particular need of your help. Bring comfort to the bereaved, peace to the dying, rest to the weary, healing to the sick, wisdom to people facing uncertain circumstances, and confidence to those who feel unsure of how to conduct their lives now that restrictions are easing.

L: Through all the earth **R: Let your word bring healing.**

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 117 – Sing praise to God who reigns above

- 1) Sing praise to God who reigns above,
The God of all creation,
The God of power, the God of love,
The God of our salvation;
With healing balm my soul he fills,
And every faithless murmur stills:
To God all praise and glory!
- 2) What God's almighty power has made
That will he ever cherish,
And will, unending, soon and late,
With loving-kindness nourish;
And where he rules in kingly might
There all is just and all is right:
To God all praise and glory!
- 3) The Lord is never far away,
But, through all grief distressing,
An ever-present help and stay,
Our peace, and joy, and blessing;
As with a mother's tender hand,
He leads his own, his chosen band:
To God all praise and glory!
- 4) O you who name Christ's holy name,
Give God all praise and glory:
O you who own his power, proclaim
Aloud the wondrous story.
Cast each false idol from its throne,
The Lord is God, and he alone:
To God all praise and glory!

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Closing blessing

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

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