

5th November – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship - Psalm 107: 1

Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good; his love is eternal!

StF 546 – Behold the servant of the Lord!

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| 1) Behold the servant of the Lord!
I wait thy guiding eye to feel,
To hear and keep thy every word,
To prove and do thy perfect will,
joyful from my own works to cease,
Glad to fulfil all righteousness. | 3) My every weak though good design
O'errule or change, as seems thee meet;
Jesus, let all my work be thine!
Thy work, O Lord, is all complete,
And pleasing in thy Father's sight;
Thou only hast done all things right. |
| 2) Me if thy grace vouchsafe to use,
Meanest of all thy creatures, me,
The deed, the time, the manner choose;
Let all my fruit be found of thee;
Let all my works in thee be wrought,
By thee to full perfection brought. | 4) Here then to thee thine own I leave;
Mould as thou wilt thy passive clay;
But let me all thy stamp receive,
But let me all thy words obey,
Serve with a single heart and eye,
And to thy glory live and die. |

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Glory be to you, God the Father, resplendent in majesty and might, maker of all and shepherd of your people. Glory be to God, **Glory and praise for ever.**

Glory be to you, God the Son, eternal Word of the Father, redeemer of all and saviour of your people. Glory be to God, **Glory and praise for ever.**

Glory be to you, God the Spirit, fountain of light and giver of life, sustainer of all and advocate of your people. Glory be to God, **Glory and praise for ever.**

Glory be to you, God the Father; Glory be to you, God the Son; Glory be to you, God the Spirit; Glory be to you, most holy Trinity. Glory be to God, **Glory and praise for ever.**

Happy are they, whose way is blameless, who walk in your ways, O God, and keep your decrees.

We confess that we are not among them. We have sinned against you exceedingly, and against our sisters and brothers. We have broken your commandments, and failed to care for others. Wash us, and make us clean, that, ceasing to do evil and learning to do good, we may seek justice and defend the oppressed, and the name of Jesus may be glorified in us. We ask it for his sake. **Amen.**

StF 492 – Christ be my leader

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| 1) Christ be my leader by night as by day;
Safe through the darkness, for he is the way.
Gladly I follow, my future his care,
Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there. | 3) Christ be my Saviour in calm as in strife;
Death cannot hold me, for he is the life.
Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain
Can touch my salvation; with Jesus I reign. |
| 2) Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,
Drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.
Grant me to trust him; though shifting as sand,
Doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand. | |

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Reading: Micah 3: 5 - 11

My people are deceived by prophets who promise peace to those who pay them, but threaten war for those who don't. To these prophets the Lord says, "Prophets, your day is almost over; the sun is going down on you. Because you mislead my people, you will have no more prophetic visions, and you will not be able to predict anything." Those who predict the future will be disgraced by their failure. They will be humiliated because God does not answer them.

But as for me, the Lord fills me with his Spirit and power, and gives me a sense of justice and the courage to tell the people of Israel what their sins are. Listen to me, you rulers of Israel, you that hate justice and turn right into wrong. You are building God's city, Jerusalem, on a foundation of murder and injustice. The city's rulers govern for bribes, the priests interpret the Law for pay, the prophets give their revelations for money – and they all claim that the Lord is with them. "No harm will come to us," they say. "The Lord is with us."

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 2: 9-12

Surely you remember, our brothers and sisters, how we worked and toiled! We worked day and night so that we would not be any trouble to you as we preached the Good News from God.

You are our witnesses, and so is God, that our conduct towards you who believe was pre, right, and without fault. You know that we treated each of you just as a father treats his own children. We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God, who calls you to share in his own kingdom and glory.

StF 713 – Show me how to stand for justice

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| 1) Show me how to stand for justice:
How to work for what is right,
How to challenge false assumptions,
How to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
In a world so full of greed,
Showing your immense compassion
By the life I choose to lead. | 3) Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
Modelled on your living word,
In humility submitting
To the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
Every day in all I do:
By your Spirit's gracious prompting
May I learn to walk with you. |
| 2) Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
Whether given or received -
For my need has not diminished
Since the day I first believed:
Let me seek no satisfaction
Boasting of what I have done,
But rejoice that I am pardoned
And accepted in your Son. | |

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Reading: Matthew 23: 1-12

Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples. "The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees are the authorized interpreters of Moses' Law. So you must obey and follow everything they tell you to do; do not, however, imitate their actions, because they don't practice what they preach. They tie onto people's backs loads that are heavy and hard to carry, yet they aren't willing to lift a finger to help them carry those loads. They do everything so that people will see them. Look at the straps with scripture verses on them which they wear on their foreheads and arms, and notice how large they are! Notice also how long are the tassels on their cloaks!

They love the best places at feasts and the reserved seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the market places and to be called 'Teacher'. You must not be called 'Teacher', because you are all members of one family and have only one Teacher. And you must not call anyone here on earth 'Father', because you have only the one Father in heaven. Nor should you be called 'Leader', because your one and only leader is the Messiah. The greatest one among you must be your servant. Whoever makes himself great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be made great.

Sermon

"We encouraged you, we comforted you, and we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God, who calls you to share in his own kingdom and glory." (1 Thess. 2: 12)

Who speaks for God? Through the centuries, the voices of those who claim to speak for God have been issuing conflicting messages. And today the confusion is no less marked. Suicide bombers claim the authority of God for what they do, whether it be in the name of Allah, or otherwise. The religious right in America is no less sure that it is on the side of God. In conflicts far and wide factions claim divine sanction for terrible atrocities, and the result is that many are turned off religion altogether because they can no longer stomach the arrogance of those who know that they are right, and use their certainty as a stick with which to beat others.

The Bible readings today address this burning problem. Sometimes it is quite difficult to see the relationship between the readings in the Lectionary, but there is no mistaking the connection today. The prophet Micah was scathing in his condemnation of those prophets who tempered their message to suit the audience. He described them as promising prosperity for those who offered them food, but, on the other hand, denouncing and reviling those who gave them nothing to eat. The prophets were often employed by the ruling authorities to declare the word of the Lord, and Micah saw how easy it was for that employment to corrupt those who were in it for the money. After all, it is dead easy to tell your boss precisely what he wants to hear!

So, who speaks for God? That was obviously a big issue for the early churches, too. It appears that the whole of the second letter to the Thessalonians was written to discredit the claims of preachers who were causing alarm within the community and within the church. The early Christians had a strong sense that they were living in the last days before God's judgement would be revealed. The end of the world, they thought, was near, and in that atmosphere unscrupulous preachers could exploit the peoples' expectations and play on their fears.

So the reading from First Thessalonians, which we heard today, reminded the Christians that those who had founded the Church there had always stressed that what really mattered was faithful living. They were to live lives worthy of the God who had called them to share in the life of the kingdom. There is the implied suggestion that one way of testing the authenticity of God's messengers was in the quality of the lives lived by those who responded to them in faith. And as a way of underlining the integrity of the message, those who had founded the Church in Thessalonica sought no reward for their ministry. They worked for a living so as not to be a burden on the Church. They were not in it for themselves, but only for God's glory and for the sake of those who came to believe through them.

We know other instances in the New Testament that there were still false prophets around. And the reading from Matthew's Gospel in which Jesus warned his disciples about trouble ahead – wars and rumours of wars, punishment and even execution, betrayal and hatred – alerted them to the rise of false prophets. *"Many men, claiming to speak for me, will come and say, 'I am the Messiah!' and they will deceive many people."* And in the words of Psalm 43, we all want to be *"delivered from lying and evil people"*.

It has always been an issue, both for those who are called to be messengers of God, and those who hear the message. How can we be sure that the message is genuine?

Those of us who are preachers know how often we are constrained by those to whom we minister. It is always possible to compromise the gospel for fear of upsetting particular people, and churches have been known to put undue pressure on those to whom they regard as 'in their employ'. The problem that Micah addressed is still with us. Those who speak the word of God can fall into the trap of saying what they believe people want to hear. Micah believed that words of warning were required, rather than promises of prosperity and comfort. In the very next chapter of his book, the true prophet offers a vision of peace that is God's will for all peoples, and he calls them to a life of justice, faith and humble walking with God. But before he could get to that positive assertion of God's word, he knew that he had to confront the false prophets and the leaders who were abusing their power. And he did so fearlessly, knowing that there were no rewards for harsh words.

One of Bob Dylan's songs satirises those who claim that God is on their side and that they know what God wants them to do. It is a temptation to try to validate your actions by claiming that you are carrying out the Lord's will. Indeed, Holy Wars have been fought on the assumption that we know we are right and that God has told us what to do. But the Bible readings today warn us that it is not easy to hear, or to speak, the word of God. The message has often been distorted, and the messengers have often been misguided, if not deliberately perverse.

Our text today from 2 Thess. 2: 12, puts it clearly: *"We encouraged you, we comforted you, we kept urging you to live the kind of life that pleases God, who calls you to share in his own kingdom and glory."*

StF 588 – I come with joy

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| 1) I come with joy, a child of God,
Forgiven, loved, and free,
The life of Jesus to recall
In love laid down for me. | 4) The Spirit of the risen Christ,
Unseen, but ever near,
Is in such friendship better known;
Alive among us here. |
| 2) I come with Christians far and near,
To find, as all are fed,
The new community of love
In Christ's communion bread. | 5) Together met, together bound,
By all that God had done,
We'll go with joy, to give the world
The love that makes us one. |
| 3) As Christ breaks bread and bids us share,
Each proud division ends;
The love that made us makes us one,
And strangers now are friends. | |

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Prayers of Intercession

Father God, we pray for all who have shared their lives and their faith with us. We pray for all who teach the faith, for preachers and evangelists, for theological colleges, for Religious Education teachers, for Sunday School teachers. We remember all who have been led astray by false teachers and vain promises. We pray for all who are working for peace in our world, for all who stand up for the exploited or the underdog, for those with vision who seek to care for and conserve our planet. We pray for ecologists, for all who work the land, for all research workers and scientists. We pray for all who have been cheated out of their land by economic powers.

We give thanks for all who share their lives with us and are dear to us. We pray for a spirit of good neighbourliness in our communities; may no one be neglected or forgotten. We pray for all who are estranged from their loved ones and friends. We pray for the building up of community life, for community centres and places where locals can meet.

We remember before you all who are lonely, all who have been deserted by loved ones, and those who have recently lost loved ones. We pray for all who have difficulty in making relationships, and for all those in difficult relationships where there is a breakdown in understanding or care. We pray for all who are separated from loved ones through sickness, all who are in hospital or in care.

We give thanks for all those who have sought to love you with all their heart, with all their soul and with all their mind. We remember all who have served you by serving others. We give thanks for all who in the past have enriched our lives and our neighbourhood by their goodness. We pray that we may have a share with them in your kingdom in glory.

Lord of grace and glory, **Lead us from despair to hope. 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 693 – Beauty for brokenness

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| 1) Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in Your suffering world, this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset Your kingdom increase. | 3) Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, His cross for the pain. |
| 2) Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills.
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those
who can't speak. | 4) Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams,
Plundered and poisoned, our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed,
Make us content with the things that we need. |
| <i>Ch) God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray,
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain,
Come change our love from a spark to a flame.</i> | 5) Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until Your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of Your ways,
Seek Your salvation and bring You their praise. |

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Blessing

The love of God be in your heart, the peace of God be in your mind, the grace of God be in your dealings: And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**