

5th September 2021 – Morning Service

Megan Ashmore

Call to Worship - Psalm 118 v 24

This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Welcome

We meet to praise and rejoice in worship as we gather together in the presence of God, our Father. We are going to sing those opening words from Psalm 118 in our first hymn, which encapsulates three core elements of Christian belief: belief in a loving creator God; belief in the resurrected, life-giving Christ and belief in the presence of a dynamic Holy Spirit.

StF 152 – This is the day

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| 1) This is the day, this is the day
That the Lord has made, that the Lord has made;
We will rejoice, we will rejoice
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.
This is the day that the Lord has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
This is the day that the Lord has made. | 3) This is the day, this is the day
When the Spirit came, when the Spirit came;
We will rejoice, we will rejoice
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.
This is the day when the Spirit came;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
This is the day when the Spirit came. |
| 2) This is the day, this is the day
When he rose again, when he rose again;
We will rejoice, we will rejoice
And be glad in it, and be glad in it.
This is the day when he rose again;
We will rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day,
This is the day when he rose again. | |

Anon CCL No. 515642

Prayers

We begin our prayer time by saying together the Apostle's Creed:

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

We thank you heavenly Father for this day – for the freshness of the morning dew; the hint of Autumn in the air; and the promise that your mercies are new every morning. Thank you for the sleep we had last night which has renewed our bodies with strength for today. How wonderful it is to know that while we slept your praises still rang out as our neighbours on the other side of the world got up and began their songs of praise.

We praise you for the gift of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has redeemed us by his blood and brought us into a full and everlasting relationship with you. And we rejoice in your life-giving Spirit, which equips us and enables us to live our lives in service to you. **Amen.**

The Old Testament reading for today is taken from the book of Proverbs. The definition of a proverb is “a short, well-known pithy saying, stating a general truth or piece of advice.” The proverbs we are going to hear come from select verses. I’m not sure they are well-known, nor particularly short, but they do state a general truth or seek to give advice. As we listen let’s consider what are they saying to us?

Reading: Proverbs 22: 1 - 2; 8 - 9; 22 – 23

If you have to choose between a good reputation and great wealth, choose a good reputation. The rich and the poor have this in common: the Lord made them both.

If you plant the seeds of injustice, disaster will spring up, and your oppression of others will end. Be generous and share your food with the poor. You will be blessed for it.

Don't take advantage of the poor just because you can; don't take advantage of those who stand helpless in court. The Lord will argue their case for them and threaten the life of anyone who threatens theirs.

Brief thought

The internet is a marvellous thing. I googled today’s date – September 5th – and was directed to a website called “There is a day for that.” It appears that most days, if not every day of the year, has a particular commemoration. I’m afraid we’ve missed “International Traffic Light Day” which was on August 5th; National Bakewell Tart Day, which was on the 11th; Lemon Juice Day, 29th and Eat an extra Dessert Day, which was yesterday. However, having prepared this service well in advance I sorted that one out for you!! But back to today. September 5th is International Day of Charity”. Originally a Hungarian civil society initiative, the United Nations General Assembly made it an international day in 2012, and is celebrated on the anniversary of the death of Mother Teresa.

In September 1946, Mother Teresa experienced what she later described as "the call within the call" which led her to establish the Missionaries of Charity. In her words, it would care for "the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone". (Wikipedia)

The words of scripture that we heard from the book of proverbs remind us that everything is made and loved by God, and that we have a duty to ensure that the kingdom values of fairness; justice and equality reign here on earth as they do in heaven.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we give thanks for charitable organisations that work in your name to seek fairness, justice and equality for all. We pray for forgiveness for the times we have been greedy, wasteful, and self-centred. Show us what we can do today to ease the situation for someone in need. With your help we can make a difference. **Amen**

Our next hymn is probably one of the most well-known, having been standard fare in school for many years. But it is a hymn that praises God’s wonderful creation and reminds us that God made all things.

StF 100 – All things bright and beautiful

*Ch) All things bright and beautiful
All creatures great and small
All things wise and wonderful
The Lord God made them all.*

- 1) Each little flower that opens
Each little bird that sings
He made their glowing colours
He made their tiny wings.
- 2) The purple headed mountain
The river running by
The sunset and the morning
That brightens up the sky

- 3) The cold wind in the winter
The pleasant summer sun
The ripe fruits in the garden
He made them every one.
- 4) He gave us eyes to see them
And lips that we might tell
How great is the Almighty
Who has made all things well.

Cecil Frances Alexander CCL No. 515642

Reading/Reflection

Our gospel reading comes from Mark 7: 24 – 30, and is told from the perspective of the mother...

A Woman's Faith

Let me introduce myself. I am a Gentile, born in the region of Phoenicia in Syria. I have a daughter, a beautiful girl, but she is so troubled. There are times when it seems she is possessed by an evil spirit, which takes control and subjects her body and mind to such awful trauma.

One day, I heard about this man Jesus. He had travelled into our territory. Bit of a surprise really, journeying into Gentile lands. But I gather he was having a bit of hassle from the Jewish authorities and maybe he was seeking time out, away from them. I think he was trying to lie low, and get some peace and quiet in a house near the city of Tyre, another Gentile area. But once I'd heard he was in the area I wanted to ask him for his help. So I took myself off to see him. I cried out, "Son of David! Have mercy on me, sir! My daughter has a demon and is in a terrible condition."

Jesus didn't say anything. His disciples did though. They told Jesus to send me away. They didn't want me following them and making all that noise. But then Jesus did answer. Not them. Me! He said, "Let us first feed the children. It isn't right to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs."

Well, when I was telling my family and friends what had happened they were horrified that Jesus had referred to me as a dog! But he didn't use the term derogatively. He used the word that means a pet dog, a little puppy. I know he wasn't being unkind and dismissing me, that's not his nature. The tone of his voice and the look in his eyes displayed his compassion and mischief. He was teasing me, but at the same time drawing more out of me.

I knew what Jesus was saying. He had been commissioned by God to deliver the good news of salvation to the Jews, and to do whatever he could to bring them into God's kingdom. But I also knew that in his preaching and teaching, words and actions, he broke down barriers between men and women; rich and poor; clean and unclean. Why should there be division between Jews and Gentiles? We are all God's children.

And my little girl was ill and I was determined to get help. When it's your child or some other family member or close friend, you will do all that you can to get the help needed. I wasn't going to take no for an answer. So, I responded. "Sir," I answered, "even the dogs under the table eat the children's leftovers!"

In that moment he saw my determination, and I suppose my faith in him shone through, even though my heart was breaking; and he gave me what I needed. "Because of that answer," he said, "go back home, where you will find that the demon has gone out of your daughter!" I went home and found my daughter lying on the bed; the demon had indeed gone out of her.

When I think back to that day I am amazed at what happened. Where did my courage come from? I didn't even take my daughter with me – I just went to tell him I needed his help and somehow knew that it would all be ok. I suppose I was a bit cheeky answering him back – me a Gentile woman and him a Rabbi, a great teacher and a man with a great following. But you know, he didn't seem to mind. In fact, I think he enjoyed someone challenging him. I was at least engaging with him, even if it was just through persistence. And I like to think that I led the way a bit in my encounter with Jesus; that I helped others to overcome the supposed barriers that separated them from approaching him. My daughter received new life that day, thanks to her saviour Jesus. That's what she calls him, "My Jesus, My Saviour" she says.

Do you know him as your Jesus? Your Saviour?

StF 363 – My Jesus, my saviour

My Jesus, my Saviour,
Lord, there is none like you.

All of my days I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter,
Tower of refuge and strength,
Let every breath, all that I am,
Never cease to worship you.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King.
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of your name.
I sing for joy at the work of your hands.
For ever I'll love you, for ever I'll stand.
Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.

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Response

Take a moment to think on each of these questions.....

Walk home with the woman. It must have seemed a very long way. She walked with Jesus's reassurance that all would be well but what would she have been thinking? Did she carry hope with her all the way or did she falter?

Enter the room and see the girl sleeping peacefully. What does the mother do?

The daughter lives her days free from the troubles of the past. How do the mother and daughter respond to this miracle?

What impact does their encounter have on you?

Reading: Mark 7: 31 – 37 Jesus Heals a Deaf-Mute

Jesus then left the neighbourhood of Tyre and went on through Sidon to Lake Galilee, going by way of the territory of the Ten Towns. Some people brought him a man who was deaf and could hardly speak, and they begged Jesus to place his hands on him. So Jesus took him off alone, away from the crowd, put his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched the man's tongue. Then Jesus looked up to heaven, gave a deep groan, and said to the man, "Ephphatha," which means, "Open up!"

At once the man was able to hear, his speech impediment was removed, and he began to talk without any trouble. Then Jesus ordered the people not to speak of it to anyone; but the more he ordered them not to, the more they told it. And all who heard were completely amazed. "How well he does everything!" they exclaimed. "He even causes the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak!"

Prayers of Intercession

Based on an original prayer written by Revd Nigel Cowgill - London District Chair at the start of the New Methodist Year 2020.

Father God,

We have heard two wonderful stories of your loving, healing power shown through the work of your son Jesus. And so we bring our prayers to you for the world, knowing that you hear us and will answer us.

Creator God,

This is the day that you have made; and yet throughout the world conflict, greed, oppression and injustice threaten all that you have created.

We pray for peace, generosity, democracy and fairness in your world. [*Silence*]

This is the day when Jesus rose from the dead; and yet there are people in your world who have not heard this wonderful news and experienced the saving grace of your love. We give thanks for missionaries and outreach workers who serve in your name to share the good news of the gospel abroad. May we too show the light of your love to all those with whom we come into contact, and if the opportunity arises give us courage to speak up about our faith. [*Silence*]

This is the day when the Spirit came; and yet many people dismiss the still small voice that offers a relationship with the Living God and life eternal. We hope and pray that blinded eyes may be opened to see your love in action; that deaf ears may be unblocked to receive the good news of salvation; and that stubborn minds and hardened hearts might soften to accept the new life you offer. [*Silence*]

Gracious God,

At the beginning of this new Church year, we pray for our new president, The Revd Sonia Hicks and vice-president, Barbara Easton; our District and Circuit Leadership teams; Ministerial staff and Lay workers; Circuit Stewards and Church Stewards; and for all those worshipping in our churches this morning. And we offer ourselves and our lives in fresh commitment to you.

Transforming God,

Guide our decisions and turn our hearts to deeply desire you. We ask that you will open doors needing to be opened and close the ones needing to be shut tightly. Release our grip on the things that hold us back from seeking justice for all your people, so that all can be free to be the people who you wonderfully and lovingly created.

Healing God,

We hold before you those whose lives are darkened by pain. Strengthen them in their sorrow that they may know your presence. Keep us shining in the darkness that we may make a difference to all we meet. May we reflect your peace and hope to the world.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life. Give us grace to wait on your timing and recognise that whatever the outcome, you do all things well. **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

- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- 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.*

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Blessing

Loving Father, creator of each new day, we thank you for the many gifts you bestow upon us. We pray that in this coming week we will rejoice in your presence and seek ways in which we can be a friend to the poor and weak. And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon us, now and forever.

Amen.