

6th August 2023 – Morning Service

Olwen Meller

Call to Worship - Isaiah 55:1 - 3

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and
your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen to me and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the
richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live.

StF 407 – Hear the call of the kingdom

1) Hear the call of the kingdom,
Lift your eyes to the King;
Let his song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God, rich in mercy,
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in his unfailing grace.

*Ch) King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
Filled with passion,
Filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name.*

2) Hear the call of the kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven,
The humility of Christ;
Walking justly before him,
Loving all that is right,
That the life of Christ may shine through us.

3) Hear the call of the kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross,
Bringing peace and forgiveness,
And a hope yet to come:
Let the nations put their trust in him.

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Opening prayers

Loving God, great in love, wisdom and might, majestic without compare; we worship you. You are the
Creator, flinging stars into space, bringing the light of life to the darkness of barren waste.

God of compassion, comforter of wounded souls, meeting pain with peace and woe with joy, turning pride
and power upside-down and lifting humble hearts high; we worship you. You are the Redeemer, rescuing
us from sin and shame, bringing the promise of forgiveness to the despair of guilt.

God of liberation, lifting lives crushed by circumstance, filling hearts fearful of worth, raising hopes dashed
by sorrow; we worship you. You are the Inspirer, urging pilgrims on, to find the Way, Truth and Life for all
their days. We worship and adore you. In Christ's name.

Prayer of Confession

Heavenly Father, we lower our heads before you and we confess that we have too often forgotten that we
are yours. Sometimes we carry on our lives as if there was no God and we fall short of being a credible
witness to You. For these things we ask your forgiveness and we also ask for your strength. Give us clear
minds and open hearts so we may witness to You in our world. Remind us to be who You would have us be
regardless of what we are doing or who we are with. Hold us to You and build our relationship with You
and with those You have given us on earth. We ask this in Christ's name. **Amen.**

StF 518 – Father hear the prayer we offer

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| 1) Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously. | 3) Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would strike the living fountains
From the rocks along our way. |
| 2) Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly. | 4) Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side. |

Love Maria Willis

Reading: Matthew 14:13 - 21

When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill. As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.' 'We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered. 'Bring them here to me,' he said. And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Reflection on the Matthew reading

After receiving the news of the death of John the Baptist - his cousin - Jesus withdrew to a lonely place where he and the apostles could be by themselves, and this is the context for the miracle of the loaves and fishes.

Giving is at the heart of the Christian Gospel. Basically there are two kinds of giving. The first is where the giver gives what he or she can live without. This kind of giving doesn't really hurt. But there is another kind of giving that does hurt, namely when the gift is as desperately needed by the giver as by the receiver. Then there is real sacrifice involved.

Mother Theresa gives us an example of the second kind of giving. Once she came across a Hindu family that hadn't eaten for days. She took a small quantity of rice and gave it to that family. What happened next surprised her. Without a moment's hesitation the mother of the family divided the rice into two halves. Then she took one half of it to the family next door, which happened to be a Muslim family. Seeing this Mother Theresa said to her, "How much will you have left over? Aren't there enough of your family?" "But they haven't eaten for days either," the woman replied. Generosity such as this humbles us.

There are a number of examples of generosity such as this in today's Gospel. The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 was made possible by the gift of five loaves and two fishes. According to St John it was a small boy who made that gift. It was a small thing in itself but for the little boy it was a big thing because it was all that he had. Then there is the marvellous generosity of Jesus. To appreciate this we have to consider the circumstances of the miracle. He had just learned that his cousin John had been murdered and he needed peace and quiet. That is why the apostles crossed to the far side of the lake. But when he stepped out of the boat he found a throng of people waiting for him and instead of being angry with them - we are told - he had compassion on them. Finally there is the wondrous generosity with which he fed them. Each got as much as he wanted and even so there were twelve baskets of leftovers.

The story of the feeding of the multitude was treasured by the early Christians. It is the only miracle that is contained in all four Gospels and it was treasured because it reminded them of Moses feeding his people in the wilderness. Christ fed 5,000 people in the desert. Everyone got as much as they wanted and still there were twelve baskets of food left over. It was an outstanding display of compassion and generosity on his part. But he couldn't have done it without the five loaves and two fishes given him by that young boy and without the help of the apostles.

Mother Theresa fed 9,000 people each day in Calcutta but she couldn't have done it without the generosity of many people around the world and the assistance of her nuns and lay helpers. Here is an example of the kind of generosity that made this daily miracle possible.

One day a young couple came into Mother Theresa's house and gave her a large sum of money.

"Where did you get so much money?" she asked. "We were married two days ago," they replied, "and we decided not to have a wedding feast, but to give the money to feed the poor instead."

"Why would you do this?" she asked. "Because we love each other and we wanted to begin our married life with an act of sacrifice," they replied. What made their act of generosity all the more amazing was that they were both high-caste Hindus who normally will have nothing to do with the poor.

Sometimes a small deed takes on an importance far beyond its actual value. When Jesus told the disciples to give food to the people and they replied that they only had five loaves and two fish, he could easily have said, "Forget the whole thing. Send the people home." But instead he took the five loaves and two fish and with them fed the hungry.

There is a tendency today to go in for the big gesture and to neglect the small gesture, hence we may be tempted to think that because our contribution is small it will make no difference. So we excuse ourselves from doing anything at all. But everything helps, enough crumbs can make a loaf. Besides our example may trigger a response in others for them to do something as well. The miracle involved a lot more than giving food to people - it was an expression of the care and love of God for his people. The food is a symbol of the life God wants us to have - life here on earth - and eternal life hereafter. The small boy gave all that he had...Jesus gave all that he had for us.

StF 161 – Speak O Lord

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| 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory. | 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
And the earth is filled with your glory. |
| 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief. | |

Reading: Romans 8: 35 & 37 - 39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection on Romans

Many years ago a group of miners got trapped in a shaft 240 feet below ground when it was flooded with water. They sought refuge in the one area that remained free of water. From the start they decided that they would die as a group, so they bound themselves together so they wouldn't float away from one another in the dark. It was an amazing display of solidarity. Without doubt that bond was a major factor in their survival. Their ordeal lasted three days after which they were successfully rescued.

It reminds us of what St Paul says about God's solidarity with us in Christ. It is one of the most memorable passages in the Bible. He assures us that nothing in the whole of creation can separate us from the love of God. What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will trouble, or hardship, or persecution or famine or danger? No! In all of these we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

Paul was speaking from experience. He had known lots of troubles, as he tells us in his writings. He was imprisoned, he was whipped to the point of death, he was beaten with sticks, once he was stoned and left for dead and three times he was shipwrecked, spending a day and night adrift at sea. He travelled thousands of miles, often narrowly escaping death from robbers and from his enemies. He knew hunger and thirst and cold and nakedness. Yet he overcame all of these through the power of God. His strength came from the conviction of God's love for him in Christ Jesus.

Each of us could draw up a list of troubles we have experienced. The list would be different for everyone but as soon as trouble hits us we begin to think negatively. We feel that God no longer loves us or has even abandoned us. That's when we must try to imitate Paul. The more his troubles abounded the more he clung to God. If we do as Paul did then our trials, far from separating us from God, will actually bring us closer because in them we experience his love and power. The love we are talking about is not our love for God but God's love for us in Jesus.

We see a marvellous example of this love in today's Gospel reading. In spite of his own troubles (he had just received the news of the death of his cousin John the Baptist) we are told that when Jesus saw the people he had pity on them and gave himself to them, teaching them, healing their sick and feeding them. At the end of the day, as they returned home, those people knew that God loved them and cared for them and this is the love that Paul is talking about. We might think that we don't deserve this love but it has nothing to do with deserving it. God loves us, not because we are good, but because he is good. We are his children and that is enough for him to love us.

StF 639 – Through the love of God our Saviour

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| 1) Through the love of God our Saviour,
All will be well;
Free and changeless is His favour,
All, all is well:
Precious is the blood that healed us;
Perfect is the grace that sealed us;
Strong the hand stretched forth to shield us,
All must be well. | 3) We expect a bright tomorrow;
All will be well;
Faith can sing through days of sorrow,
All, all is well:
On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
Then in living or in dying
All must be well. |
| 2) Though we pass through tribulation,
All will be well;
Christ hath purchased full salvation,
All, all is well:
Happy still in God confiding;
Fruitful, if in Christ abiding;
Holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
All must be well. | |

Mary Peters

Prayers of Intercession

We pray, O Father, for those who work to provide our food; for the farmer and the gardener, the lorry driver and the shopkeeper, for the skills you have given them, and the expertise we can use to grow our food. All power and glory are yours forever and ever.

We pray, O Father, for those who have no food; for the hungry of the world, and for those who, for lack of water or good soil, cannot grow enough to live on. We pray for those who use their power to help others in need, for the aid agencies, and each individual who gives help to another person.

All power and glory are yours forever and ever.

We pray, O Father, for the leaders of the world that they will use their power for the good of all, that they will be just and even-handed in making decisions. We pray for ourselves, that as people rich, in comparison with many, we may learn to reject selfishness, and live in love, as your Son showed us.

All power and glory are yours forever and ever. **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 499 – Great God, your love has called us here

- 1) Great God, your love has called us here
As we, by love, for love were made;
Your living likeness still we bear,
Though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed;
We come, with all our heart and mind,
Your call to hear, your love to find.
- 2) We come with self-inflicted pains
Of broken trust and chosen wrong,
Half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
By social forces swept along,
By powers and systems close confined,
Yet seeking hope for humankind.
- 3) Great God, in Christ you call our name,
And then receive us as your own,
Not through some merit, right or claim,
But by your gracious love alone;
We strain to glimpse your mercy-seat,
And find you kneeling at our feet.
- 4) Then take the towel, and break the bread,
And humble us, and call us friends;
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
And show how grandly love intends
To work till all creation sings,
To fill all worlds, to crown all things.
- 5) Great God, in Christ you set us free
Your life to live, your joy to share;
Give us your Spirit's liberty
To turn from guilt and dull despair
And offer all that faith can do,
While love is making all things new.

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Blessing

May you have unshakeable confidence in Christ's love for you, may you be convinced that nothing can separate you from that love and may you be good witnesses for the Gospel by the love and joy you radiate.

Amen