

7th February 2021 – Morning Service

Rev Andrew Roberts

Call to Worship – from Psalm 147

Praise the LORD!

How good it is to sing praises to our God;
for he is gracious, and a song of praise is fitting.

He heals the broken-hearted,
and binds up their wounds.

The LORD lifts up the downtrodden;
he casts the wicked to the ground.

Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving;
make melody to our God on the lyre.

The LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him,
in those who hope in his steadfast love.

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! | 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! |
| 2) What God's almighty power has made
That will he ever cherish,
And will, unflinching, 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! | 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! |

Johann Jakob Schütz, Frances Elizabeth Cox & Honor Mary Thwaites

© Michael Thwaites

CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Approach

Lord, there are no limits to your love. Before the world came into being, you knew us as your children. So, we come to you as we are, knowing that you delight in those who love and honour you. Meet us, and transform us ever more into the likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession

The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love. Let us bring to God those things that distance us from the Father's love, asking for forgiveness and mercy.

How good it is to sing praises to our God, for he is gracious; he gathers the outcasts.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

The Lord lifts up the downtrodden; he casts the wicked to the ground.

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

He heals the broken-hearted, and binds up their wounds.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy. Amen.**

StF 495 – Dear Lord and Father of mankind

- 1) Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.
- 2) In simple trust like theirs who heard
Beside the Syrian sea
The gracious calling of the Lord,
Let us, like them, without a word
Rise up and follow thee.
- 3) O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee
The silence of eternity,
Interpreted by love!
- 4) With that deep hush subduing all
Our words and works that drown
The tender whisper of thy call,
As noiseless let thy blessing fall
As fell thy manna down.
- 5) Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.
- 6) Breathe through the heats of our desire
Thy coolness and thy balm;
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier CCL No. 515642

Reading: Mark 1:29-39

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. And the whole city was gathered around the door. And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. And Simon and his companions hunted for him. When they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.' He answered, 'Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.' And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

Address

In this chapter of Mark's Gospel, Jesus moves between public spaces and private ones, and we learn how he uses each to sustain himself and others. From the synagogue, he comes to the house of his first disciples, perhaps seeking to retreat from the crowds. Throughout this Gospel, Mark makes it clear that healing has a noticeable impact on Jesus – it takes significant energy from him and a house is often a safe space for him to rest and be strengthened.

However, even in a private home sometimes there was no escape and people keep coming seeking Jesus' healing touch. In grace he responds as best he can. In this instance he restores Peter's mother-in-law to health and in so doing restores balance and order to the home - the story is a small-scale reflection of Jesus' impact on society at large. After dark, when the sabbath is over, the door of the house becomes a meeting-place for the chaos of a desperate crowd. People needed healing from the pain and trauma of illness and deliverance from the associated economic problems where workers were unable to earn their living. Jesus exerts huge energy exercising authority over a range of illnesses and calming demons that traumatised. Then, in the stillness before dawn, Jesus no doubt weary from his labours, retreats again to a deserted place. For the Israelites, the desert was the place to meet God, and Jesus too uses this safe space to pray and to be renewed. But it is not long before his peace is disturbed as the disciples seek him out and call him back to the never-ending needs around.

It's not difficult to recognise how this pattern of demanding healing work and the concomitant need for prayer, rest and renewal are evident not just in the life and ministry of Jesus but in the lives and ministries of so many today – remembering that the word ministry is not the exclusive preserve of the ordained or those in specifically Church related roles but is a rightful way of describing all God honouring roles of service. In these testing days we continue to be thankful to those who are going way beyond the norm to care for and serve others. Those in health care naturally come to mind but there are many others working above and beyond at this time. If you are one of these, thank you -- and may I encourage you to notice how Jesus sought out private spaces to rest and safe places to pray. May I encourage you to do the same. When life is exhausting and demands unrelenting, the need to take care of oneself and draw on the deep wells of prayer is even more important than usual. Please take care of yourself and please remember that prayer is gift not a guilt trap. Jesus found a deserted place to pray. Where is or might that place be for you? And for those of us, who for whatever reason may actually have more time on our hands than usual at the moment, how might we gift some of that time in prayer and other forms of loving support to those who are exhausted?

I will always remember when I was a young trainee local preacher – a few years ago now – my preaching tutor telling me that when she was a young mum of two, she reached a point when she was so exhausted that she asked her husband not just to pray for her but actually to pray her prayers for her. Might that be a ministry we could exercise for others at this time? Others too tired, even to pray.

One other thought in closing. Our Gospel reading today is about healing and prayer. It does seem particularly timely for very obvious reasons. In recent weeks it has been such a joy to see and hear stories of Church buildings being opened as vaccination centres. From our own Brierley Hill Methodist Church to Lichfield Cathedral, we are seeing something of the cry in the Lord's prayer for God's Kingdom to come becoming real in the form of the healing gift of a vaccine being given in place of prayer. Another Church joining in with this is Codsall Methodist Church where the minister Jo Cox-Darling says:

We are finally able to use our building for the restoration and healing of the world – and it is not a privilege we hold lightly. This is the calling of the kingdom of God, for which we are happy to get involved with. The real story-keepers and miracle workers throughout this are the hundreds of medics and volunteers who are at the start of this vaccine marathon. They deserve every chocolate brownie and prayer we are able to offer to them – and that is absolutely our privilege. One arm at a time, together, we are offering hope which will change the world.

Prayer and healing – two life giving precious gifts of God for which we give thanks again today and which we seek to share in whatever way we can. Amen.

Song – Christ's is the world in which we move (A touching place)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) Christ's is the world in which we move,
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love.
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care and
Christ is the one who meets us there. | 3) Feel for the parents who've lost their child,
Feel for the women whom men have defiled,
Feel for the baby for whom there's no breast and
Feel for the weary who find no rest. |
| Ch) <i>Christ's is the world in which we move,
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love.
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care and
Christ is the one who meets us there.</i> | 4) Feel for the lives by life confused,
Riddled with doubt, in loving abused;
Feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,
Which longs to be pure but fears to begin. |
| 2) Feel for the people we most avoid -
Strange or bereaved or never employed;
Feel for the women and feel for the men
Who fear that their living is all in vain. | |

Prayers of Intercession

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing

We pray for our world, for those where the virus is rife and vaccines are in short supply...

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing

We pray for our country, for those in power and those who are powerless...

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing

We pray for all those serving others and going above and beyond the call of duty

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing

We pray for our communities for those who are ill or bereaved...

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing

We pray for our Church that we may be healing presence in our communities

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing

We pray for our family and friends especially those who are care worn or exhausted at this time

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing

And finally, we pray for ourselves that we might be renewed and healed and refreshed to pray and serve

L: God, at work in our world

R: Bring your healing 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 65 – Sing of the Lord's goodness

1) Sing of the Lord's goodness,
Father of all wisdom,
Come to him and bless his name.
Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,
Faithful to the end of days.

3) Courage in our darkness,
Comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
Solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
Splendour of the living God.

*Ch) Come then, all you nations,
Sing of your Lord's goodness,
Melodies of praise and thanks to God.
Ring out the Lord's glory,
Praise him with your music,
Worship him and bless his name.*

4) Praise him with your singing,
Praise him with the trumpet,
Praise God with the lute and harp;
Praise him with the cymbals,
Praise him with your dancing,
Praise God till the end of days.

2) Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,
Risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken,
One bread he has broken,
New life he now gives to all.

Ernest Sands © 1981 Ernest Sands CCL No. 515642

Blessing

God to enfold you, Christ to uphold you, Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight; So may God grace you, heal and embrace you, lead through darkness into the light. Amen. May it be so.