

8th October 2023 – Morning Service

Change

Christine Odell

Call to Worship

Come, God's people, let us worship the Living God, the God of yesterday and tomorrow, the God who makes the present moment holy and crowns us, his people, with blessings.

StF 638 – Through all the changing scenes of life

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| 1) Through all the changing scenes of life,
In trouble and in joy,
The praises of my God shall still
My heart and tongue employ. | 4) The hosts of God encamp around
The dwellings of the just;
Deliverance he affords to all
Who on his succour trust. |
| 2) Of his deliverance I will boast,
Till all that are distressed
From my example comfort take,
And charm their griefs to rest. | 5) O make but trial of his love;
Experience will decide
How blest are they, and only they,
Who in his truth confide. |
| 3) O magnify the Lord with me,
With me exalt his name;
When in distress to him I called,
He to my rescue came. | 6) Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
Have nothing else to fear;
Make you his service your delight,
Your wants shall be his care. |

Nahum Tate & Nicholas Brady

Introduction

Autumn is a time of change. The green leaves of spring and summer become a glorious display of browns and crimsons and golds, as nature prepares the trees for the coming harshness of winter. The nights draw in, the heating has to go on. Young people are back at college or school. Church meetings start up again, with the start of the new church year. All is change. Some changes we welcome, some we regret. Often, for us, the word 'change' comes to mean 'challenge'. In our service we're going to be thinking about what change means to us as Christians who believe in a God who is the God of yesterday, today and all our tomorrows.

Prayer of Adoration

God of the past, we adore you. You inspired our mothers and fathers in the faith, sharing their sorrows and joys and giving them courage and the story of our own lives is shaped by you. [*Silence..*]

God of the present, we adore you. You have brought us together in this place. You came in Jesus to share our human life with us and you surround us with your saving love every day. [*Silence..*]

God of the future, we adore you. Take from us all that separates us from you. Show us your purpose for us, as individuals and as your church, and help us all to walk in your Way Into your Kingdom of Everlasting Love. [*Silence..*] In Jesus's Name, **Amen**

Meditation – 'Loving Now' by Peter Firth

Lord of this Autumn morning, like me the year is growing old and I still haven't realised the urgency of loving now. I know all the right thoughts and words - I say 'Amen' to your command to love my neighbour as myself, but in my heart I know I pay much lip-service to love. It's something I keep promising to do tomorrow – because love is something you do, not just feel. And I tell myself I've got enough to do already, looking after myself. Yet in my heart I know this is not what you are saying to me.

Lord of this Autumn morning, you are saying now is the time to love, now is the time to call on someone who's ill, or old, now is the time to write a letter, to visit a neighbour with a gift, to forgive someone, to ask for forgiveness; Now is the time, today. For love is known in action – love is something to be done.

Lord of these Autumn days, help me to bring some grit and caring into my idea of love. I may even sometimes find that the one who gains most from any love I can give will be me!

Prayer of Confession

Lord, we confess to you how hard we find it to live in the present moment. Our thoughts dwell in memories of the past, in planning for the future, and we forget to listen for you in the present moment, Forgive us, Lord **and help us**.

When we live in the past, imprisoned by memories of what once was, closing our eyes to the opportunities and needs of today, Forgive us, Lord **and help us**.

When we fail to 'seize the day' in our lives as your followers putting off till tomorrow what we should do today, Forgive us, Lord **and help us**.

When we forget to trust in you for our future and fear cripples our lives in you, Forgive us, Lord **and help us**.

The Lord hears our prayer: Thanks be to God. Amen.

StF 526 – Lord of all hopefulness

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| 1) Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever childlike,
no cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the
break of the day. | 3) Lord of all kindliness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your
arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the
eve of the day. |
| 2) Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
Whose strong hands were skilled at the
plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the
noon of the day. | 4) Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose
presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the
end of the day. |

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Comment 1

The trees let go of their autumn leaves, and they fall to the ground. Change in our lives also means letting go - of the things that are past. God has something else in store for us for the present and the future. But this does not mean that we should lose sight of the past – we have much to remember with gratitude, and both happy and painful lessons to learn from it. The autumn leaves fall to the ground, but there they both protect and feed the new growth emerging in spring. The people of Israel loved to remember the stories of God's providential care for them – they gave them the faith and courage they needed to face the present and the future.

Reading: Psalm 111

Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate. He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.

He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations. The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness and uprightness. He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever— holy and awesome is his name.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

God of the past, we remember how you called creation into being, giving humankind life, a home, and one another to love:

For your loving faithfulness **we thank you, God of our lives**

God of the past, we remember how you cared for and rescued your people, sending them prophets to call them back to your way of justice, love and peace.

For your loving faithfulness **we thank you, God of our lives**

God of the past, we remember how you came to us in Jesus, to share our human life, so we could share eternal life with you.

For your loving faithfulness **we thank you, God of our lives**

God of the past, we remember how you have blessed our former days, with people we have loved and those who have pointed us to you, with joyful times spent meeting and worshipping you in church and with the fellowship and friendship we have known.

For your loving faithfulness **we thank you, God of our lives**

Lord, take our joyful memories of life with you, and use them to give us wisdom for present days and faith and trust for the future. In Jesus's Name, **Amen.**

StF 470 – Lord for the years

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| 1) Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today. | 4) Lord, for our world, when we disown and
doubt Him,
Loveless in strength and comfortless in pain;
Hungry and helpless, lost indeed without Him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign. |
| 2) Lord, for that Word, the Word of life which
fires us,
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze.
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the Word, receive Your people's praise. | 5) Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne.
Past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone. |
| 3) Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
Spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
For young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer. | |

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Comment 2

One name for God in the Old Testament was YAHWEH (pronounced 'yahway'), which means 'I am what I am'. Not 'I was what I was' or 'I will be what I will be', but 'I am what I am'. He is the God of the present moment, and that is where we find him.

Reading: Matthew 19: 16 - 26

Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments." "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honour your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbour as yourself.'"

"All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Comment 3

We can be afraid of change, and make excuses for putting it off. But this lesson reminds us that if we don't respond to God's call in the present moment, we may miss out on what he has to offer us! As the leaves fall, we may be so caught up mourning the end of the summer, or so preoccupied worrying about the coming winter, that we do not notice how beautiful the autumn days are!

Prayer of commitment

We have heard God's call, we have decided to follow Jesus, and be faithful to him until our journey's end. We'll praise him for all that is past: **and trust him for all that's to come.**

We have met God in the everyday moments of our lives and know Jesus as our Saviour, Brother and Friend. We'll praise him for all that is past: **and trust him for all that's to come.**

We know that God will speak to us and guide us safely through all the changes and challenges of our lives. We'll praise him for all that is past: **and trust him for all that's to come.**

In the name of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life for us today, **Amen.**

StF 67 – This, this is the God we adore

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| 1) This, this is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,
Whose love is as great as his power,
And neither knows measure nor end: | 2) 'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;
We'll praise him for all that is past,
And trust him for all that's to come. |
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Joseph Hart

Comment 4

God is God of the past, God of the present, and lastly, God of the future. Looking to the future is where we see change most clearly, and it can alarm us. But because of our faith as Christians, we have been given a sure hope for the future, amidst all the change and upheaval of our daily lives.

Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-12; 12:1-2

To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see. It was by their faith that people of ancient times won God's approval. It is by faith that we understand that the universe was created by God's word, so that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen. It was faith that made Abraham able to become a father, even though he was too old and Sarah herself could not have children. He trusted God to keep his promise.

It was faith that made Abraham obey when God called him to go out to a country which God had promised to give him. He left his own country without knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as a foreigner in the country that God had promised him. He lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who received the same promise from God. For Abraham was waiting for the city which God has designed and built, the city with permanent foundations. Though Abraham was practically dead, from this one man came as many descendants as there are stars in the sky, as many as the numberless grains of sand on the seashore.

As for us, we have this large crowd of witnesses round us. So then, let us rid ourselves of everything that gets in the way, and of the sin which holds on to us so tightly, and let us run with determination the race that lies before us. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! On the contrary, because of the joy that was waiting for him, he thought nothing of the disgrace of dying on the cross, and he is now seated at the right-hand side of God's throne.

Prayers of Intercession

God of our past, our present and our future, we pray for the world, where nothing stays the same: Governments come and go; wars are fought and peace treaties signed; rains fail, the earth quakes, mountains erupt, rivers flood. We pray for the world that is always changing, asking that in the midst of change humankind might find you, the unchanging God, at work, and find reasons for hope and joy.

God of our past, our present and our future, we pray for the church, where nothing stays the same: Ways of worshipping come and go; beliefs are challenged by new ways of thinking; the Spirit constantly renews your people; we learn to live and share together. We pray for the church that is always changing, asking that in the midst of change Christians might find you, the unchanging God, at work, and find reasons for hope and joy.

God of our past, our present and our future, we pray for our lives, where nothing stays the same: Happiness comes and goes; we experience and learn and grow; unexpected events alter everything; we suffer illness and loss. We pray for our lives that are always changing, asking that in the midst of change we might find you, the unchanging God, at work, and find reasons for hope and joy.

In the name of Jesus, who came to change the world, **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 476 – One more step along the world I go

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| 1) One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go;
From the old things to the new
Keep me travelling along with you: | 3) As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me travelling the way I should;
Where I see no way to go
You'll be telling me the way, I know: |
| <i>Ch) And it's from the old I travel to the new;
Keep me travelling along with you.</i> | 4) Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough;
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me travelling along with you: |
| 2) Round the corners of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn;
All the new things that I see
You'll be looking at along with me: | 5) You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me;
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me travelling along with you: |

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Blessing

Through all the changing scenes of life, may the blessing of the God of love encircle each one of us, now and evermore. **Amen.**