

## A service for 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2023 (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me. Amen.

*King David's Psalm refers to his trust in the Lord's unfailing love. We shall sing a hymn by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter. Hymn number 628,*

*'Faithful One, so unchanging,'*

**Faithful One, so unchanging,**

**Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.**

**Lord of all I depend on you.**

**I call out to you again and again.**

**I call out to you again and again.**

**You are my rock in times of trouble.**

**You lift me up when I fall down.**

**All through the storm, your love is the anchor,**

**My hope is in you alone.**

© Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

***Let us pray.***

Heavenly Father, Word of life throughout the universe, you first revealed yourself to human beings through Law you gave Moses and by the prophets, so we might know, love and serve you, but when we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, you displayed amazing grace and goodness by taking human form as Jesus Christ and living with us. Jesus not only brought Good News in words and deeds of love which reveal your true nature, but gave his life at Calvary to pay the cost of the sins of the world. Through his resurrection, he broke the power of sin and death and by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit he lives within each of us, encouraging, guiding and empowering us as we seek to serve him.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of gifts you offer us: for everyone who has brought inspiration, love and joy into our lives and for loving us even when we are unloving, faithless and unlovable.

Merciful God, we confess that sometimes we do not appreciate all the blessings you grant us. Sometimes we spurn your gifts because they require us to use them for the well-being of other people, rather than our own prestige or benefit. At other times we abuse your gifts, or simply ignore them because of our laziness, fear, or sense of unworthiness. Often, we let you down because we try to act in our own strength, rather than calling on the Holy Spirit to empower, guide and encourage us. O Lord, in Jesus' lovely name help us amend our ways and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, you hear and answer our prayers, so we are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you desire us to and use our gifts of the Spirit for the good of the Church and our neighbours, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

***As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:***

**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.**

*We continue with a hymn about fellowship – sharing our life’s journey. It was written and composed by New Zealander Richard Gillard. It took him more than a year to complete, for he wrote the first verse in 1976 and the remainder in 1977. I think it was worth the wait! We shall sing hymn number 611, ‘Brother, sister, let me serve you’.*

**1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,**

**Let me be as Christ to you:**

**Pray that I may have the grace to**

**Let you be my servant, too.**

**2. We are pilgrims on a journey,**

**And companions on the road;**

**We are here to help each other**

**Walk the mile and bear the load.**

**3. I will hold the Christ-light for you**

**In the night-time of your fear;**

**I will hold my hand out to you,**

**Speak the peace you long to hear.**

**4. I will weep when you are weeping:**

**When you laugh, I’ll laugh with you.**

**I will share your joy and sorrow**

**Till we’ve seen this journey through.**

**5. When we sing to God in heaven,**

**We shall find such harmony;**

**Born of all we’ve known together**

**Of Christ’s love and agony.**

**6. Brother, sister, let me serve you,**

**Let me be as Christ to you:**

**Pray that I may have the grace to**

**Let you be my servant, too.**

© Richard Gillard

***In our prayers of intercession, when I say ‘Your kingdom come’, please respond with, ‘Your will be done’.***

Creator God, we praise and thank you for this beautiful, self-sustaining world, but we are only too well aware of its brokenness, some of which is caused by natural disasters, but much of which is the result of mankind’s failure to recognize and honour kingdom values such as justice and loving-kindness. Lord, help us to respond to your amazing grace by serving you in whatever way we can to help our neighbours, nearby and far from us. Where the best we can offer in our service is inadequate, then we ask you to warm the hearts of and motivate people with power and influence who can really make a difference to the world.

**‘Your kingdom come’, ‘Your will be done’.**

God of love, truth and justice, hear our cry of grief for the countries afflicted by droughts and famine, especially Sudan and Afghanistan where civil war and disputes

with the United Nations are making it even more difficult to feed the starving masses. May your loving-kindness break down stubborn pride and warm cold hearts to offer hope to these lands and may grain and oil still be allowed to be carried from Ukrainian ports to ease their plight.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’**.

Lord of compassion, we confess that we have failed our collective responsibility to be stewards of our planet and the evidence is before our eyes: melting glaciers; wildfires; floods and droughts, increasingly strong storms and depletion of resources. Help us do what we can to rebuild the environment by changing our lifestyles and by supporting the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can, or Christian Aid as they support victims of disasters.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’**.

Gracious God, in the name of our risen Lord Jesus, hear our prayer for those who hold authority in the nations of the world. Guide them in the way of your righteousness, so that justice prevails and people desire fairness for all-comers. Help us build a world where people stand up against poverty, here and abroad, where we see others as you see them, as your children who are to be protected and nurtured. Help us to be willing to work together in mutual trust, to always seek the common good, rather than our own selfish desires and to share justly the earth’s resources, rather than fighting over them.

We pray for the establishment of peace in the many lands blighted by conflict around the world, including Ukraine, Afghanistan and Sudan and for peace among Jews and Palestinians in Jerusalem. Bless the work of peacemakers and those who work with the victims of conflict, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. May our daily lives reflect the peace we ask for the world in the way we care for our neighbours.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’**.

Lord of wholeness and well-being, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their time of need. Lord, remember neighbours who are lonely, anxious, overworked, or who feel undervalued and unloved as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them.....  
Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, from which they may find healing, courage, strength and peace.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’**.

Holy God, grant that this church and churches throughout the world may unite in love and action, so we represent the glory of shalom, offering harmony, wellbeing, prosperity, security, reconciliation, love and the kind of peace which passes understanding, offering your full blessing to all-comers. May we bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world in Jesus’ name.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’**.

Abba, heavenly Father, look upon us, our friends and families with loving-kindness. In the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us safe, help us resist the temptation to sin, and, most of all help us to live out the gospel message in all that we do and say, so our lives honour your holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**The Old Testament reading is Jeremiah chapter 28 verses 5 to 9**

Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. He said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfil the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD'S house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognised as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true." Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 10 verses 40 to 42**

"People who receive you receive me, and those who receive me receive the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous person because they are righteous will receive a righteous one's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because they are my disciples, I tell you the truth, they will certainly not lose their reward." Amen.

*We continue our worship as we sing a hymn written in 1952 by George Briggs in answer to an appeal by the Hymn Society of America to celebrate the publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. We sing number 157, 'God has spoken – by his prophets', hopefully set to a lovely Welsh melody, "Hyfrydol".*

**1. God has spoken – by his prophets,  
Spoken his unchanging word,  
Each from age to age proclaiming  
God, the one, the righteous Lord.  
'Mid the world's despair and turmoil  
One firm anchor holding fast:  
God eternal reigns forever,  
God the first and God the last.**

**2. God has spoken – by Christ Jesus,  
Christ, the everlasting Son,  
Brightness of the Father's glory,  
With the Father ever one;  
Spoken by the Word incarnate,  
God from God, ere time was born,  
Light from Light, to earth descending,  
Christ, revealing God to all.**

**3. God is speaking – by the Spirit,  
Speaking to our hearts again,  
In the age-long word expounding  
God's own message, now as then.  
Through the rise and fall of nations  
One sure faith is standing fast;  
God still speaks, the Word unchanging,  
God the first and God the last.**

© George Wallace Briggs (1875 – 1959)

**Sermon:** *"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."* Matthew 10: 40. It may speak volumes about my character, but Jeremiah is one of my favourite prophets. He was called by the Lord between 16 and 20 years old, in the 13th year of **King**

**Josiah, in 627 BC**, and served kings **Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah**, remaining until the destruction of Jerusalem in **586 BC**. At first he lived in **Anathoth**, and ventured to Jerusalem only for the great festivals; later he lived in Jerusalem, and was there during the terrible times of the siege and destruction of the city.

Today's reading is set in August or September, 593BC, when Jeremiah rebuked the populist prophet, Hananiah. Four years earlier, the Babylonians had taken Jerusalem, deporting some Jews and putting Zedekiah as a puppet leader over the remainder, since when advisers had tried to encourage the king to form an alliance with Egypt, so Judah could rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah opposed the hot-heads and, as a result was hated by them. The would-be rebels began by calling Jeremiah, 'Terror on every side', then denounced him as a traitor and had him held first in a vile prison, then thrown into a slimy cistern from which he was saved by a courtier, **Ebed-Melech**.

The prophet Hananiah told the priests and congregation in the Temple that not only would the power of Nebuchadnezzar be broken within two years, but King Jehoiachin and the exiles would be returned with articles plundered from the Temple in 597. Jeremiah declared that he fervently hoped Hananiah's prophecy was correct, but added that previous prophets had forecast war, starvation and disease, so people could only judge Hananiah's declaration of peace if it was fulfilled in the course of time. Jeremiah was effectively telling the people that there would be no **'quick-fix'**, much to Hananiah's rage, for the slighted prophet tore off the wooden yoke from Jeremiah's neck and broke it, signifying that the power of Babylon would similarly be broken. Six years later, Jeremiah was vindicated as Jerusalem was destroyed, the Temple plundered and razed to the ground, while most of the population was led into exile. The Jews had not accepted or honoured God's messenger and had thereby rejected the Lord himself.

The gospel reading follows Jesus' instructions to the disciples before he sent them to spread the Good News, in deeds as well as words, to local towns and villages. Matthew probably intended that these words should be directed at people to whom the disciples went, rather than to the disciples themselves, for Jesus promised rewards to people who actively welcomed them. He went further, because he said, **"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me."** What a thought that is: anybody who offers hospitality to the bearer of God's message, effectively offers hospitality to Jesus and, by the same fact, offers it to God himself! After warning his followers earlier of the hardships and responsibilities they would face, Jesus was explaining what a privilege they carried, effectively serving as God's ambassadors!

By welcoming the followers, people would be accepting God and his message of salvation, so they would receive a reward from the Lord, even if their hospitality was as limited as offering a disciple a cup of water, which is an act taken for granted in the Middle East and as such ordinarily merits no reward. The free offer of salvation is surely reward enough, yet Jesus suggested that welcomers would receive more.

Nowadays Christians frequently find our views challenged by society at large: Christ's Good News is often not accepted by an increasingly secular society because it does not offer instant gratification, or a 'quick-fix'. Just think of how politicians frequently offer quick-fixes when crises arise, or even 'oven-ready' solutions! How often is the general public misled by such offers? By comparison, Jesus challenges all-comers to look at themselves honestly, consider their relationships with God and with one another, then consider what is happening around us in global terms. Whenever the Church has

become involved in significant campaigns, such as nuclear disarmament, anti-apartheid, human rights, social justice, environmental issues, global terrorism and the plight of the world's poor, critics have often suggested we should keep our noses out of politics, but if we don't stand up for justice and mercy, who will?

We may feel that we can do little as individuals, but even the equivalent of offering a cup of water – an outwardly insignificant act – can have greater effect than we might expect. In Johannesburg, during the early 1950s, a young black boy was walking along a road with his mother when they saw a white priest approaching them. Black people were expected to step into the gutter when a white person passed on the same pavement. Indeed, if they failed to do so, they would be shoved into the road by white men. However, before the boy and his mother could step into the road, the priest did so and raised his hat as a greeting. Soon afterwards the same priest was a regular visitor when that boy spent a long time in hospital. The priest's humility and kindness made such a deep impression on him that the boy offered himself for the priesthood and rose to become Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who created and chaired the **Committee for Truth and Reconciliation**, which allowed those who had committed racial crimes during the apartheid era to confess their offences without retaliation, allowing a relatively peaceful transition, rather than the bloodbath that many had forecast. The white priest, who showed that God cares for all people by his actions and words, was Revd. Trevor Huddleston. Had they not met as they did, the course of South African history could have been vastly different, so we ought to remember to treat others as we'd like to be treated, because even simple acts of goodness can produce surprising results.

Let us, therefore, not set aside kingdom values in favour of quick-fixes, or cheap popularity. Let us continue to campaign for a better world, even when it means making sacrifices, for without sacrifices change will not happen. And if you hesitate at the idea of making sacrifices, think of the sacrifice Christ made for our redemption! **May we remember that we are God's ambassadors whose words and deeds should reflect the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so people we meet have the opportunity to receive him as their Saviour and friend, too. Amen.**

*Our closing hymn was written by Jacqueline Jones, a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, who was based in the United Kingdom for 5 years, but now lives in Christchurch, New Zealand and is enjoying the role of vicar's wife – at least I hope she is! We shall sing hymn number 662, 'Have you heard God's voice: has your heart been stirred?'*

**1. Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?**

**Are you still prepared to follow?**

**Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
Though the way be rough and narrow? *Chorus:***

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
And embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
The disciples of tomorrow?*

**2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down**

**When the multitudes are silent?**

**Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
When the crowds are turning violent? *Chorus:***

**3. In your city streets will you be God's heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?  
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
Will you share your faith with the faithless? *Chorus:***

**4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
And believe it could be different?  
Will you share your views using words of grace?  
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:***

*We will walk the path that will cost us much  
And embrace the pain and sorrow.  
We will trust in One who entrusts to us  
The disciples of tomorrow.*

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***Benediction***

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and for evermore. Amen.**