

Call to worship: Psalm 149

Praise the LORD. Sing to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice in their Maker; let the people of Zion be glad in their King. Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. For the LORD takes delight in his people; he crowns the humble with salvation. Let the saints rejoice in this honour and sing for joy on their beds.

May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentence written against them.

This is the glory of all his saints.

Praise the LORD. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by John Samuel Bewley Monsell, a Nineteenth Century vicar of Egham in Surrey. He was a keen hymn-writer and gave us ‘Fight the good fight’ as well as the hymn we are going to sing, but in the preface to one of his hymnals he wrote, ‘Most of us are too distant and reserved’ ‘we sing not as if our hearts were on fire with the divine flame of love and joy as we should hymn Him who is chief in the courts of heaven and altogether lovely’ ... ‘We sing, not as we should sing to He who is Chief among the ten thousand, the Altogether Lovely.’ Let us sing as John Monsell advocated. Hymn number 34, ‘O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’.

1. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.

2. Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
High on his heart he will bear it for you,
Comfort your sorrows, and answer your prayerfulness,
Guiding your steps as may best be for you.

3. Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth you would reckon your own;
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to lay at his throne.

4. These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
He will accept for the name that is dear;
Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.

5. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.

© John Samuel Bewley Monsell {1811 – 1875}

A sad footnote to our first hymn: in 1870, John Monsell became Rector of St. Nicholas' in Guildford, which was in a dilapidated state. Rev. Monsell set to work enthusiastically, arranging for his church to be restored. It was unfortunate, to say the least, that he took an active interest in the rebuilding for, as a result, he met his end in 1875, as a stone fell from the roof whilst he stood looking at the craftsmen working above and poor John Monsell died from the head injuries he received.

Let us pray.

Word of life, you brought our universe into being and sustain it with your love. Your glory is revealed both in the vastness of space with its myriad suns, planets and moons, besides the beauty and complexity of life on this planet. In the light of your wisdom, might and holiness, we are amazed that you care for flawed human beings so much that you took human form and lived among us as Christ Jesus, revealing your boundless love by his life, death and resurrection. Amazing God, take away all anxieties and distractions so we can pray to you in faith, sing our hymns of praise joyfully and both understand and respond to your holy word. All honour and glory, power and praise be yours now and forevermore. Amen.

When I say, 'Merciful Lord', please respond, 'heal and restore us to righteousness'.

Let us pray.

Lord, our Good Shepherd, you bless us day by day with good things to enjoy, with opportunities and experiences that warm our heart. You bring us safely through trials and temptations and you guide and protect us. You are truly amazing and we rejoice to be part of your flock.

However, like sheep we confess that we have strayed from the path you want us to follow: we ignore your calls and go our own way. We are often selfish and self-centred, ignoring the needs of our neighbours; we give way to anger and prejudice, saying things that hurt and offend other people. As we reflect on these things

Merciful Lord heal and restore us to righteousness

Like sheep, we find ourselves in barren places because of our pride and greed. We take more than we need and will not share what we don't want. We are loveless and unlovable, lost and ashamed.....

Merciful Lord heal and restore us to righteousness

Loving, faithful God, you hear and answer our prayers. You seek us out and carry us home to the path of righteousness, rejoicing that we can journey with you once more. Help us to centre our discipleship on Christ and to lead lives of loving service in his precious name. Amen.

We shall say the Lord's Prayer

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.

The author of our next hymn was written by Bishop William Walsham How in 1864. Whist he was Bishop of Bedford (which actually meant he served in the East End of London) he travelled by horse-drawn buses, rather than in his bishop's carriage and

was nicknamed ‘The omnibus Bishop’, but he was also known as ‘The Children’s Bishop’, which delighted him more, for he founded a children’s home and always tried to set youngsters at their ease. Once, when a group of young children was assembled to meet him, he helped reduce their fears by reciting, ‘Humpty Dumpty’ with them. Let us sing number 745, ‘For all the saints who from their labours rest’.

1. For all the saints who from their labours rest,
Who thee by faith before the world confessed,
Thy name, O Jesus, be for ever blest: Alleluia, alleluia!
2. Thou wast their rock, their fortress and their might;
Thou, Lord, their captain in the well-fought fight;
Thou in the darkness still their one true light: Alleluia, alleluia!
3. O may thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
And win, with them, the victor’s crown of gold! Alleluia, alleluia!
4. O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine: Alleluia, alleluia!
5. And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,
And hearts are brave again, and arms are strong: Alleluia, alleluia!
6. The golden evening brightens in the west;
Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest: Alleluia, alleluia!
7. But lo, there breaks a yet more glorious day;
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;
The King of Glory passes on his way! Alleluia, alleluia!
8. From earth’s wide bounds, from ocean’s farthest coast,
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost: Alleluia, alleluia! © William Walsham How (1823 – 1897)

In our prayers of intercession we bring our concerns for neighbours nearby and far away. When I say, ‘Lord, in your mercy’, please answer ‘hear our prayer’.

Heavenly Father, your generous, constant love is evident in the wonders and beauty of this world on which we live, the blessings we receive day by day and knowing that you have redeemed us through Christ Jesus. We ought to be joyful, yet our spirits are often cast down because of the brokenness we see and hear about in the News Media. We do indeed pray for the needs of the poor and marginalised to be met, for justice, peace and blessing for all humankind, not just a select few, but we know our limitations and therefore turn to you.

*Lord, in your mercy..... **hear our prayer***

Merciful God, remember people in our church, our families, workplaces and community who are suffering illness, trouble, or need. Those who are lonely, anxious, unemployed, or

depressed and especially all who are mourning the loss of somebody dear to them. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are especially concerned, asking that you will reach out to them, heal, restore and comfort them, granting them courage and peace. Lord, empower us to offer them practical support and friendship, as your earthly hands.

*Lord, in your mercy..... **hear our prayer***

Lord, our thoughts turn to Ukraine and Palestine, where fighting is causing unspeakable horror and suffering, particularly to civilians, young and old. We pray that the peace plan brokered by President Trump will be accepted by both Hamas and Israel, that all hostages will be released, prisoners freed and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank will experience an end to their suffering. May Ukraine weather Russian attacks until a just peace is established. Like prophets of old, we cry out for justice: for swift ends to the fighting, not only in Ukraine and the Holy Land, but also in Congo, Sudan and Somalia, Myanmar.

Lord of the nations, teach world leaders to negotiate and compromise in order to avoid taking up arms and help people in this this country to listen to and discuss opinions that are challenging, rather than growing ever more polarized by shutting them off. Remind us of our common humanity and that Christ died to save everybody, including people whose views offend us.

*Lord, in your mercy..... **hear our prayer***

Lord of all, you gave us stewardship of the beautiful planet, but we have clearly broken it, as wildfires, storms, droughts and floods bear witness. Help us change our ways, to give the world a chance to heal itself, so future generations do not have to pay the price of our pride and negligence.

Holy God, hear our prayer for Dame Sarah Mullarkey, the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Grant her wisdom, patience and grace to heal some of the Anglican church's divisions and be the good shepherd she aspires to be. We ask you to inspire this church, churches in our area and indeed churches throughout the World to serve you in love and unity, so we bear good news to a world that desperately needs it.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends as we walk in the way of the Lord. Keep us free from harm, help us to resist the temptation to sin and teach us to share your overflowing love with both friend and stranger, in the wonderful name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

The first two verses of our next hymn was written by Revd. John Keble, whose Assize sermon on national apostasy in 1833 resulted in the start of the Oxford Movement which led several Anglican priests to move to the Roman Catholic Church, including St. John Newman. Nevertheless, John Keble remained an Anglican. We shall sing hymn number 244, 'Blest are the pure in heart'.

**1. Blest are the pure in heart,
for they shall see their God;
the secret of the Lord is theirs;
their soul is Christ's abode.**

**2. The Lord, who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,**

to dwell on earth in lowliness,
our pattern and our King;

3. Still to the lowly soul
He does himself impart,
and for his dwelling and his throne
chooses the pure in heart.

4. Lord, we your presence seek,
a vision of your face;
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple of your grace.

© John Keble (1792 – 1866) vs. 1 & 3 – William Hall vs. 2 & 4

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 6 verses 20 to 31

Looking at his disciples, he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets.

But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you". Amen.

The authors of our next hymn, John Bell and the late Graham Maule were members of the Iona Community and have written a number of striking and challenging hymns, usually set to old Scots ballads. This one is set to 'O waly, waly', which I hope you will recognize. We shall sing hymn number 746, 'For all the saints who showed your love,'

1. For all the saints who showed your love
In how they lived and where they moved,
For mindful women, caring men,
Accept our gratitude again

2. For all the saints who loved your name,
Whose faith increased the Saviour's fame,
Who sang your songs and shared your word,
Accept our gratitude, good Lord.

3. For all the saints who named your will,
And saw your kingdom coming still
Through selfless protest, prayer and praise,
Accept the gratitude we raise.

4. Bless all whose will or name or love
Reflects the grace of heaven above.
Though unacclaimed by earthly powers,
Your life through theirs has hallowed ours.

© J. Bell (b. 1949) & G. Maule (1958 – 2019)

Sermon: “*Beatitudes*” Luke 6: 20 – 31

The Oxford Dictionary defines saints as ‘**canonized or officially recognized by the church as having won by exceptional holiness a high place in heaven and veneration on earth**’. Some Christians pray to saints in particular situations, for example, my late mother, an Anglican, would pray to **St. Jude** when she lost something – though actually he is the **patron saint of lost causes (perhaps she was praying for me!)** The United Kingdom has four patron saints: **Andrew, David, George and Patrick** and on 13th October, six years ago, **Cardinal John Newman** became the first Briton to be canonised for a century. Some believe saints are perfect people, but essentially they are ordinary people who have been transformed by the Holy Spirit, which is why I am uncomfortable that to move from beatification to canonisation there has to be evidence of two miracles attributed to the person involved.

Fortunately, as a Non-Conformist, I prefer the use of ‘**saint**’ in the Old Testament and in Paul’s letters. In our call to worship the use of saints means God’s people, those who obey Torah and honour the covenant with the Lord. In Paul’s letters, ‘saints’ refer to members of the Christian communities, people who believed in Christ Jesus and obeyed his teachings. Some of them, including Paul, were indeed canonized by the Church, but the term is still applicable to all faithful Christians, for we are **sanctified by faith: we are God’s people, a ‘holy priesthood’**. Therefore, today, we remember and celebrate people who have made a positive impact on our lives, whether or not they have had any social status. Members of our families, friends, teachers, ministers, church members – all can be considered saints in this sense and Jesus described some saintly qualities in what we call the Beatitudes.

In Luke’s gospel, the Sermon on the Mount began with ‘The Beatitudes’, because of the use of “**Blessed**” at the beginning of each of the qualities of character to which Jesus refers. Unfortunately, ‘**Blessed**’ is a poor translation of the Greek ‘**Makarios**’, which is better rendered as ‘**happy**’, or better still, ‘**fortunate**’. **The Good News Bible uses ‘happy’, not in the sense of being cheerful, or content, but to be congratulated. So, what qualities does Christ advocate and declare those who possess them fortunate?** If you look at them by society’s standards, they may seem absurd, because there is no mention of celebrity, fame, wealth, power over others, nor pre-eminence in public gatherings. Instead, Jesus tells us what really matters in the attitudes of his followers – then and now.

Jesus copied the style of Old Testament poetical books to outline the qualities of true discipleship, where we accede to the demands of God’s kingdom. Let us examine what Jesus regards as kingdom qualities: ‘**poor**’ refers to those who know they are ‘**spiritually poor**’, people who humbly trust God, even though their loyalty can lead to their material disadvantage and possibly to oppression. Unlike the worldly, they do not use their talents for their own benefit, to gain wealth or power, which the world reveres, but instead they offer their gifts for the benefit of others. The kingdom of heaven consists of such men and women. ‘**Those who weep**’ does not necessarily mean the bereaved, or penitent: they are

people who are saddened by the state of the world, by their own failings and inability to set things right, so turn to the Lord in their distress. Jesus declares they will find inner peace through God's salvation.

Jesus ended the blessings by warning followers that they might well face persecution and character assassination as a result, but called them to be strong, for he would face similar treatment and there was a long tradition that prophets had also suffered as a result of being true to God. **'Those who are hated, excluded from employment, families and society insulted and rejected as evil, because of the Son of Man'** recognizes the cost of following Christ. At the time the Church was born, followers were persecuted – don't forget that Paul pleaded for aid to be sent to Christians in Jerusalem, whose families had disowned them, turned them out of their houses and taken away their livelihoods. Sadly, in many countries, especially in the Middle East, Christians are still persecuted and even killed.

Please note the **woes** are not intended as Christ's curse, but as **'how unfortunate are those'** and seem to have been addressed to Pharisees among the crowd. The rich have loved and put their faith in material possessions. Instead of relying on God, they felt self-sufficient and were far less likely to accept the Good News Christ was bringing. A time would come when they would see the error of their ways, but it would be too late. The final woe, **'when all men speak well of you'**, implies that they would have sacrificed deeply-held principles in order to court favour. Truth would be an early victim for those who sought popularity and the Old Testament records how true prophets like **Isaiah and Jeremiah** suffered for standing up for the truth.

We may well feel these qualities are beyond us and certainly it is difficult for us to possess all of them: yet Jesus demonstrated each in his earthly ministry: in Charles Wesley's words, **'He left his Father's throne above – / So free, so infinite his grace – / Emptied himself of all but love, / And bled for Adam's helpless race.'** Christ trusted his Father enough to face death on a cross to fulfil God's plan for our salvation. Jesus was humble, despite being the Son of God. He did not seek out the rich, powerful, establishment and self-satisfied, but instead reached out to the poor, sinful, diseased and foreigners and his dealings with them, even with the enemy, offered healing and reconciliation to all-comers, marking Jesus as the greatest of peacemakers.

We may not be called to lay down our lives for the sake of justice and God's kingdom, but nevertheless, we should humbly work for the good of our neighbours as we answer Christ's call, so we, too, may qualify as saints in the Pauline sense. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by Marjorie Dobson, a Methodist local preacher, who came from Country Durham. She was born in 1940 and became a local preacher when she was twenty. Her writings reflect her concern for those who feel disconnected from faith by their image of the church as being outdated and irrelevant in the Twenty-First Century. Reflect on her words and consider how we can serve Jesus as he calls us to – possibly in new ways. Hymn number 664, 'Lord, you call us to your service'. We shall sing it to 'Angel Voices'.

1. Lord, you call us to your service,
Each in our own way.
Some to loving, caring, healing;
Some to preach, or pray;

Some to work with quiet learning,
Truth discerning,
Day by day.

2. Life for us is always changing
In the work we share.
Christian love adds new dimensions
To the way we care.
For we know that you could lead us,
As you need us,
Anywhere.

3. Seeing life from your perspective
Makes your challenge plain,
As your heart is grieving over
Those who live in pain.
Teach us how, by our compassion,
You may fashion
Hope again.

4. Lord, we set our human limits
On the work we do.
Send us your directing Spirit,
Pour your power through,
That we may be free in living
And in giving
All for you.

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Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all forever more. Amen.

