

**A service for All Saints / All Souls – 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2023 (StF)**

**Call to Worship: Psalm 43 verses 3 and 4**

Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God. Amen.

*Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light and truth of Christ to guide us through these challenging times. It was written in 1993 by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall sing hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'*

**1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness,**

**Longing for truth, we turn to you.**

**Make us your own, your holy people,**

**Light for the world to see. *Chorus:***

*Christ, be our Light!*

*Shine in our hearts,*

*Shine through the darkness.*

*Christ be our Light!*

*Shine in your Church gathered today.*

**2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.**

**Longing for hope, many despair.**

**Your word alone has power to save us.**

**Make us your living voice. *Chorus:***

**3. Longing for food, many are hungry.**

**Longing for water, many still thirst.**

**Make us your bread, broken for others,**

**Shared until all are fed. *Chorus:***

**4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.**

**Longing for warmth, many are cold.**

**Make us your building, sheltering others,**

**Walls made of living stone. *Chorus:***

**5. Many the gifts, many the people,**

**Many the hearts that yearn to belong.**

**Let us be servants to one another,**

**Making your kingdom come. *Chorus:***

*© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}*

**Let us pray.**

Almighty God, your might is matched only by your boundless love. You are the Living Word who spoke the Universe into existence, who created the earth and all that lives on it. You created mankind and entrusted the stewardship of this world into our care. You have granted us wisdom to make use of the resources this world offers and a conscience to discern between right and wrong. We thank you for your loving-kindness.

Heavenly Father, you seek to sustain all life and provide our daily needs.

Although you know all our failings and flaws, you call us to be your earthly sons and daughters, a holy priesthood in an everlasting covenant of love. You understand us intimately, for you lived among us as Christ Jesus, who shared our very nature: our joys

and woes, hopes and fears, our trials and temptations and who not only came to show us in words and deeds how you want us to live, but through his death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death and offers us everlasting life through faith in him.

Spirit of truth and love, it is good to be here to worship you. Take away all anxieties and distractions, so we may offer our praise and adoration with open hearts and minds and receive your blessing through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Heavenly Father, we offer heartfelt thanks for the many blessings we have received from you, for living saints who have guided, loved and inspired us and for loving us even when we are disobedient, faithless and unlovable, but most of all for coming to redeem us through Christ Jesus. In Jesus' precious name, help us to change our ways, O Lord, so we may lead Christ-centred and not self-centred lives. As we do so, we ask you to forgive us for sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

Merciful Lord, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us but call us to follow you once again. From now onward, may we serve you in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that, by caring for our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, we may serve and honour you in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

***Let us say the prayer our Lord taught us:***

**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 our worship with a hymn by William Walsham How in 1864, when he was Rector at Whittington. Shropshire. He became Bishop of Bedford, a misnomer, for in reality it covered the East End of London. Appalled by the poverty there, he travelled the length and breadth of his see, not by carriage, but on horse omnibuses and trams, carrying his impedimenta with him, to the astonishment of ordinary folk – and probably to his fellow-bishops! As a result, he gained the affectionate nickname, “the Omnibus Bishop”. Hymn 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! © W. Walsham How (1823 – 97)  
*In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for its needs. When I say 'Your kingdom come', please respond with, 'Your will be done'. Let us pray.*

God most gracious and holy, thank you for your boundless, undying love that has sustained us throughout our lives and as a result, we offer ourselves to serve you in whatever ways we can. We pray for the compassion, wisdom, courage and steadfastness required to serve well and, in situations that are beyond our powers, we ask you to intervene, for all things are possible to you.

Heavenly Father, hear our cry of grief for the many lives lost as a result of the attack by Hamas in southern Israel and in subsequent fighting. Remember in your mercy people who have been bereaved, or injured, for those taken as hostages and ordinary civilians trapped in Gaza with nowhere to flee. We pray for an end not only to this war, but to all conflicts around the world. May lasting peace, based upon justice and mercy, be established and may the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and discrimination receive the practical and emotional support they need to rebuild their lives.

**'Your kingdom come', 'Your will be done'.**

Lord of all, we pray for the leaders of the world. Teach them to act justly and mercifully, seeking peaceful resolutions when disagreements arise. Lead them in the ways of integrity, so they seek the well-being of all, rather than their vested interests.

**'Your kingdom come', 'Your will be done'.**

Lord of creation, 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 people whose lives are affected by extreme weather. Merciful God, remember victims of disasters and famines. Bless the work done by relief workers and charities like the Disasters Emergency Committee. Grant them the resources they need for their work.

**'Your kingdom come', 'Your will be done'.**

Lord of shalom, of healing and well-being, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we pray for 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 and may you embrace them in your love, which offers healing, courage, hope, strength and transcending peace.

**'Your kingdom come', 'Your will be done'.**

Gracious God, hear our prayer for our church, the churches in our Circuit and, indeed, the World Church. Sanctify and grant us all the spiritual strength, energy, compassion, courage and vision to lead us where you want the Church to go. May we proclaim good news boldly and find new ways of engaging our community.

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

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us to lead Christ-centred lives by sharing the abundance of your love with all-comers. In Jesus’ holy name. Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 5 verses 1 to 12**

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Amen.

*Our next hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. Most of their hymns are set to old Scots ballad melodies, but this hymn is set to ‘O Waly, Waly’, a traditional English melody from the early Eighteenth Century. 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 (b. 1958)

**Sermon: The Beatitudes**

When I was a teacher librarian, my mother, an Anglican to the core, would frequently inform me that the Patron Saint of librarians is St. Jerome, though when she had mislaid something, she would pray to St. Jude for its reappearance. I didn’t have the heart to tell her that Jude is the Patron Saint of lost causes or hopeless cases, in which case I’d have been told it applied to me as well as Jerome! Nevertheless, many Anglicans and Catholics do pray to saints and their churches often contain lovely

figures of saints, who had led holy lives and in some cases had been martyred for their faith. All such people were declared saints after they had died. However, in many of his letters, Paul used the term to describe living church members, who were sanctified by following Jesus. This tradition has carried over into nonconformist denominations, so technically we may be considered saints, though our behaviour may not always be very saintly! We are in the period of All Souls and All Saints, so you may have been plagued by 'Trick or Treaters' last Tuesday evening. All Saints Day precedes All Souls, the latter being a day of remembrance for the faithful departed, rather than saints in the Church canon. It is the qualities of those 'ordinary' saints to whom I shall be referring in this address.

The Ten Commandments were given to Moses to instruct the Israelites about living in a way that pleased the Lord: **'you shall have no other gods before me; you shall not worship false idols; you shall not take the name of the Lord in vain; you shall keep the Sabbath day holy; honour your mother and your father; you shall not commit murder; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, his servants or his property.'** Although some academics claim that they are outdated, these laws are designed to produce harmony in society – provided they are not broken. However, as an ex-teacher I do have reservations about the way they are set out. Each law is a prohibition – 'you shall not....' Just think what happens when you tell children that they must not do something, especially if they are in their teens! They'll often find your ban a challenge – which makes it all the more irresistible, so they defy you.

Jesus always tried to be positive, which is why his Beatitudes congratulate those who behave well in God's sight. The **Greek word makarios, which many Bibles translate as 'blessed' or 'happy', really means congratulations, or well-off, or fortunate.** In other words, we ought to read the first beatitude as, **'Fortunate are those who know they are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!'** Jesus is telling us what qualities and actions really please God. Let us consider what each beatitude means today.

Being spiritually poor means humbly trusting God, even when things go wrong, rather than setting oneself against the Lord, relying on one's own strength alone. Those who mourn are people who see worldly wrong and work to set it right – God will work alongside them. The humble or meek, refers to those of us who do not seek to achieve success by callously trampling over others, but who try to succeed by honest means. To hunger and thirst for righteousness means to be God-centred in our dealings with other people, the result of which will be to be fulfilled in our lives.

To be merciful means to honour the Commandment that we are to love other people as we love ourselves. If we do so, God's love will shine down on us. Now, the pure in heart does not mean moral or sexual purity, but making the love for God our chief priority, echoing the Greatest Commandment, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind'. If you do so, you will see God face-to-face in heaven. The peacemakers are not only those who seek to end wars, but those who work for God's shalom in our world: the well-being of all; for prosperity, good health, happiness, unity, peace and blessing. True peace requires all peoples feeling good about themselves, their neighbours and the future, so those who work for God's shalom are his true children, his saints, for this is what Jesus strove to do in his earthly ministry.

In the last two beatitudes Jesus warned his followers to expect to be persecuted by those who do not share their beliefs and values. He said, however, those who kept their resolve would inherit eternal life, because they witnessed to Jesus as the Messiah. Surely, you may say, saints like these must be very distinctive, yet I shall end by telling you about a lady who would be embarrassed if I named her publicly, though some of you may recognize her from my story.

When Carol and I joined Wordsley Methodist Church with our young children, Andrew and Hannah, this lady, along with a couple of others, made us feel welcome and valued without smothering us with evangelistic zeal. She took us in hand, guided us into fellowship and was particularly attentive to the needs of our children. She had no position of authority, yet seemed to be involved in many church activities and is an active supporter of Action for Children. When help was needed, she'd always be there. If someone was needed to read, or help with Christian Endeavour, she'd be willing. She was active in her support of the congregation at Wordsley when it merged with Amblecote and has continued to be an encourager and supporter there.

This lady claims to have no particular gifts, but accomplishes more than most and always with cheerful concern for everybody. During the COVID19 lockdown she was active in keeping in touch with people who were isolated – I dread to think what her 'phone bill must have been. When there were no services and into the **Jitsi/Zoom** period, she encouraged me to produce weekly services on printed sheets to help people worship at home, especially if they had no computers or tablets. She not only has a pastoral prayer list, but is a gracious visitor of the lonely and sick, too. I'm sure she thinks she is just an ordinary woman, but she is one of the living saints to whom the word **MAKARIOS** belongs. May Christ grant us the grace to live out our faith as she does. Amen.

*We conclude our worship with hymn number 672, 'Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master'. It was written in 1993 by Allan Dickinson a lay preacher at a Baptist church in Cardiff and directs us to go out from our churches to take Good News to the poor, marginalised and needy – just as Jesus did.*

**1. Where can we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?**

**We want to serve you, to answer your call.**

**Where do you lead us and ask us to follow?**

**What should we do in our service to all?**

**2. 'Go to the hungry, to those who have nothing;**

**Go where the farmlands are empty and bare.**

**I broke the bread for the people around me;**

**Out of my plenty, think what you can share.**

**3. 'Go to the homeless, to those who have nowhere;**

**Go where my people sleep out in the rain.**

**I had no comforts but what others gave me;**

**Offer them shelter, give ease to their pain.**

**4. 'Go to the outcast, to those who have no-one;**

**Go where my sheep are rejected and lost.**

**I dined with sinners and reached out to lepers;**

**Go and do likewise, and don't count the cost.'**

**5. Where will we find you, Lord Jesus our Master?**

**We are your servants who answer your call.  
You go before us, and there we will follow,  
Taking our cross in the service of all.**

© *Allan Charles Dickinson (b. 1954)*

***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.**