

Call to Worship: Psalm 33 verses 2 to 5

Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love. Amen.

Our opening hymn was published posthumously in 1946, seven years after the death of Rt. Revd. Timothy Rees, Bishop of Llandaff. Bishop Timothy had served as a Chaplain to the forces during the Great War and was awarded the Military Cross. After the War, he pursued a monastic vocation at the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield in Yorkshire and was there, in 1922, when he wrote this hymn. After he became Bishop of Llandaff in 1931, he devoted most of his time and energy supporting the unemployed of South Wales and their families during the Depression. We shall sing hymn number 103, 'God is Love: let heaven adore him;'

**1. God is Love: let heaven adore him;
God is Love: let earth rejoice;
Let creation sing before him,
And exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
He who spread the heavens above,
He who breathes through all creation,
He is Love, eternal Love.**

**2. God is Love: and he enfoldeth
All the world in one embrace;
With unfailing grasp he holdeth
Every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find that selfsame aching
Deep within the heart of God.**

**3. God is Love: and though with blindness
Sin afflicts the souls of men,
God's eternal loving-kindness
Holds and guides them even then.
Sin and death and hell shall never
O'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love: so Love for ever
O'er the universe must reign.**

© Timothy Rees (1874 – 1939)

Let us pray.

Lord of creation, we have come to worship and adore you today, for you are truly amazing, faithful and loving in everything you do. As we look around us, we rejoice in the beauty of life on earth: the many varieties of plant and animals; the magnificence of the sky with daytime clouds and swirling myriads of stars at night; the trees that not only help absorb greenhouse gases, but release oxygen to maintain life; mountains and valleys, rivers, seas and islands that fill us with awe.

As we consider the vastness and complexity of everything you have made, we realize how amazing is your wisdom and how mighty is your power. Although, compared with you, we are weak and unimportant, you love us so much that you came as Jesus to show us in words and acts of love how you want us to live. His death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death, offering us new life through faith in him. Holy, gracious Lord, accept the best we can offer you in our worship today, through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and friend. Amen.

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing and seeking forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.

Lord of all, thank you for all you do for us, for all you give us and all you accomplish in us, for we know your love and generosity are boundless. You are holy and gracious, but we know that we let you down in what we think, say and do. We aren't always wholehearted in our discipleship and we know we don't always treat other people as we'd like to be treated. Help us change our ways and forgive us, Lord.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'Hear our prayer'.

Forgive us, too, when we fail to help neighbours who are in need, in distress, or in trouble, even though we know we should. Teach us to be warm-hearted and compassionate, as Jesus was in his ministry.

'Lord, in your mercy,' 'Hear our prayer'

Merciful God, we believe that you hear our prayers and have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow you once more. May we serve you and our neighbours with joyful faithful hearts in the precious name of Jesus, our friend and Saviour. Amen.

As Jesus 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.

Our second hymn was written in 1850 by Anita Laetitia Waring, who was born in Neath, Glamorgan in 1823 and raised as a Quaker. However, she became a member of the Anglican Church and was active in the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, besides serving as a prison visitor during a period in which prison life was grim indeed. We are fortunate she joined the Established Church, as Quakers generally don't sing hymns! Hymn number 736, 'In heavenly love abiding'.

***1. In Heavenly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear,
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here:
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid;
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?***

***2. Wherever he may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.
His wisdom ever waketh,***

His sight is never dim;
He knows the way he taketh,
And I will walk with him.

3. Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me,
Where darkest clouds have been;
My hope I cannot measure,
My path to life is free;
My Saviour has my treasure,
And he will walk with me.

© Anita Laetitia Waring (1823 – 1910)

In our prayers of intercession, we bring our concerns for people nearby and far away to the Lord. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, in response to your loving-kindness to us, help us to serve as your earthly hands, feet, eyes, ears and voice as we reach out to people around us, especially those who need support and friendship. We know that what we can offer isn't as much as we would like it to be, but help us serve you in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we exceed our expectations, but where we fall short, we pray that you will reach out in compassion, for we believe that nothing is beyond your powers.

Lord of all, hear our prayer for the leaders of the nations of the world. Warm their hearts and inspire them to govern with mercy and justice. Teach them to negotiate when disputes arise and to compromise in order to avoid warfare. We pray for a just end to fighting in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Syria, Myanmar, Sudan, Somalia and Congo; an end to death, injury, destruction and displacement of our neighbours that fill us with grief whenever we watch the news.

Heavenly Father, remember the victims of global warming, where strong storms, floods, drought and wildfires are wreaking great destruction. Help all humankind to take greater care of this planet over which we have been made stewards. Let us waste less, recycle more, pollute less and use only the resources we need, so that future generations inherit a healthier planet.

We pray for people who are ill, in body, mind or spirit, for those who are in any kind of need, or neighbours who are lonely or who have lost someone dear. In a time of silence, we name people for whom we are especially concerned, confident that you will understand their need and will reach out to them.

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Heavenly Father, may we offer practical support wherever possible to those for whom we pray, but we ask that you will enfold them with your love, offering healing, hope, renewed strength, courage and, not least of all, lasting peace.

Holy God, we offer our prayer for the church, not only here, but the Church throughout the world. Unite us in Spirit, love and truth. Teach us to work together and give us the courage to bring good news to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world which desperately needs it.

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us lead Christ-centred lives by sharing the abundance of your love with both friend and stranger, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Revd. Bryn Rees in 1974. He was the Minister at Tetherdown URC, Muswell Hill, London at the time and his organist, Gerald

Barnes composed one of four melodies for the hymn which, naturally, is called “Tetherdown”! Hymn number 255, ‘The kingdom of God is justice and joy’.

**1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God’s power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**

**2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God’s banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**

**3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all! © Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}**

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 12 verses 32 to 40

Jesus said,

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.

I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Amen.

“Jesus calls us from the worship / Of the vain world’s golden store, / From each idol that would keep us, / Saying: ‘Christian, love me more.’” We continue our worship with a hymn by the wife of a Nineteenth Century Primate of all Ireland, the remarkable Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander. Cecil was a quaint Irish custom of naming a child after a family sponsor. Needless to say, she was called Fanny by family and friends! Hymn number 250, ‘Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult’.

**1. Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult
Of our life’s wild restless sea,
Day by day his clear voice soundeth,
Saying, “Christian, follow me.”**

**2. As of old apostles heard it
By the Galilean lake**

Turned from home and toil and kindred,
Leaving all for his dear sake.

3. Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store:
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."

4. In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil, and hours of ease,
Still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."

5. Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thine obedience,
Serve and love thee best of all.

© Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)

Sermon: *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Luke 12:34

In our Gospel reading, Jesus directed his followers to sell their possessions so they might distribute the money raised amongst the poor. **'Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'** This was to be their response to the generosity of God the Father, who had given them his kingdom, that is, had redeemed them through faith in Christ. When St. Luke wrote his gospel, most Christians believed the Second Coming was imminent, that within a matter of days or weeks, Jesus would return in glory to judge the world, so wealth and material possessions were useless and best shared with the needy. Two thousand years later, such an approach to personal wealth may seem impractical at best – perhaps naive to outsiders. After all, it is easy to argue that Christ's return is a long way off, probably not in our lifetime, so we can afford to acquire as much as possible for our retirement. However, isn't that what the parable of the foolish farmer is all about?

Moreover, not all worldly treasures are material; other things can divert us from kingdom values. Here is what Martin Luther said: **"What a man loves, that is his God. For he carries it in his heart, he goes about with it night and day, he sleeps and wakes with it; be it what it may—wealth or possessions, pleasure or renown."**

Pleasure or fame are very attractive, which is why shows like **'X Factor'**, or **'Strictly'**, **'I'm a Celebrity'**, or even **'Love Island'** are so popular. The problem with the pursuit of pleasure or fame, as with wealth, or possessions, is they can become serious distractions from living as God wants us to. If we become so single-minded in our attempts to become rich, or famous, or hedonistic, our relationships with other people, especially our families – and with God – may be jeopardised, because our striving for success will leave no time for anything, or anybody else.

This begs the question what constitutes purses that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven? Serving God's will, answering his call as we do kingdom work is what really counts. Moreover, it is serving God diligently, now, not sometime more convenient to us, for we could argue that we could seek fame and fortune first, then answer our call when time allows. None of us know when Christ will return, so we ought to be prepared for him at any time, just as Jesus' parable about servants waiting for their master's return warned his disciples to be vigilant however long the wait for their master.

In Jesus' day, a Jewish wedding feast could last for a week, so the servants would have no real idea when their master would come back home. Instead, they were to be ready to greet him, whatever the time of his return, be it the second watch from 9 p.m. to midnight, or the third watch from midnight till 3 a.m.. Their lamps should be lit to guide him to the door, for when he discovered their faithfulness to him and their diligence in their duties, he would reverse the master-servant roles and would serve them instead – just as Jesus demonstrated by washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper. At the time Luke wrote his gospel, such role reversal would have been considered scandalous in the Roman World, yet Christ repeatedly dignifies serving others.

If you are wondering what meaning this reading has for us, ask yourself what you would do if Jesus appeared now in this church. Would any of us be ready for his judgement? Are any of our lives all we know they ought to be? Are we living out Good News, actively building God's kingdom, or just coasting along, waiting for God to do all the work? Are our churches' eyes turning inwards, preoccupied about finances and congregation size, or are they looking at ways of serving the community?

Many years ago, a monastery fell on hard times: nobody offered himself as a novice, so it looked as though the community would become extinct. The abbot visited the local bishop and discussed the situation with him. On his return to the monastery, the abbot was asked what the bishop had said. The abbot looked gravely at them and said, **"Remember, the Messiah is among you!"**

Gradually, the monks began to treat one another more carefully, just in case one of them was the Messiah and so a remarkable change occurred within the community. Outsiders began to visit the monastery once more, to worship and trade. Before long, new novices presented themselves, because they saw value, kingdom value, in what the community was working for. Old squabbles, power struggles, self-interest had been replaced by peace, reconciliation and mutual concern for one another's well-being.

If we adopt the same approach – **remembering that the Messiah is among us** – our attitudes will become more Christ-like: we will make sure we answer our calling promptly – not like me, for it took nearly a decade for me to apply for a note to preach; we will work actively for social justice, here and abroad. Ought more of our churches to be opened to the community on weekdays and not just to raise funds for the church?

Local churches run pensioners' lunch clubs, knit and natter groups or cafes, craft classes, mother and toddler groups or after school clubs, some run by non-church members. If you are worried about vandalism, remember this, if others see value in the church's role, there less chance of it being vandalised, because all will look out for it.

Let's prayerfully seek Christ's guidance how we can meet some of our community's needs, as individuals, or as church, or in collaboration with other groups. As soon as we know Jesus' will, let's do it, for he's our real treasure and our hearts should be with him as we serve him, now, not some remote point in future. Amen.

We close our worship with another hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. The authors frequently set their hymns to old Scots ballad tunes and this is true for our final hymn, which is sung to "Kelvingrove". We shall sing number 673, 'Will you come and follow me'.

1. Will you come and follow me

If I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

And never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you, and you in me?

2. Will you leave yourself behind

If I but call your name?

Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare,
Will you let me answer prayer
In you, and you in me?

3. Will you let the blinded see

If I but call your name?

Will you set the pris'ners free,
And never be the same?

Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you, and you in me?

4. Will you love the 'you' you hide

If I but call your name?

Will you quell the fear inside,
And never be the same?

Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you, and you in me?

5. Lord, your summons echoes true

When you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you,
And never be the same.

In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow
In you, and you in me.

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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 evermore. Amen.