

A service for 11th May, 2025 – Easter 4 (StF)

Call to worship: Micah chapter 6 verse 8

He has showed you, O people, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Amen.

*Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light of God's love to guide us.
It was written by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer from
West Yorkshire, whose hymns are beautiful and challenging. 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.

Glorious heavenly Father, Lord of all creation, whose Word created our universe and whose compassion maintains life, you entered our world as Christ Jesus, to share our lives and experiences, to bring Good News to all peoples in words and deeds. He died upon a cross to reconcile fallen humanity to you, the Father of all, by breaking the power of sin. Through his resurrection, Jesus offers us everlasting life by his grace, not by anything we deserve, nor can do to earn it. We come to offer you all our praise, adoration and thanksgiving in our worship today, for all honour and glory are yours by right.

Loving Lord, accept our wholehearted thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining world that you made for us, for all the blessings you bestow on us: for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, but most of all we thank you for redeeming us at such a tremendous cost. Thank you for Jesus. Amen.

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing our sins.

Hear us, merciful God, as we confess our failure to live as you want us to. We know that we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly and we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, by acting and speaking in a way that shames us.

We know that, whilst you love us sinners, sin itself angers and grieves you, so we ask you to help us turn away from sin and back to the path you call us to tread. Merciful Lord, bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness for the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that in your loving-kindness you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow you. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives may provide evidence of our faith and be a beacon to draw others to know and love our risen Saviour. Amen.

We shall say 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 next hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed Kendrick's visit to India the previous year.

We shall sing hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'

**1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.**

**Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!**

**2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills;
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,**

Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. *Chorus:*

God of the poor, friend of the weak,

Give us compassion we pray:

Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;

Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

**3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain. *Chorus:***

**4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
Make us content with the things that we need. *Chorus:***

**5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of your ways,**

Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. *Chorus:* © Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far-away. Let us pray.

Loving God, Jesus' passion, death and resurrection remind us that you care for us with boundless, unconditional, redemptive love. Grant us faith, wisdom, compassion and steadfastness to serve you as you desire. Do not let us not close our eyes and hearts to injustice, prejudice or neglect, but instead bid us strive courageously for the wellbeing of everyone. Help us to share your love with our neighbours, nearby and far away.

This week, we are commemorating the eightieth anniversary of VE Day, giving heartfelt thanks for everybody who contributed to defeating Nazism and fascism and earning us the freedom which we sometimes take lightly. Help us to recall the terrible cost of war, so we strive for peace and justice. We grieve that wars are currently being waged in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Myanmar, Congo, Somalia and Sudan with all the suffering, destruction, death and displacement that results from mankind's inability to co-exist with neighbours. Teach the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise, rather than taking up arms when disputes arise. Enable just and lasting settlements to the conflicts we have named and help us to stand up for justice for all-comers and not turn a blind eye to evil.

Jesus is the source of healing and well-being, so we pray for people who are ill, for those brought low by loneliness, fear or need and for all who are experiencing the pain of bereavement. In a time of silence, we bring to mind friends and neighbours for whom we are especially concerned.....

Loving Lord, help us offer them practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be healed, encouraged and granted reassurance.

As we begin Christian Aid Week, we ask a blessing on its works throughout the world: for the provision of materials, crops, equipment and training that allow people in developing countries to make their own way forward in dignity, offering them hope of prospering. Thank you for those who lead the charity, those employed here and abroad. Grant the vision and courage to face the challenges of global warming and political instability and bless people like Aurelia, who having received help, share knowledge and skills to lift neighbours from poverty and hopelessness. Bless, too, everybody who contributes to its work with gifts and prayers.

Saviour God, hear our prayer for this church, churches in our Circuit and indeed the World Church. May the light of Jesus' love guide us through the darkness of this increasingly secular, materialist world and may we remain constant and true. Unite us in love and purpose and help us proclaim good news boldly to a world that needs good news so much.

Abba, Father God, may the risen Lord inspire us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to reveal the light of your love in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

We shall sing a version of the 23rd Psalm, which was written and composed by Stuart Townend in 1996. This is how it happened in his own words: 'I never set out to write a new musical version of this psalm – it seems very brave, or very arrogant, to think you can improve on the existing hymn version, which has been loved and sung by millions of people for so long! I was actually working on a different song at the time, which after several hours' hard work was not going well... I happened to flick to this psalm in my Bible while taking a break, a simple melody popped into my head, and the whole thing was written in ten minutes

(something I wish as a writer would happen more often to me!). Hymn number 481. 'The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;'

1. The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;

He makes me lie in pastures green,

He leads me by the still, still waters,

His goodness restores my soul. Chorus

And I will trust in you alone,

And I will trust in you alone,

For your endless mercy follows me,

Your goodness will lead me home.

2. He guides my ways in righteousness,

And he anoints my head with oil;

And my cup – it overflows with joy,

I feast on his pure delights. Chorus

3. And though I walk the darkest path –

I will not fear the evil one,

For you are with me, and your rod and staff

Are the comfort I need to know. Chorus

© Stuart Townend (Born 1963)

We shall say Psalm 133 responsively. It is number 833 in "Singing the Faith".

Behold, how good and pleasant it is

To dwell together in unity.

² It is like the precious oil poured upon the head,
running down upon the beard,

³ **Even on Aaron's beard, running down upon the collar of his clothing.**

⁴ It is like the dew of Hermon running down upon the hills of Zion.

5 For there the LORD has promised his blessing: even life for evermore. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is John chapter 10 verses 22 to 30

Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered,

"I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one."

Amen.

Our next hymn was written by John Bell and the late Graham Maule of the Iona Community. It is set to a melody composed by John Bell, not their usual settings of old Scots ballads. We shall sing hymn number 701, 'Heaven shall not wait'

1. Heaven shall not wait

for the poor to lose their patience,

the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend:

Jesus is Lord;

he has championed the unwanted;

in him injustice confronts its timely end.

2. Heaven shall not wait
for the rich to share their fortunes,
the proud to fall, the elite to tend the least:
Jesus is Lord;
he has shown the master's privilege -
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast.

3. Heaven shall not wait
for the dawn of great ideas,
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain:
Jesus is Lord;
he has married word and action;
his cross and company make his purpose plain.

4. Heaven shall not wait
for triumphant Hallelujahs,
when earth has passed and we reach another shore:
Jesus is Lord;
in our present imperfection:
his power and love are for now and then for evermore.

© John Bell (born 1949) & Graham Maule (1958 – 2019)

Address: *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”* John 10:27
King Antiochus IV Epiphanes was of Greek descent, but ruled Syria and was determined that Jews should cease to worship God – at the pain of torture and death. All symbols and worship was prohibited and in 168BC Antiochus desecrated the Temple by entering the Holy of Holies and carrying off silver and gold vessels used in worship. The Maccabee family led a successful revolt that eventually freed the Jewish nation from Syrian tyranny and allowed the Temple to be re-consecrated by Judas Maccabeus in 165BC. Indeed, the Temple's rededication is still celebrated by Jews at Hanukkah, or the Festival of Lights, every December.

Our reading from John relates how Jesus went to Temple to celebrate Hanukkah, not because it was an obligation of faith, but because it represented a new beginning for those who'd remained faithful to God throughout prohibition and persecution. Jesus had barely arrived before he was surrounded by leading Jews, who demanded he declare himself as the Messiah, or not. Their hostility was compounded by their failure to see he is indeed God's Son, because he didn't match their image of what Christ should be: in their opinion Jesus was certainly neither a Judas Maccabeus, nor a King David, who would free them from Roman occupation; nor was he another Moses who would minister to God's elect, as they considered themselves. After all, he not only ate with sinners and tax-collectors, but healed Gentiles and Samaritans, whom Jews hated with a passion.

Jesus replied he had already told them, but they didn't believe in him. Even his miracles had not been accepted as signs of Messiahship, because the Jewish establishment lacked the faith to accept Jesus' challenge of Good News. Jesus used an image of himself as the Good Shepherd, as he accepted he would never gain their approval, declaring, **‘but you do not believe because you are not my sheep.’**

However, he added words of reassurance to those who had accepted him. **‘My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand.’** Notice how Christ uses the present tense: the promise is for the present, not just the future. It is

important for all of us to remember we share this assurance. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who will bring us through life's trials, if only we trust in him and listen to him when he calls us by name.

In effect, we are called to continue what Jesus had declared he had come to fulfil: to reach out and help the needy, here and abroad without seeking or expecting to be rewarded. Caring for others is not an add-on to our faith: it is a fundamental part of it. We don't help because we want the Lord to love us more – he can't as he already loves us to the uttermost – but we know we have been blessed by his grace and ought to want to bless others in return. By helping, we recognize our common humanity. We are Christ's earthly hands and, just as he offers practical love, so we are called to do the same.

This year, we shall commemorate the eightieth anniversary of VE and VJ Day, but we ought also to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the founding of Christian Aid. It was founded in 1945 by a number of British and Irish churches to help refugees from the Second World War. By working with partner organizations, Christian Aid expanded its outreach to the most vulnerable people across the world, not only providing disaster relief, but by working to eradicate poverty by providing equipment and training to help communities support themselves. Deep wells provide clean piped water for both hygiene and land irrigation. Solar power provides lighting and runs electrical equipment, allowing businesses to be run and children educated. People helped by Christian Aid are not made to feel like beggars, but are dignified by having some control over their futures. It is also bold in publicizing that developing countries lose more money through the tax evasion practices of large corporations than they receive through official aid which is scandalous.

Nine-tenths of the world lives in grinding poverty, exacerbated by the effects of both globalization and global warming. Far too many people in this country are living in poverty, but their plight is minimal compared with the need of the Developing World. I am going to tell you about one person who has been given a new start by Christian Aid. Ninety per cent of Q'eqchi (Co-WAY-chee) people in the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala live in poverty. Men have to seek work away from their homes, so women are left to grow crops to support their families.

Aurelia is one such woman. She is a community leader, mother of eight children and a grandmother, too. Global warming has resulted in unpredictable weather patterns, rising temperatures and droughts. Water sources are drying up or are being polluted by industry. Aurelia and her neighbours have to walk four hours a day during two trips to collect water from a natural sinkhole with water at the bottom. a natural sinkhole like a cave, with water at the bottom. She told a Christian Aid worker, 'Climate change has been killing our crops and this is our food. The next thing that will die is us'.

Fortunately for Aurelia's community, Congcoop, Christian Aid's partner in Guatemala provides them with agricultural resources and training to help them become resilient against climate change. Aurelia has learned new skills and now has a deep understanding of her land with new techniques. She makes organic fertilizer, makes rainwater collection systems and is able to grow a wider range of crops, one of which is cacao that allows her to make and sell chocolate products at a local market to support her multi-generational family, including her father, Ricardo.

Although she still needs to walk four hours a day for water, Aurelia makes time to share her knowledge and skills with neighbours, so they can become self-sufficient. Life is still challenging for the community, but the help received from Christian Aid / Congcoop means that they are able to resist pressure from big land developers to sell

their land, leading to further environmental damage. Aurelia is confident that a united, hopeful community can face life's challenges because of the support they have received.

Notice how Jesus' Shepherd image does not only involve caring for the helpless, hurt, stray and weak, but shows strong leadership. The Church is called, therefore, not only to look to the needs of the vulnerable and marginalized of this country and further afield, but to be a voice to the world with or through Christian Aid. We are challenged to stand up for a world where justice and mercy are extended to all, which means courting unpopularity at times. Jesus willingly did so, because he cared for all-comers, particularly the poor, foreigners, social rejects and downtrodden. Sometimes, it is tempting to remain silent, to do nothing, just so we may have a quiet life, but that's not Christ's way. A practical way we can make a change is by supporting Christian Aid Week and joining in their lobbying campaigns. Remember, **'Whatever you do for one of the least of these brothers or sisters like Aurelia, you do for Christ.'** Amen.

Our closing hymn is 'Give me the faith which can remove', not so much that is by Charles Wesley, but we need real faith to make real changes to establish social justice for all peoples. Hymn number 661, 'Give me the faith which can remove'.

1. Give me the faith which can remove

**And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the child-like praying love,
Which longs to build thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
And all my simple soul devour.**

**2. I would the precious time redeem,
And longer live for this alone;
To spend, and to be spent, for them
Who have not yet my Saviour known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe, to breathe thy love.**

**3. My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
Into thy blessed hands receive;
And let me live to preach thy word,
And let me to thy glory live;
My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinners' friend.**

**4. Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless charity divine;
So shall I all my strength exert,
And love them with a zeal like thine;
And lead them to thy open side,
The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.**

© Charles Wesley {1707 – 1788}

Benediction

Heavenly Father, by whose glory our Saviour Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life; and may the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. **Amen.**