

A service for 12<sup>th</sup> March, 2023 Lent 3 (StF)

**Call to Worship: Psalm 95 verses 6 and 7**

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care. Amen.

*Our opening hymn is a version of the 23<sup>rd</sup> 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)

***Let us pray.***

Almighty, Sovereign God, Maker of all life throughout the universe, we have come to worship and adore you as we celebrate your wisdom, power, faithfulness, goodness, grace and holiness. Lord, whose might is as boundless as your love, we are here to sing your praises, to pray in faith and to receive and to respond to your word. You are the one true God who from the beginning has performed mighty deeds and upheld a covenant with human beings who have answered your call.

As we journey through Lent, we remember in humble gratitude that you shared our mortal form as Christ Jesus, who has taught us with words and deeds of authority the love that builds us up, not the knowledge that makes us conceited and selfish. Jesus is indeed the pattern for how you want us to live and when he became the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world and was raised from death, he broke the power of sin and death and offers us everlasting life as a gift of grace, not as something we deserve or earn by our works. Therefore, with joyful hearts, we offer you thanks for your everlasting grace. All glory, honour power and praise be yours now and evermore. Amen.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.***

Thank you, Lord, for our lives, for our fellowship here, for everything that has brought us pleasure, for people who have brought light and joy into our lives, as well as experiences and challenges that have given meaning to our lives and forged our character. Thank you for this beautiful planet on which we live and help us to treat it better, so future generations may inherit a healthy world.

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

Merciful God, we know we don't deserve such blessings, for we often fall short of what we know we ought to be and what you want us to be. In sadness we confess that we do not always love and serve you with all our heart; we don't always care for other people as we would like to be cared for. Help us turn away from our sinful ways and forgive us in Jesus' holy name.

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

God most merciful and holy, you hear and answer our prayers. We believe that you have pardoned us and call us to follow you once more. Grant us the power of your Holy Spirit so we may love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer that Jesus 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.**

***Our next hymn was much used by Messrs Moody and Sankey. Dwight Moody said that even souls that resisted his eloquent pleas to turn to Jesus were melted by this hymn, the words of which offer hope to the tired, careworn and inwardly empty and the tune of which changes so emotively from minor to major key. It was written by a scholarly Scot, Horatius Bonar, who was born in Edinburgh in 1808 and died there eighty-one years later. In 1883 he was appointed Moderator of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, the highest position one could attain. Hymn number 248, 'I heard the voice of Jesus say,'***

**1. I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
'Come unto me and rest;  
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down  
Thy head upon my breast.'**

**I came to Jesus as I was,  
So weary, worn and sad;  
I found in him a resting-place,  
And he has made me glad.**

**2. I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
'Behold, I freely give  
The living water, thirsty one;  
Stoop down and drink and live.'  
I came to Jesus, and I drank  
Of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
And now I live in him.**

**3. I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
'I am this dark world's light;  
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,  
And all thy day be bright.'  
I looked to Jesus and I found  
In him my star, my sun;  
And in that light of life I'll walk  
Till trav'ling days are done.**

© *Horatius Bonar (1808 – 1889)*

***We shall now bring our prayers of intercession to the Lord.***

Gracious, heavenly Father, Christ Jesus came to save and heal the broken world, for which we now pray. We receive daily reports of situations that are heart-breaking and largely beyond our powers to remedy directly, so we turn to you, for whom nothing is impossible. Lord, inspire and encourage people who wield power and influence to bring about much-needed change as well as using us to build your kingdom here by reaching out to neighbours who are in distress or need.

Jesus came as Prince of Peace and so we pray for an end to conflicts which cause so many deaths, injuries, destruction and suffering around the world. We pray for an end to the war in Ukraine, asking that the people can repel Russia's invasion. We grieve about the profound privation and suffering of both the military and the civil population and pray for an end to their anguish as well as the opportunity for them to rebuild their lives in peace and security. We pray, too, that the troubles in Jerusalem will end with an understanding between Jews and Palestinians. Lord speak to the hearts and minds of national leaders, so they turn away from using violence as a means of gaining their own way. Instead, may they govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of true peace.

We pray for victims of war, terrorism, prejudice and oppression. Grant them the support and encouragement they need to rebuild their lives and face the future with confidence. Above all else may they find peace and healing of body, mind and spirit in safe places.

Lord of all, we pray for the leaders of wealthy nations to be generous in offering aid to countries where there is great poverty and suffering, in particular lands such as Afghanistan and lands in the Horn of Africa which are afflicted by droughts and famine and countries that have suffered natural disasters, such as the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria. We ask a special blessing upon work being done by charities like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid to provide victims with desperately-needed aid.

We pray, too, for people in this country for whom life is a struggle with some people who are facing the awful choice between heating their homes, or of eating properly during this winter. Bless food banks, warm spaces and other initiatives like holiday clubs which are helping the children of low-paid families, but may new ways be found to offer hope and support people this winter and beyond.

God of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, we pray for everybody we know who is sick in body, or mind, or spirit. Be with people who are waiting for, or recovering from operations and with those whose treatment has been delayed by factors beyond their control. May all of them receive the treatment and support they require to be restored to health and grant them renewed strength, healing, hope and peace not only by the professional care and support they are given, but by feeling your presence during their time of need.

We also remember people around us who feel lonely, or neglected, or who are unemployed and homeless, particularly at this time of year. Remember, too, those who have lost loved-ones and who find bereavement unbearable. In a time of silence we offer you names of people for whom we are most concerned .....  
Lord, help us to be sensitive to the needs of people around us who are in any kind of need, or trouble, so we can befriend and offer them practical support. We pray that you will enfold all of them in the warmth of your love, so they may receive healing, comfort, courage, hope and peace.

God our Saviour, we pray for this church and churches in our Circuit, that we may be a light of hope to a sin-darkened world. We pray, too, for the World Church, that old differences may be set aside and all Christians learn to serve you in unity of mission to build your kingdom in spirit, love and truth. Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends. Help us lead Christ-centred lives and, as you give us an abundance of love, may the Holy Spirit help us to share it freely wherever we go, in the beautiful name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Our Gospel reading is John chapter 4 verses 5 to 42**

So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about the sixth hour. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her,

"Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him,

"You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)

Jesus answered her,

"If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

"Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his flocks and herds?"

Jesus answered,

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

The woman said to him,

"Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water." He told her,

"Go, call your husband and come back."

"I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her,

"You are right when you say you have no husband. The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

"Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

Jesus declared,

"Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now

come when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.”

The woman said,  
“I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”

Then Jesus declared,  
“I who speak to you am he.” Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked,  
“What do you want?” or “Why are you talking with her?”

Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people,  
“Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him,  
“Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them,  
“I have food to eat that you know nothing about.”

Then his disciples said to each other,  
“Could someone have brought him food?”  
“My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.

Even now the reaper draws his wages, even now he harvests the crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour.”

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I ever did.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman,  
“We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Saviour of the world.” Amen.

*We continue our worship with Sydney Carter’s, ‘When I needed a neighbour, were you there?’ which he wrote in 1965. You may not know that, during the 1950s and 60s, Sydney worked as a lyricist for Donald Swann in the famous revues of Flanders and Swann. Just think, we could be singing, ‘mud, mud glorious mud’! Instead, let us sing, hymn number 256, ‘When I needed a neighbour, were you there?’*

**1. When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?**

**When I needed a neighbour, were you there? Chorus:**

*And the creed and the colour and the name won’t matter,  
Were you there?*

**2. I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?**

**I was hungry and thirsty, were you there? Chorus:**

**3. I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?**

**I was cold, I was naked, were you there? Chorus:**

**4. When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?**

When I needed a shelter, were you there? *Chorus:*

5. When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there? *Chorus:*

6. Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there,

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, *Chorus:*

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,*

*I'll be there.*

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**Sermon: “...whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst.” John 4:14**

Water covers two-thirds of our planet and it is vital not only for life, but for the development of Western culture. After all, it was the fertile, well-watered fields around the Nile Delta, that gave birth to Egyptian civilisation, six thousand years ago, by allowing the Egyptians to farm the land and set up cities. Moreover, whilst we can survive for weeks without food, we will die within days if we take in no fluids. Sadly, the conflict in the Holy Land for the past five thousand years has largely been about who controls the fertile land and water supplies, so we see how precious water is in barren lands.

The gospel story shows that Jesus was willing to break Hebrew social customs and taboos in order to offer salvation to a despised Samaritan woman. When he sat at Jacob's Well in the Samaritan town of Sychar, in the middle of the day, Jesus was ignoring Hebrew customs, for most Jews would have gone around Samaria, rather than travel through it, as there was real hostility between the nations. Nearly five and a half centuries earlier, King Cyrus allowed Jews to return from Exile in Babylon to Judah. They found that Samaritans, Jews from the Northern Kingdom who had previously intermarried with Assyrians and other idol-worshippers, had settled on their land and were outraged when they offered to help rebuild the temple in Jerusalem.

When they rejected the offer on the grounds that Samaritans were guilty of apostasy, no longer fit to consider themselves God's people, the Samaritans tried to obstruct the Jews and so began a longstanding feud. This enmity became so bitter that Jews would cross the road to avoid a Samaritan; they would utter a curse and spit upon the ground, if they had to say 'Samaritan' and would sometimes seek out a priest for ritual cleansing if a Samaritan's shadow fell across them. Equally, Samaritans would sometimes follow a Jew, put bits of straw in their tracks and set them on fire, to symbolise 'Good riddance'!

When a Samaritan woman approached, Jesus broke two more taboos: not only did he speak to a strange woman, which was considered improper, but he asked her for a drink of water, which meant he would have used her drinking utensil – deemed unclean by a high-minded Jew. It is not surprising that the woman was both surprised and defensive: **'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?'** She would have had another reason to be on her guard, for most women would draw water early in the morning, when it was cool, rather than at the hottest part of the day. It was evident the Samaritan woman was an outcast in her own community, for she had been married five times (whereas rabbinic law frowned upon more than three) and she was co-habiting with a sixth man. She would not have been allowed to mix with respectable villagers which is why she'd made her lonely way to the well at noon, when all the others had left.

Jesus replied that, if she knew his identity, she would have living water that satisfies completely, unlike the water that slakes our thirst. Although the woman misunderstood Christ at first, she quickly realised that he meant that she could be filled

with the water of life, the Holy Spirit, but there was an impediment; she first needed to confront her sins and repent. Jesus gently, but candidly exposed her situation, which she acknowledged in amazement. She recognised that he was a prophet, but raised a bone of contention between Jews and Samaritans, for the latter worshipped on **Mount Gerizim** whilst Jews worshipped at the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus replied that the Holy Spirit would render the argument about the right place for worship obsolete, for true believers will worship in spirit and truth, irrespective of where they are.

As a result, the woman forgot that she was an outcast and ran to her neighbours, saying, **“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!”** In turn, the Samaritans invited Jesus to spend two days with them and many turned to him, not only because of the woman’s testimony, but because of what they heard Jesus say. Our reading ended with the woman restored within her community and the delicious irony that, whereas the Jewish establishment rejected Jesus, the despised Samaritans were able to say, **“It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Saviour of the world.”**

Today’s readings are a real challenge for us, because we live in a society where many people are more concerned about their material needs than spiritual ones. Few consider thanking God for their blessings, yet we frequently hear people condemning him when things go wrong; **‘If God existed, that wouldn’t have happened!’** As Twenty-First Century disciples, do we offer others **‘living water’**, not simply by preaching to them, but by how we show our faith in our actions and care?

How inclusive are we as individuals or as a church? Are we content with the status quo, or are we trying to work alongside other denominations – even with other faith groups – to benefit our community? Do we recognise people who are isolated within our area through age, race, faith, gender or disability and, if so, are we doing anything about it? Jesus declared that the fields were ripe for the harvest: they still are, if we have faith enough to join the great work. Let us use Lent to listen to Christ’s call and then respond in Spirit, love and faith. Amen.

*We conclude our worship with the hymn on our sheets, ‘For all Christ died; for all was raised –’ which I wrote and is based on John Wesley’s teaching: ‘All need to be saved; All may be saved; All may know themselves saved and All may be saved to the uttermost’.*

- 1. For all Christ died; for all was raised –  
To all he offers hope:  
Then let our Saviour’s name be praised;  
All come within his scope.**
- 2. For all Christ came: the lame; the blind;  
The fallen and deranged:  
He healed them – body, soul and mind,  
Their social standing changed.**
- 3. To all Christ offers life again;  
For us was crucified.  
For all he bore the shame and pain  
As on a cross he died.**
- 4. Through faith the Spirit warms our heart,  
Empowers our words and deeds.  
Christ calls us all to play our part**

**To meet our neighbours' needs.**

**5. To all Christ calls, for if we choose**

**To follow where he leads –**

**Then we'll be heralds of Good News**

**In speech and Kingdom deeds.**

*M. Rider 29<sup>th</sup> March, 2009 - @ Amblecote Wordsley a.m. (to 'St. Magnus' HP2 /StF 312, or 'St. Fulbert' HP823/ StF 769) Modified 1<sup>st</sup> Sept., 2021 – John Wesley's 'All may be saved .....*

***Benediction***

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