

Call to worship: Isaiah chapter 55 verses 10 to 13

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands. Instead of the thorn-bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow. This will be for the LORD'S renown, for an everlasting sign, which will not be destroyed." Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Thomas Obediah Chisholm in 1923, one of over two thousand he wrote in his lifetime and the only one to grace modern hymnals. We shall sing hymn number 51, "Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,"

**1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been thou forever shall be: Chorus:
Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand has provided.
*Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.***

**2. Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. Chorus:**

**3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Chorus:**

© Thomas O. Chisholm (1866 – 1960)

Let us pray.

Lord God, Creator of life throughout the universe, you first revealed yourself to human beings through your Commandments given to Moses and through the prophets, in order that we might know, love and serve you. However, we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, but instead of destroying us, you displayed amazing grace by taking human form as Jesus Christ and living with us, not only to bring Good News in words and deeds, revealing your true nature, but to give his life at Calvary for the sins of the world. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus broke the power of sin and death no longer has the final word, for he offers us eternal life through faith in him.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of blessings that we receive from you: for people who have cared for, guided and inspired us. Most of all, thank you for Jesus Christ, without whom we are helpless and hopeless.

Merciful God, we confess that whilst you are holy and loving, our own lives are spoilt by our failure to live as you call us to. We know that we say and do things that cause pain and offence; we spurn chances to help neighbours who are in need or trouble and frequently set our own wants before the needs of others. We find it easier to

condemn others than it is to forgive. We ask you to please help us change our ways, so that Christ is at the heart of all we do and say and, as we repent, we ask you to pardon us.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and we are confident that you have forgiven us. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you desire us to and use our gifts of the Spirit for the good of the Church and our neighbours, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

As our Saviour 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.

Graham Kendrick was a Baptist pastor's son, who trained as a teacher, but was called to become an evangelist. He has used his talents as a musician, theologian and poet to write a host of hymns and worship songs to teach the faith in music, much as Charles Wesley did. Indeed, in many respects Graham Kendrick is the Charles Wesley of the late Twentieth Century. He wrote our next hymn in 1987, as a member of the Ichthus Christian Fellowship - a radical free church with considerable youth appeal. We shall sing hymn number 59, 'Lord, the light of your love is shining,'

**1. Lord, the light of your love is shining,
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth you now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me. Chorus:**

***Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory;
Blaze, Spirit, blaze,
Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy,
Send forth your word,
Lord, and let there be light.***

**2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
From the shadows into your radiance;
By the blood I may enter your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me. Chorus:**

**3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
So our faces display your likeness.
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me, shine on me. Chorus:**

© Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

In our prayers of intercession, when we remember the needs of people nearby and far afield, I shall leave pauses in each section, so you can offer your own concerns. When I say, 'Lord in your mercy' please answer 'Hear our prayer'.

El Shaddai, omnipotent and holy, we pray for the world and all places where there is war, conflict, prejudice, division and fear, that leaders of nations will turn away from violence and seek justice and mercy for those they govern. We pray for just conclusions to wars that are being waged at present and we remember people who are victims of our failure to love one another.

Silence

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

Jehovah Rohi, faithful Shepherd, we pray for victims of disasters, refugees, the starving, overlooked and homeless and for all who seek to help them.

Silence

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

Jehovah Rapha, Lord of healing, we pray for people who are lonely, needy, anxious and afraid.

Silence

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

Jehovah Shalom, Lord of peace, we bring to you people who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those living with a dementia and all who care for them; for those whose lives are coming to an end.

Silence

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

El Elyon, God Most High, we pray for our leaders, both local and national, that you grant them wisdom and integrity in their service.

Silence

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

Adoni Elohim, Lord Almighty, we pray for this church and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth.

Silence

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

Abba, heavenly Father, please accept and answer our prayers. Bless us, our family and friends. Keep us safe and free from sin. Help us to share your overflowing love with friends and strangers, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by a retired Methodist minister, Revd. Fred Pratt Green, who was born in 1903 and died in 2000. It is set to 'Ar hyd y nos', or 'All through the night'. Hymn number 124, 'For the fruits of all creation,'

**1. For the fruits of all creation,
Thanks be to God;
For his gifts to every nation,
Thanks be to God;
For the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
Silent growth while we are sleeping,
Future needs in earth's safe-keeping,
Thanks be to God.**

**2. In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
In the help we give our neighbour,**

**God's will is done;
In our world-wide task of caring
For the hungry and despairing,
In the harvests we are sharing,
God's will is done.**

**3. For the harvests of the Spirit,
Thanks be to God;
For the good we all inherit,
Thanks be to God;
For the wonders that astound us,
For the truths that still confound us,
Most of all, that love has found us,
Thanks be to God.**

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 13 verses 1 to 9 and 18 to 23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. Such large crowds gathered round him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. Then he told them many things in parables, saying:

"A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. He who has ears, let him hear."

"Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown." Amen.

Francis Ridley Havergal was the daughter of Rev. W.H. Havergal of Astley, Worcester. Rev. Havergal was a gifted composer of hymn tunes and a writer of hymns, too, so it is not surprising that Frances should have inherited some of his skill as a writer. This is one of the many hymns that she wrote in quite a short life. It was written on 19th May, 1867 at Weston-Super-Mare. Hymn number 666, 'Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,'

**1. Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for thy gracious word,
Longing for thy voice that cheereth;
Master, let it now be heard.
I am list'ning, Lord, for thee;
What hast Thou to say to me?**

2. Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the Rock.

3. Master, speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! for O thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak! and make me blest indeed.

4. Master, speak: and make me ready,
When thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
Master, speak! O speak to me!

© Frances Ridley Havergal (1836 – 1879)

Sermon: “Those who have ears, let them hear.” Matthew 13:9

Farming today in developed countries is a science rather than art, with soil analysed, conditioned and irrigated to ensure optimum growth. If you go to Evesham or parts of Shropshire, you will see vast poly-tunnels in which strawberries and crops suited to warmer climates are grown. Tractors pull equipment that plants seeds and tubers with precision, so wastage is kept to a minimum. They are guided by Global Positioning Systems, or GPS and advanced farms are using GPS-controlled robots to weed and feed the crops – and increasingly, to harvest them, too. Sadly, heatwaves and flooding caused by Global Warming are threatening agriculture, but that is worth of a sermon on its own.

At the time of Jesus, farmers would carry a bag filled with seeds, take a handful and scatter them by throwing them in an arc. As Jesus’ parable indicated, the wastage was considerable, so seeds were sown generously to take account of some crop-failure. IT was vital, for a major crop failure would lead to famine and many deaths and this still happened in the Developing World where farming is relatively primitive.

Of course Jesus wasn’t referring directly to farming matters: he was telling his disciples, as future sowers of the seeds of Good News, that they must not expect everybody to accept it and live it out. There are those who will have closed hearts and minds, who will reject the Gospel message from the outset; others will accept the teaching superficially, but when friends mock them, or challenge their beliefs, or if the authorities persecute them for their faith, they will fall away, despite all efforts to keep them on board; the third kind of people are they who have all the potential of becoming good Christians, but find pressures of family, or wealth, or work, or temptations to avoid being considered ‘religious’ by others too hard to resist, so they fail to reach their potential, even though they retain residual faith.

The fruitful remnant is people who receive spiritual nourishment, through worship, Bible-study and fellowship. They not only receive the word, but live out Christ’s teachings, refusing to let anything crowd Christ out of their lives. Such people are not **stereotypical ‘Holy Joes’ or ‘do-gooders’**, as so often portrayed on television, though we should always try to do good. No, they fall into the category described by St. Paul as,

‘those who live in accordance with the Spirit,’ for they ‘have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.’

Jesus clearly recognised the conflict within our human nature between the material and spiritual way of life, the former leading to rejection of God’s values, the Spirit-led path offering new life in Christ with the resulting peace – shalom in Hebrew. Shalom means more than peace: it covers harmony, unity, rest and prospering. Jesus offers us this peace in his Gospel message, which challenges selfishness and the **‘me first’** attitude which seems to pervade society today. Christ’s values – Spiritual values – are based on love – of God and neighbour, not of wealth and possessions. As such they are life’s solid joys and lasting treasures.

John Fawcett was appointed Pastor at a Baptist church in Wainsgate, Yorkshire, where the small, impoverished congregation could not even afford to pay his keep, other than in kind, potatoes, rabbits and wool being much of their contribution. In 1772, Revd. Fawcett wrote an essay about anger that came to the attention of the King and so impressed him that he wanted to advance his career. The King offered John Fawcett the position as Minister at the huge, prosperous Carters Lane Church in London.

John Fawcett accepted the move, but after he preached his farewell sermon, he returned to his house where carters were loading his possessions. He decided to go round to his small flock to say his farewells in person. Although they were poor and illiterate, he began to recall the times they had shared. All of the members were desperately sad to lose him, so it is not surprising that long before he had finished his visits, John Fawcett was waging an inner battle between his worldly desire to answer the King’s call to go to London and enjoy a life of riches and what he felt was a call by God to remain at Wainsgate, serving the people whom he loved – though at great cost in material terms.

After a time of contemplation, Revd. Fawcett returned to his house and instructed the removal men to unload his belongings, declaring that he would remain in Wainsgate a little longer. In fact, he remained there the remaining fifty-four years of his life, during which time he wrote the lovely hymn, “Blest be the tie that binds” which recognises the beauty of Christian fellowship, where the very love of Jesus is reflected in mutual prayer and service. Although Revd. John Fawcett was neither wealthy nor famous in worldly terms, he was rich in love, for he lived in the Spirit and is an example of the fertile soil in which Christ wants the Gospel seeds to grow. May our lives show that we are fertile soil, too. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by Jacqueline Jones, a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, who was based in the United Kingdom for 5 years, but now lives in Christchurch, New Zealand and is enjoying the role of vicar's wife – at least I hope she is! We shall sing hymn number 662, ‘Have you heard God’s voice: has your heart been stirred?’

1. Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,

Though the way be rough and narrow? Chorus:

Will you walk the path that will cost you much

And embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you

The disciples of tomorrow?

2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent? *Chorus:*

3. In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless? *Chorus:*

4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
And believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:*

*We will walk the path that will cost us much
And embrace the pain and sorrow.*

*We will trust in One who entrusts to us
The disciples of tomorrow.*

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Benediction

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