

## A service for 12<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 (StF)

### 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 reminds us of our need for the light of God's good news to guide us. It was written 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:***

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***Let us pray.***

Almighty God, whose Word spoke life into our universe, you have sought to bring us close to you through your Holy Law, yet we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies. In your boundless grace you revealed yourself as Jesus Christ, who not only shared our mortal form and brought us Good News in words and deeds, but gave his life at Calvary to redeem the world from sin. His resurrection broke the power of death, so that we who believe in him may have everlasting life. When he ascended to heaven, you sent your Holy Spirit to inspire, comfort and guide us through our life, because of his amazing power dwelling within us. Lord of all, hear and accept our worship and adoration, for all honour and glory, power and praise are yours forevermore.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of gifts you offer us; for everyone who has brought light, love and joy into our lives and for those opportunities and experiences that have enriched our lives. Thank you for this beautiful world and for your enduring love, for we know that even when we stray from you, you seek us out and welcome us back home.

Merciful God, in shame we confess that whereas you are holy and true, our own lives are marred by failure and sin. We don't love others as we love ourselves and we are sometimes half-hearted in our love for you. We don't always answer your call to serve others in Jesus' name because of our laziness, fear, or sense of unworthiness. Often, we let you down because we try to act in our own strength, rather than calling on the Holy Spirit to empower, guide and encourage us. O Lord, in Jesus' lovely name help us to change our ways and pardon us both for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we know you hear and answer our prayers and are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you once more. From now on, let your Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you want us to, by using 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.**

*The author of our second hymn was also a Roman Catholic from Yorkshire. Michael Lundy. He became a full member of the De la Salle Brothers, a Catholic institute that is involved in education and social work. As Brother Damian Lundy, he was involved with the Charismatic movement, with Catholic Youth Services, and was a key figure in the youth events during the Pope's 1982 visit to Ninian Park.*

*Sadly, he died in 1996, aged only fifty-three. We shall sing hymn number 397, 'The Spirit lives to set us free,' – walk in the light!*

**1. The Spirit lives to set us free,  
Walk, walk in the light;  
He binds us all in unity,  
Walk, walk in the light. *Chorus:***

*Walk in the light,  
Walk in the light,  
Walk in the light,  
Walk in the light of the Lord.*

**2. Jesus promised life to all  
Walk, walk in the light;  
The dead were wakened by His call,  
Walk, walk in the light. *Chorus:***

**3. He died in pain on Calvary,  
Walk, walk in the light;  
To save the lost like you and me,  
Walk, walk in the light. *Chorus:***

**4. We know His death was not the end,  
Walk, walk in the light;  
He gave His Spirit to be our friend,  
Walk, walk in the light. *Chorus:***

**5. By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,  
Walk, walk in the light;  
The Father's kindness is revealed,  
Walk, walk in the light. *Chorus:***

**6. The Spirit lives in you and me,  
Walk, walk in the light;  
His light will shine for all to see,  
Walk, walk in the light. *Chorus:***

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***In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for its needs.***

Creator God, we praise and thank you for this beautiful, self-sustaining world over which you have given us stewardship, but we are only too well aware that our failure to respect kingdom values has caused much of the brokenness that blights peoples' lives and is damaging the environment. As we acknowledge how you have blessed us throughout our lives, we offer ourselves to respond to your grace by serving you as we help our neighbours, nearby and far from us. We know that our powers are limited, so where the best we can offer is inadequate, then we ask you to warm the hearts of and motivate people who can really make a difference to the world.

Gracious God, inspire and lead those who wield authority and power in the nations of the world: guide them and all people in the way of justice and peace, so they learn to negotiate and resolve disagreements. We pray for victims of war, terrorism and persecution: those who have been killed and their families and friends; people who have suffered life-changing injuries;

others who are broken in mind and spirit and refugees, many of whom are exploited and who face long, dangerous journeys. Grant all of them practical support and encouragement, so they may begin to rebuild their lives.

Heavenly Father, as we pray for the deliverance of victims of COVID 19, we grieve about the immense suffering of people here and abroad. Lord, the strains of understanding details of the partial relaxation of lockdown are not only confusing us, but are testing our faith and resolve, too. Help us to play our part in defeating Coronavirus and reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we can all face an uncertain, even threatening future, with hope grounded in your saving grace.

Lord of life, may the NHS receive all the support and equipment it needs to heal the sick as it grows to meet the changing needs of our society. Bless everybody, who is offering help to Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society. Keep them safe in their work.

Hear our prayer for the leaders of MHA, that they will succeed in lobbying the Government for proper, regular testing and the resources we need to remain safe. We pray, too, for the managers and staff in our homes that they may help us come safely through this time of crisis.

Spirit of healing, let the light of your love shine upon people in our community who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, through the care and support they receive and by experiencing your holy presence in their time of need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them; grant them comfort in their distress, reassurance in their confusion and a sense of being valued for who they are, despite the problems they face.

Loving God, we remember neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, or unemployed. We pray for those who are facing a broken relationship, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer you names of 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 as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, from which there is healing, courage, strength and peace.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: make us all one, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of everybody. Unite us in love and action, so we bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and often hostile world.

Abba, heavenly Father, look upon us, our friends and families with loving-kindness. Keep us from harm and may the power of the Holy Spirit help us resist the temptation to sin. Most of all, may all that we do and say, reflect your grace and goodness upon this sin-darkened world. Amen.

*We shall sing a hymn by Charles Wesley which is believed by some commentators to have been the Wesleys' Conversion hymn, rather than 'Where shall my wondering soul begin' and it was certainly a favourite of John Wesley. It is often referred to as 'The Methodist Anthem', but it has a less reverent nickname in Tipton, where it is referred to as "The bicycle hymn" – because 'my chains fell off'! Tiptonians have a strange sense of humour – one of them married me. Hymn number 345, "And can it be"*

© Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

**1. And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

**2. 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds enquire no more.**

**3. He left his Father's throne above –  
So free, so infinite his grace –  
Emptied himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me!**

**4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.**

**5. No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own!**

### **Our Epistle is Romans chapter 8 verses 1 to 11**

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. Amen.

**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.

*We continue our worship with a hymn by the prolific and long-lived Methodist Minister, Revd. Fred Pratt Green. We shall sing hymn number 124, "For the fruits of his creation,"*

**1. For the fruits of his 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 his 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.**

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

Before I retired from teaching fifteen years ago, July always seemed s a strange month: I had the imminent summer holidays to refresh body, mind and soul; I also had reports and parents' evenings before the end of term, but July was the time that I reflected upon my own performance and those of my pupils during the year. This was especially true of my eleventh year cohort, for their GCSE results would be published four weeks into the holiday and much depended upon their success or failure. In my final years in teaching, I was often given more challenging groups, as I was regarded either as a disciplinarian, or simply expendable! Consequently, I can empathise with Jesus' teaching about the sower and the seed.

I am sad to report that some of my former pupils had long since been switched off education, so however hard I tried to motivate, cajole or bluster them into doing enough work to pass, my efforts were doomed to failure. They'd sit sullenly chewing their pen – rather more usually my pen, as they seldom appeared with one – until the bell rang, whence they would depart, leaving behind scant evidence of any brain activity. They were my seeds on the path!

Others arrived with every intention of working hard, seeking my approval. However, they were easily distracted, having the concentration span of a slightly superior goldfish and they would sit through detailed preparation work and clear instructions of the task in hand, only to ask sheepishly, “What do I have to do?” as I started them off on the exercise. My seeds on rocky places!

A third group was brighter than the second and more highly-motivated than the first, but they were afraid of being called 'swats', so they would join forces with the more disruptive elements – even though they knew the consequences – to avoid any chances of being bullied as 'teacher's pets'. This group grieved me most deeply, for few of them could be saved from themselves and so never reached their potential. They, of course, were the wheat choked by the weeds.

Fortunately for my sanity, even the worst classes had a few pupils, who had the character to resist apathy, confusion and peer-pressure, who tried their hardest and sometimes even exceeded their own expectations. I still treasure the day my father told me how one of his cricketing friends whose son succeeded in gaining a pass, despite having considerable learning difficulties, had danced around the kitchen, accompanied by his wife, when David received his results. Such a harvest of success still makes teaching a worthwhile career, even though it may not have impressed an Ofsted inspector!

Of course, Jesus wasn't referring to academic 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 for the ephemeral quick-fix, power, or wealth materialism offers. The spiritual path offers us new life in Christ with its resulting peace 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. Here is an example of what I mean.

John Fawcett was born in Bradford on 6th January, 1740. He was orphaned when he was very young, but was raised by a half-sister. At twelve he worked in a 'sweat shop' for fourteen hours a day, six days a week. However, John was clever and, having received a limited education, he determined to improve himself and studied by candlelight. John was moved to Christian ministry after he had heard George Whitefield, one of the founders of Methodism, preaching nearby. He made such progress academically that, by the time he was twenty-five, he had been ordained as a minister in the Baptist Church. He was appointed Pastor at 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. Upon discovering that the famous preacher, Dr. J. Gill, was due to retire, the King offered John Fawcett the position as Minister at the huge, prosperous Carters Lane Church in London. As a Yorkshireman, John Fawcett might have preferred to stay in his native county, but the opportunity was too great, so he leapt at the chance.

On the day he was due to move, he preached his farewell sermon, then 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: the joys of marriages and christenings; the traumas of illness and hardship and the sorrows of death. 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 a number of books, a volume of hymns, including "Blest be the tie that binds" and founded a school to train young preachers. "Blest be the tie that binds" recognised 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, but 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.

*We close our worship with a hymn based upon our call to worship, Isaiah chapter 55. We shall sing hymn number 487, "You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,"*

**You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,  
And the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you.  
There'll be shouts of joy and the trees of the field  
Shall clap, shall clap their hands;  
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
And you'll go out with joy.**

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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 now and for evermore. Amen.