

A service for 12<sup>th</sup> September, 2021 (StF)

**Call to worship: Psalm 9 verses 1 and 2**

I will praise you, LORD, with all my heart. I will tell all the miracles you have done. I will be happy because of you; God Most High, I will sing praises to your name. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, Bernadette Farrell, 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, your power and glory shine through the universe created by your Word and so we have come to worship and adore you. Lord of compassion, you have created eco-systems to sustain the life of all you have made and so we come to thank and praise you for all that you do. Christ Jesus, you shared our mortal form and lived among us, teaching us to live as your Father wants us to. You died on across at Calvary to atone for the sins of the whole world and you rose from death three days later and so we come to you, seeking the true light to help us make our way through the darkness of the world. Sacred Spirit, our counsellor, comfort, strength and guide, Word of life who lives within us, we come to seek spiritual food to sustain us in our discipleship.

Amazing God, accept all we are and all we have both in our act of worship and in our daily lives. Take away all anxiety and distractions, so we can concentrate on your holiness, wisdom and grace, for all honour, glory, power and praise are yours now and always. Amen.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say “Merciful Lord”, please respond with “Forgive us”.***

Everlasting Lord, we have come to thank you for all you have been, are, and shall be in the future. Thank you for your gift of life, for this beautiful, self-sustaining world in which we live, for the many blessings we have received from you and which you continue to bestow upon us, but above all else, thank you for loving us even when we stray from you, when we are loveless and unlovable, for you seek us out and restore us.

**‘Merciful Lord’ ..... ‘Forgive us’.**

Heavenly Father, we confess our failures to love our neighbours as we know we should and to serve you wholeheartedly, through weakness, pride, fear, or selfishness ..... Lord, for the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do, forgive us and grant us the faith and commitment to be your holy people.

**‘Merciful Lord’ ..... ‘Forgive us’.**

Abba, our loving heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have already pardoned us and call us to follow you, unburdened by guilt. Empower us with your Holy Spirit, so we can serve you and our neighbours with joyful, warm and faithful hearts, in the lovely name of Jesus, our Saviour. 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.**

***Our next hymn was written by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, a Methodist Minister who not only lived from 1903 to 2000, but wrote most of his hymns after he sat down!***

***Hymn number 346, ‘Christ is the world’s light, Christ and none other’***

**1. Christ is the world’s Light, Christ and none other;**

**Born in our darkness, he became our Brother.**

**If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:**

**Glory to God on high.**

**2. Christ is the world’s Peace, Christ and none other;**

**No one can serve him and despise another.**

**Who else unites us, one in God the Father?**

**Glory to God on high.**

**3. Christ is the world’s Life, Christ and none other;**

**Sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother –**

**He, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:**

**Glory to God on high.**

**4. Give God the glory, God and none other;**

**Give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;**

**Give God the glory, God in us, my Brother:**

**Glory to God on high.**

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000} StF version

***In our prayers of intercession we think of people near and far away.***

Heavenly Father, you have given us this beautiful, self-sustaining planet which should meet the needs of all. However, the daily news reports, remind us of its brokenness, most of which is the result of human failure, greed, cruelty, pride, foolishness and selfishness. Lord, grant us the steadfastness, wisdom, courage and compassion we

need to comfort and support neighbours who are troubled or needy, acting as Jesus would. However, in situations where our best will not be enough, we pray that you will reach out to people who can bring about healing and wholeness, for to you all things are possible.

King of kings, guide and inspire all who hold authority in the world to use their power justly and compassionately, seeking peaceful resolutions to disputes, rather than turning to military action. Hear our prayer for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and intolerance across the world, especially in Afghanistan where allied troops have left and the population faces Taliban rule once more. The situation is so grave that it is difficult to know what to pray for, other than that those who have been evacuated may find safe refuge and compassionate treatment from their hosts. May those trapped within Afghanistan be protected from the worst excesses the world witnessed twenty years ago. We pray, too, for refugees who are so desperate they are willing to put their lives in danger by trying to cross the Channel in barely sea-worthy craft. Again, Lord, we don't have answers to the situation, but we pray that you will guide our leaders to adopt a humane approach to these asylum-seekers. Loving God, breathe your Spirit of peace upon mankind; comfort and support all who are suffering the effects of man's inhumanity to man and help us remember that we are all made one in Christ.

Lord of life, recent terrible floods and wildfires on several continents, are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We remember, too, Haitians affected by the latest earthquake, followed by a severe storm. We offer our prayer for all disaster-stricken people and pray for them to receive swift, practical aid. Most of all, we pray that all humankind comes to recognize the need for change before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

Lord of healing and hope, look with compassion on all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. May they find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them. Reassure them in their confusion, comfort them in their distress and let them feel loved and valued even in the midst of their brokenness.

Remember in your mercy our neighbours who are lonely, afraid, unemployed, or overworked, besides all who feel undervalued and unloved and everyone who has lost loved ones, particularly during this pandemic. In a time of silence, we bring to mind people around us who are in special need of your care. As we name them before you, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out 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, in which there is healing, courage, comfort, hope and peace.

Sovereign God, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide, especially as we begin to emerge from the shadow of COVID19: make us all one, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you and that the life of Christ may be revealed in all we do and say.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us be beacons of good news, day by day. May we learn to share the love you give us in such abundance with everybody we meet, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Mark chapter 8 verses 27 to 38**

Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them,

“Who do people say I am?”

They replied,

“Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ.” Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.

He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter.

“Get behind me, Satan!” he said. “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.”

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said:

“If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father’s glory with the holy angels.” Amen.

*Our next hymn was written before the First World War by Katie Barclay Wilkinson and published in “Golden Bells” during 1925. It is one of my favourite hymns and will be sung at my funeral! Hymn number 504, ‘May the mind of Christ my Saviour’.*

**1. May the mind of Christ my Saviour  
Live in me from day to day,  
By his love and power controlling  
All I do or say.**

**2. May the word of God dwell richly  
In my heart from hour to hour,  
So that all may see I triumph  
Only through his power.**

**3. May the peace of God my Father  
Rule my life in everything,  
That I may be calm to comfort  
Sick and sorrowing.**

**4. May the love of Jesus fill me,  
As the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self abasing –  
This is victory.**

**5. May I run the race before me,  
Strong and brave to face the foe,  
Looking only unto Jesus  
As I onward go.**

**Sermon:** *“If any would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* Mark 8:34

It is not only cattle and sheep that can suffer from foot and mouth disease. All of us can metaphorically put our foot in our mouth when we speak before we think of the consequences. On our wedding anniversary, several years ago, my wife, Carol, and I went to Ludlow with Carol navigating and me driving. Rather than going via Bridgnorth, Carol chose the Bewdley route, as a result of which I found our car climbing Clee Hill behind a lumbering tanker that was so slow I had difficulty keeping in second gear and was uncertain where we were. Without thinking of the consequences, I grumbled that she had got us lost on the way to our honeymoon, as well. Oops! “That was forty years ago – and you still remember it!” Carol retorted – and I was in the doghouse for the rest of the day! It goes to show that the uncontrolled tongue, as St. James said, is a fire that can ravage a great forest: it can cause hurt and offence, whereas, really, it ought to promote blessings and peace.

Simon Peter discovered this in our gospel reading, for within a short time of earning Jesus’ praise for answering the question, ‘Who do you say I am?’ with, ‘You are the Christ’, our Lord told him, ‘Get behind me, Satan’, after Peter rejected Jesus’ prediction of his crucifixion and resurrection. Peter’s first answer was the result of weighing up the evidence of nearly three years’ discipleship: hearing Jesus teach; listening to him confounding the critical Pharisees and Scribes; watching him cure the sick; seeing him perform miracles. Peter had no doubt that the evidence pointed to Jesus as the Messiah, for no other person could have done what he did. Unfortunately, his objection to Jesus’ declaration that he would be rejected by the religious Establishment, would be killed, yet would be raised on the third day, was a gut-reaction based on Jewish ideas of the Christ, which certainly did not involve suffering and death.

Although some prophetic writing pointed to the Messiah as a humble figure, the suffering servant, most First Century Jews envisaged God’s Anointed more as the bringer of retribution to their enemies from Isaiah 63, his clothes stained with their blood. Their idea was of a Davidic king, who would not only drive out the occupying Romans, but would reunite the Jewish peoples and re-establish them as the major political and economic force they had once been. The creation of a new covenant with God was not seen as a major priority. We can imagine the dismay of the disciples as Jesus foretold his passion, death and resurrection, because his teaching did not fit their expectations of earthly power and glory, so the impetuous Peter spoke up and declared, **“This won’t happen if I can help it”**.

Jesus’ response, **“Get behind me, Satan!”** seems harsh at first, but the Greek word translated as ‘Satan’, **Satana**, also means **‘adversary’**, or **‘opponent’**, so Christ was effectively telling Peter not to oppose God’s plan for our salvation, not calling him the devil! His next comments corroborate this: “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.” It is clear that Jesus was not willing to abandon his Father’s will for what human beings cherish: power; wealth and fame.

As a result, Christ made it clear to all his followers – including us – that discipleship is unlikely to earn us a fortune, nor popularity, nor authority over others. Indeed, Jesus is the Servant King, who washed his disciples’ feet like a lowly servant, who submitted to suffering without cursing his oppressors and prayed for the forgiveness of the very people who crucified him. He tells us that, if we choose to follow him, we should do so in response to his grace, not in hope of gaining any kind of advantage in worldly terms. Indeed, when Jesus said, “If any would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me”, he meant that we should be prepared to face what he

had faced, suffering, shame, rejection – even death in some parts of the world, rather than earthly glory.

Don't forget, the cross is not only a ghastly instrument of torture, usually reserved for the basest criminals, but anybody who was crucified died under a Deuteronomic curse! Carrying your cross means more than being inconvenienced by health, or in Carol's case, a trying husband! It means offering all, showing the total commitment of The Methodist's Covenant Prayer: 'I am no longer my own but yours. Your will, not mine, be done in all things, wherever you may place me, in all that I do and in all that I may endure; when there is work for me and when there is none; when I am troubled and when I am at peace. Your will be done when I am valued and when I am disregarded; when I find fulfilment and when it is lacking; when I have all things, and when I have nothing. I willingly offer all I have and am to serve you, as and where you choose. Glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. May it be so for ever. Let this covenant now made on earth be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.' Discipleship is not something we should do lightly, for it requires real commitment.

Jesus' words mean we are being called to offer all that we have and all that we are in service to the Lord. We trust in his great goodness and redeeming love, rather in the values of the world. Jesus poured out all he had for love of sinners like us. My friends, will you brave the spite and hostility of our increasingly secular and selfish society which frequently rejects kingdom values? Will we speak up for justice for the poor and oppressed of the developing world, for the refugees seeking new lives in Europe, as well as for people we know who are burdened by debt, or are marginalised because of race, faith, gender or disabilities? Are we willing to accept personal accountability for our actions as well as demanding it of the rich and powerful when they fail to live up to our expectations? Are we able and willing to accept that might is not always right, for even our Lord's helplessness at Calvary was strong enough to destroy Satan's power? Love will overcome hatred, so let us take up our cross and play our part in God's mission of love to our world? Amen.

*We conclude our worship with a hymn written by Charles Wesley 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***

**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.**