

A service for 13th August, 2023 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 105 verses 1 to 4

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Amen.

We shall sing the praises of Jesus in our opening hymn, based upon Philippians chapter 2 and written by Caroline Maria Noel in 1870. Hymn number 317, 'At the name of Jesus'.

1. At the name of Jesus

Every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him
King of glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
We should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning
Was the mighty Word.

2. Humbled for a season,

To receive a name
From the lips of sinners
Unto whom he came,
Faithfully he bore it
Spotless to the last,
Brought it back victorious,
When from death he passed:

3. Bore it up triumphant

With its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures
To the central height,
To the throne of Godhead,
To the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory
Of that perfect rest.

4. In your hearts enthrone him;

There let him subdue
All that is not holy,
All that is not true;
Crown him as your Captain
In temptation's hour:
Let his will enfold you / In its light and power.

5. For this same Lord Jesus

Shall return again,
With his Father's glory,
With his angel train;
All the wreaths of empire
Meet upon his brow,

And our hearts confess him / King of Glory now. © Caroline Maria Noel {1817 – 1877}

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we have come to worship and adore you today, for you are the King of Glory, the Creator of our universe and all life within it, a God of wisdom, might and love. You came as Jesus Christ to teach us how we should live through his words and actions. You came as Jesus Christ to become the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, to set us free from the power of sin and when he rose from the tomb, Jesus broke open heaven's gates and offers us eternal life. Amazing God, as we come before your throne, take away all our anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Thank you, Lord, for the many blessings you have bestowed upon us throughout our lives: our wonderful world, our work and our rest, our homes, food, family and friends; for everything that has brought us pleasure and fulfilment and for opportunities that lie before us. Above all these blessings, thank you for loving us even when we are loveless and unlovable, for, while you are holy, our lives are marred by our sinfulness.

Merciful heavenly Father, we know that our words, thoughts and deeds sometimes hurt and upset other people and fill you with grief. We don't always love and serve you wholeheartedly, as we know we ought to. We certainly don't always love other people as we would like them to love us. Help us to change our ways, to become more loving and faithful day by day and, in Jesus' lovely name pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Merciful heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and, confident that you have forgiven us and call us to follow you. May we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we use his gifts 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.

Our next hymn by Katie Barclay Wilkinson, a Nineteenth Century evangelist in London. We shall sing 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.

© Kate Barclay Wilkinson (1859 – 1928)

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others. When I say ‘Your kingdom come’, please respond with, ‘Your will be done’.

God of all grace, may we respond to your amazing grace by serving you in whatever way we can. Grant us the power of your Holy Spirit to give us the courage, steadfastness, wisdom and compassion we need to serve our neighbours as you call us to, but for circumstances where we know we are powerless, we turn to you, for to you all things are possible. We ask you to warm the hearts of and motivate people with power and influence who can really bring about to the world.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Gracious God, hear our prayer for those who hold authority in the nations of the world. Guide them in the way of your righteousness, so that they are just and merciful to all-comers. Help us strive to build a world where people stand up against poverty, here and abroad, where we see others as you see them, as your children who are to be protected and nurtured. Help us to be willing to work together in mutual trust, to always seek the common good, rather than our own selfish desires and to share justly the earth’s resources, rather than fighting over them.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

God of all righteousness, we confess that we have failed our collective responsibility to be stewards of our planet and the evidence is before our eyes: melting glaciers; oppressive heatwaves; wildfires; floods and droughts, increasingly strong storms and depletion of resources. Help us do what we can to rebuild the environment by changing our lifestyles and by supporting people whose lives are being ruined by extremes of weather. Hear our prayer for countries afflicted by famine and natural disasters. Warm the hearts of governments of wealthy countries to give assistance to victims of disasters and bless the work done by charities like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Lord of shalom, hear our prayer for peace throughout the world, particularly in Ukraine and Sudan and for peace among Jews and Palestinians in Jerusalem. We pray, too for victims of terrorism and oppression that they may find comfort and support in their distress. Bless the work of peacemakers and those who work with the victims of conflict, terrorism, persecution and prejudice.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Lord of healing and well-being, may the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for neighbours who are lonely, anxious, overworked, or who feel undervalued and unloved as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer 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 practical support as well as sympathy to those for whom we pray, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, for it offers them healing, courage, hope, strength and peace.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Holy God, grant that this church, churches in our Circuit and, indeed, churches throughout the world may unite in love and action, so we may bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world in Jesus' name.

'Your kingdom come', '**Your will be done**'.

Abba, heavenly Father, look upon us, our friends and families with loving-kindness. In the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us safe, help us resist the temptation to sin, and, most of all help us to live out the gospel message in all that we do and say, so our lives honour your holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

We continue our worship as we sing 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 with us, my brother:
Glory to God on high.**

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Our Epistle is Romans chapter 10 verses 5 to 15

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law:

"The person who does these things will live by them."

But the righteousness that is by faith says:

"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Amen.

The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 14 verses 22 to 33

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a

mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them:

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying,

"Truly you are the Son of God." Amen.

Sermon: *"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."* Mt 14:28

I know quite a number of Christians who find it difficult to accept any of Jesus' miracles and attempt to find rational explanations for them. However, if we dismiss miracles as mere legends, are we not in danger of denying Jesus' divinity? I have heard people say that Jesus' walking on water could be explained by his being seen from a storm-tossed boat when he was walking along the shore, or on a submerged sandbank. I believe this miracle must have happened as the gospel writer said, though Peter's failure may have been told in the pattern of Rabbinic teaching stories.

The walking on water and stilling of the storm follows the feeding of the five thousand and both have special significance. The feeding miracle may be compared with the manna God provided during the exodus and with Elisha feeding a hundred men with only twenty loaves. Thus, Jesus is shown to be even greater than Moses or Elisha, for he fed five thousand men and unnumbered women and children with minimal resources. The second miracle demonstrates his power over nature and fulfils Job's vision of the Omnipotent God: **'His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.'** I firmly believe that Jesus walked on water: he did not walk along the edge of the Sea of Galilee, nor on concealed sandbanks, for the account said the disciples' boat was a considerable distance from the land, as it was the fourth watch, sometime between three and six o' clock in the morning, probably six or seven hours after it had set out from Bethsaida. Indeed, John's gospel indicated the boat was approximately three and a half miles from shore, so the sandbank theory is highly-flawed.

John tells us that the miraculous feeding led many in the crowd want to make Jesus their king, which is not what he wanted, nor what he came to be. This may be why he had to order his disciples to sail away at once, whilst he went to pray alone: he would not have wanted them to be caught up in such worldly enthusiasm. By the time he was ready to join them, the boat was in the middle of the Sea, buffeted by a fierce headwind. Although several disciples were experienced fishermen, Jesus knew that

everybody on board was afraid, for the sudden squalls on the Sea of Galilee were more than capable of overwhelming a small boat. Therefore, he made his way to them across the water, but his appearance probably as day began to break added to their terror, for human beings cannot walk on water, whereas spirits might. Jesus called out to them, **"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** It is worth noting that the Greek, **'ego eimi'**, literally means **'I am'** – God's name for himself. In effect he implied that he is the Almighty One, who rules the wind and waves which threatened them. Peter's request to walk on the water may sound typically vain, but in fact, it shows a lack of faith, for he prefaced his request with, **"Lord, if it's you,"** so he needed to experience a miracle to believe that the approaching figure was indeed, Christ. At first, Jesus granted his wish, but Peter's limited faith let him down when he felt the wind and saw the waves. He took his eyes off the Lord and sank into the sea, only to be rescued by Christ's saving hand. And, as in the other accounts of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus quietened the wind and waves, demonstrating that he is truly God's Son.

This reading is relevant to Christians today, as a challenge to our faith. It is all too easy to find ourselves out of our depth in life: in church; at home; at work, or a combination of the three. We may then compound our problems by trying to rely on our own resources, rather than appealing to Christ for help. When we pray for help, we cannot expect God to click his fingers and put things right, but he will offer ways forward, if we are open-minded enough to recognize them. There is a story about a devout but misguided Christian in a flood. When the local river broke its banks, waters rushed round his cottage and he was trapped. Soon afterwards, a man rowed up to his front window and told him to climb out, so he could ferry him to safety.

"Thank you, but no," the man replied. "The Lord will save me!" So the man rowed away. An hour later, the water had reached his bedroom and as he stood looking out at the flood and praying, a motor launch roared up. Two lifeboatmen called out, "Open your window, climb aboard and we'll take you to safety."

"Thank you, but no," the man replied. "The Lord will save me!" So the launch left him and went to rescue other people. Two hours later, the man was sitting on his roof with water lapping round his feet. Again he prayed for God to save him. Soon afterwards a helicopter clattered its way to his cottage and hovered above, whilst a man descended on a winch line.

"Come on, mate," said the man, "put this strap round you and we'll lift you to safety."

"Thank you, but no," the man replied. "The Lord will save me!" So the helicopter rumbled its way across the flood, looking for others to save.

Soon afterwards, the cottager arrived at the gates of heaven where he saw the Lord.

"Almighty God," he grumbled, "I'm very disappointed. I kept praying for you to save me from the flood, but you didn't answer me, so here I am."

The Lord sighed: "My child, I don't understand. I sent a rowing boat, then a lifeboat and finally a helicopter. How could you possibly have drowned?"

In my role as a Chaplain I frequently find myself in situations where I feel I'm out of my depth, that I lack the resources to provide the support, comfort or help that residents or carers need. I know that God, who invested his Son's life to redeem fallen humanity, will never sell us short, so I always pray for help and guidance and he's never

let me down, because there is always somebody, or something to draw me to safety. He'll do the same for you if you trust him and look for the help he'll provide. Amen.

We conclude our worship as we sing 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.**

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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.