

Call to Worship: Psalm 82

God presides in the great assembly; he gives judgment among the "gods":

"How long will you defend the unjust and show partiality to the wicked? Defend the cause of the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed. Rescue the weak and needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked. They know nothing, they understand nothing. They walk about in darkness; all the foundations of the earth are shaken.

"I said, 'You are "gods"; you are all sons of the Most High.' But you will die like mere men; you will fall like every other ruler." Rise up, O God, judge the earth. Amen.

The Psalmist calls for justice and righteousness from rulers who effectively set themselves up as gods. Part of our calling is to stand up for the disfranchised and oppressed. Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light of God's love to guide our discipleship. 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. 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:

© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}

Let us pray.

O LORD, our God, your majesty fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens and your enemies fall silent before you. You have set in place the moon and myriad stars in

the night sky. You have created this planet with all the intricacy and wonder of animal and plant life and maintain life in all its fullness by incredible eco-systems. We find it amazing that you care for insignificant, flawed beings like us, yet from the beginning of our history you have reached out to us and ordained that we should be stewards of your creation here on earth. Moreover, you have tried to draw us close to you in a relationship where we may call you, 'Abba, daddy'.

You love us so much that you came into the world as Christ Jesus, not only to share our lives and experiences, to show us how you want us to live by words and deeds of love, but he died at Calvary to break Satan's hold over us. By raising him from the tomb, you opened heaven's gates and through his grace alone, we have the free offer of eternal life and death no longer has the final word. Lord, help us set aside anxieties and distractions, so we may devote ourselves to worshipping you.

We have come to thank you for this beautiful, for people who have loved, inspired and guided us, for all the good things that we enjoy, including opportunities and experiences that enrich our lives. Help us to count our blessings, for they sustain us when times are difficult and remind us of your boundless grace.

However, merciful God, we know our own lives fall short of what they ought to be. In sadness we acknowledge that we have sinned against you in what we have thought, said and done. We have not loved you wholeheartedly; we have not loved our neighbours as ourselves. We are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong, asking you to forgive us for the sake of our Lord Jesus.

Gracious loving Lord, we believe that you have not only heard our prayer, but have breathed forgiveness over us. May the Holy Spirit warm our hearts, so we love and serve both you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, in Jesus' beautiful 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 next hymn, Revd. Timothy Hughes is a Former director of worship at Holy Trinity Brompton, a large Anglican church in central London, who has since been ordained as a minister in the Church of England and appointed Vicar of St Luke's, Gas Street Birmingham. We shall sing hymn number 175, 'Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness,'

1. Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness,

Opened my eyes, let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore you,

Hope of a life spent with you. Chorus:

So here I am to worship,

Here I am to bow down,

Here I am to say that you're my God,

And you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,

Altogether wonderful to me.

2. King of all days, oh so highly exalted,

Glorious in heaven above.

**Humbly you came to the earth you created,
All for love's sake became poor. *Chorus:***

**3. And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross.
And I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross..... *Chorus:***

© Tim Hughes

***In our prayers of intercession, we bring our concern for people nearby and far
away unto the Lord. Let us pray.***

Loving God, often when we listen to the news, we hear about so much pain and suffering, here and abroad, that we are driven to despair, especially as so many of the issues result from humankind's failure to love our neighbours. You love us and, in return we offer ourselves to play what part we can in repairing some of the brokenness around us, although our powers are limited. Nevertheless, we believe that all things are possible for you, so we pray that you will warm the hearts of people with greater power and influence, inspiring them to bring about changes that put right the results of mankind's cruelty, folly, exploitation and indifference.

Heavenly Father, we bring you our concerns about wars currently being waged in many parts of the world. We grieve at the suffering caused by war that we see in the news: destruction, injury, death and displacement, resulting from human inability to co-exist peacefully with neighbours. This is all the more appalling as we commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Second World, yet seem to have failed to learn the need for and value of peace. May the Holy Spirit help the leaders of all nations to recognize that negotiation and compromise are far better than taking up arms when disputes arise and may we learn to live in harmony with our neighbours, too.

Heavenly Father, remember in your mercy the many victims of the recent flash flood by the Guadalupe River in Texas and their friends and families. This reinforces our fears that global warming is already threatening the ability of our planet to maintain life into the future, so we pray that governments, businesses and people in general will learn to use earth's resources carefully, recycle more and waste less for the sake of future generations. Help us to act now, to play our part in caring for the environment, so we honour our responsibilities as stewards of the planet.

Lord of all, we pray for the church, both locally and world-wide. May the Holy Spirit rekindle our desire to share good news with our neighbours, by freely sharing your love with them. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission, so we bring others to know and serve him.

Jesus is the Lord of shalom, the source of healing and well-being, so we pray for neighbours who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those brought low by loneliness, fear, unemployment or need and everybody who is experiencing the agony of bereavement. Wherever possible, Lord, empower us to offer support and friendship to them. Loving Lord, embrace them with the warmth and power of your love, so they may be healed, encouraged, granted both reassurance and an enduring peace.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us lead Christ-centred lives, sharing the love you give in such abundance with both friends and strangers, trusting in your grace and goodness evermore. Amen.

***We continue our worship with a hymn by a Birmingham-trained missionary,
Thomas Colving, written during a day's training course for evangelists at
Chereponi, Northern Ghana. It is set to a Ghanaian love song. Hymn number 249,
'Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,'***

Jesu, Jesu

Fill us with your love,

Show us how to serve

The neighbours we have from you.

1. Kneels at the feet of his friends,

Silently washes their feet,

Master who acts as a slave to them: *Chorus*

2. Neighbours are rich folk and poor,

Neighbours are black folk and white,

Neighbours are nearby and far away: *Chorus*

3. These are the ones we should serve,

These are the ones we should love.

All these are neighbours to us and you: *Chorus*

4. Kneel at the feet of our friends,

Silently washing their feet,

This is the way we should live with you: *Chorus*

© T.S. Colvin {born 1925} – based on a song from northern Ghana

The gospel reading Luke chapter 10 verses 25 to 37

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus.

"Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

"What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

He answered:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' "

"You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"
In reply Jesus said:

"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he travelled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

"Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" The expert in the law replied,

"The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise." Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Sydney Carter, who also wrote 'Lord of the dance' and 'One more step along the world I go'. He also wrote some of the lyrics for Flanders and Swan in the 1950s and 60s – quite a versatile man! We 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.*

© Sydney Carter {1915 – 2004}

Sermon: "And who is my neighbour?" Luke 10:29

Sometimes a seemingly innocent question can be extremely dangerous, like a hand grenade with the safety pin removed! The lawyer's question, "**And who is my neighbour?**" was a trap for Jesus, for whilst before the exile in Babylon, Jews had accepted foreigners as neighbours – remember the command, '**And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt**', unfortunately after the return from exile, **Nehemiah and Ezra** were so determined to make Judaism distinctive they dissolved marriages between Jews and Gentiles and made the purity of their faith of paramount importance. From that time, 'neighbours' were restricted to fellow-Jews. Thus, the lawyer was trying to make Jesus unpopular with the crowd, by including Gentiles as neighbours, possibly even Samaritans, for Jews and Samaritans hated one another with even greater passion than Loyalists and Nationalists in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, or Israelis and Palestinians in Gaza, currently. Their hatred was so intense that, if a Samaritan's shadow fell upon a Jew, the Jew would consider himself ritually defiled and would seek out a priest to be cleansed. Samaritans were as petty: if a Jew left footprints in the sand, a Samaritan would drop straw into them and set the straw alight as a way of saying 'Good riddance'!

Imagine, if you will, telling a parable about Martin McGuinness or Gerry Adams coming to the aid of a robbed and injured Ian Paisley in a Loyalist church or club in the 1970s or 1980s, or alternatively a parable where Ian Paisley was the good neighbour in a Republican bar! You would have put yourself at risk of being beaten up, or killed by telling it, yet Jesus' parable about the Good Samaritan would have been as scandalous to his Jewish listeners, because you don't set the enemy as the hero of your story.

You may wonder why the priest and lawyer would have left a fellow-Jew in such a state. Well, the priest and Levite may have been going to perform sacred duties in the temple, so if they were unsure whether or not the traveller was dead, they could not risk touching him, for each would have been made ritually unclean and could not have performed his duties. Ceremony, therefore, took precedence over compassion. Only the despised enemy was moved by the injured man's plight. Whether or not the Samaritan recognized that the injured man was a Jew, his heart went out to him. Ignoring the dangers of being attacked should the robbers have returned, the Samaritan cleaned and bandaged the injured man's wounds, put him on his donkey, took him to an inn, where he

tended him overnight and then paid the innkeeper to look after the man until he recovered.

Clearly, the Samaritan was the only one to honour the Greatest Commandment – loving both God and neighbour. After he had told the parable, Jesus asked the lawyer, **“Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”** Notice how the lawyer could not bring himself to use the word ‘Samaritan’ in his answer, **“The one who had mercy on him.”** It speaks through the ages, doesn’t it?

Jesus’ message is that everybody is our neighbour, irrespective of race, colour, politics, gender, lifestyle, social status or creed. Nobody is beyond God’s love, even though some of our words and actions grieve and anger him. God loves the sinner, but hates sin. When you read the gospels, you see how Jesus welcomed all-comers, irrespective whether they were fellow-Jews, Gentiles, Roman occupiers, or Samaritans, or, indeed of their social standing. He died for everyone at Calvary, not just for people who deem themselves the predestined elite.

The founders of Methodism believed passionately that all may be saved, so we must set aside our prejudices and reach out to as many who need help as we can. Remember that John Wesley taught: **‘Do All the Good You Can, By All the Means You Can, In All the Ways You Can, In All the Places You Can, At All the Times You Can, To All the People You Can, As long as Ever You Can!’ Amen.**

We conclude our worship with a vision of heaven by a Congregational Minister, Bryn Rees. Its set melody, ‘Tetherdown’, was composed by Gerald Barnes, the organist at Tetherdown URC, in Muswell Hill, London, when Revd. Rees was minister. We shall sing hymn number 255, ‘The kingdom of God is justice and joy,’

**1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God’s power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**

**2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God’s banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**

**3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all!**

© Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}

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.