

Alternative Service for 13th June, 2021 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 92 verses 1 to 5

How good it is to give thanks to you, O LORD, to sing in your honour, O Most High God, to proclaim your constant love every morning and your faithfulness every night, with the music of stringed instruments and with melody on the harp. Your mighty deeds, O LORD, make me glad; because of what you have done, I sing for joy. How great are your actions, LORD! How deep are your thoughts! Amen.

Hymn number 82, 'How great thou art!'

1. O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder

Consider all the works Thy hand hath made,

I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,

Thy power throughout the universe displayed: *Chorus*

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,

How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee,

How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

2. When through the woods and forest glades I wander

And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;

When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur

And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze: *Chorus*

3. And when I think that God His Son not sparing,

Sent Him to die – I scarce can take it in.

That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,

He bled and died to take away my sin. *Chorus*

4. When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation

And take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!

Then I shall bow in humble adoration

And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art! *Chorus*

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Let us pray.

Almighty God, we have come to worship you today, to praise and adore you, for you are our God, Creator of all that exists on earth and throughout the universe. Everywhere we look, nature in all its glory bears witness to your amazing and boundless power, for not only has every living thing been made by you, but you care for and sustain it, too. We, whom you have called here today, seek time in our busy lives to find peace and refreshment of our souls that only you offer. Holy God, take away all anxious thoughts that distract us from concentrating on your holiness and your everlasting love.

Gracious Heavenly Father, in your unmerited and freely-given love, we humbly thank you for each of your abundant blessings, but in particular for sending your beloved Son, Jesus, to be our Redeemer and Friend, through him conquering our two great enemies sin and death, so that we might be drawn close to you as your children. May our hearts be filled with awe and joy at the height, depth and breadth of your grace.

However, merciful God, whereas you are holy and faithful, our own lives are spoilt by sinfulness and selfishness. In shame we humbly confess that we have said and done

things that have hurt other people and angered you. Sometimes we have not helped people who were in need because we were too afraid, or too proud, or we just indifferent to their plight. We feel ashamed, so we turn away from what is wrong, asking you to forgive us for the sake of your Son, Christ Jesus.

We believe that, as Jesus came into the world to save sinners, you have heard our prayer and in your everlasting mercy you offer each of us a fresh start, free from sin. Therefore, Lord, as you have forgiven us, may we gladly forgive those who wrong us. Fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to live out and proclaim the Gospel message in the blessed name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

We say the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples.

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.

Hymn number 102, 'For the beauty of the earth'

**1. For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies: *Chorus:*
*Gracious God, to Thee we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.***

**2. For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale and tree and flower,
Sun and moon, and stars of light: *Chorus***

**3. For the joy of ear and eye,
For the heart and mind's delight,
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight: *Chorus***

**4. For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled: *Chorus***

**5. For each perfect gift of Thine
To our race so freely given;
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven. *Chorus***

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

Almighty God, we have no doubt that all things are possible for you and this is a great comfort to us in our discipleship, for we are aware how limited our own powers are. Guide and empower us as we strive to answer our call to serve Christ Jesus, but when the best we can do is not enough, then reach out and move people who can heal some of the world's brokenness to act instead.

Holy God, we a blessing on our church, that we may a blessing to our community, particularly as we move out of restrictions caused by COVID19. We pray for all churches in our city and for the World Church. Teach us to set aside our divisions and differences, so that we learn to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission Use our love, gifts and graces to not only address the needs of our community, but to help bring people to accept Jesus as the friend, Lord and Saviour of the world.

God of shalom, of peace and unity, we grieve about the number of conflicts in so many parts of the world and so we pray for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. Breathe your Spirit upon national leaders; warm their hearts and guide them along the paths of peace, mercy and justice. We pray in particular that the dispute in Ethiopia will not lead to another famine. like the one in 1984. We ask you to bless mediators who are trying to resolve the conflict.

Loving Lord, inspire and guide people who are campaigning to keep this planet habitable for future generations and those who campaign for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including the distribution of coronavirus vaccines to countries like India and Brazil, where many people are suffering with and dying from coronavirus, but where there are insufficient supplies. May your Spirit inspire countries that can offer practical support to do so swiftly.

Heavenly Father, we pray for people living with a dementia, whose memories and faculties are diminishing and whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Remember, in your mercy, their families, friends and carers who are struggling to cope, too. Grant them all the support they need to keep going.

We pray for people we know who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear. Lord, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but embrace them with your love, so they may be comforted and find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

We ask your blessing upon everybody who is working for our wellbeing, especially members of the NHS, scientists who are developing vaccines and cures. We ask you to bless carers and key-workers, as they try to bring us through these days of anguish. Keep them safe and grant them success in their endeavours.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and help us live Christ-centred lives by sharing your abundant love with all-comers and living out the Good News in words and deeds, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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 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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The Gospel reading is Mark chapter 4 verses 26 to 34

Jesus went on to say,

“The Kingdom of God is like this. A man scatters seed in his field. He sleeps at night, is up and about during the day, and all the while the seeds are sprouting and growing. Yet he does not know how it happens. The soil itself makes the plants grow and bear fruit; first the tender stalk appears, then the ear, and finally the ear full of corn. When the corn is ripe, the man starts cutting it with his sickle, because harvest time has come.”

“What shall we say the Kingdom of God is like?” asked Jesus. “What parable shall we use to explain it? It is like this. A man takes a mustard seed, the smallest seed in the world, and plants it in the ground.

After a while it grows up and becomes the biggest of all plants. It puts out such large branches that the birds come and make their nests in its shade.”

Jesus preached his message to the people, using many other parables like these; he told them as much as they could understand. He would not speak to them without using parables, but when he was alone with his disciples, he would explain everything to them. Amen.

Address: ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like.’ Mark 4: 26 – 34

35 years ago, I was invited to replant my parent's favourite escallonia bush in my garden at Wordsley before it was ruined by workmen renovating their house. I readily agreed, but circumstances led to it being left for replanted for a whole day, so by the time it was in the ground, the roots had dried out. Despite watering it frantically, the poor shrub failed to recover: the leaves shrivelled and fell until the plant was skeletonised – a rebuke to my initial neglect.

However, as I dug up the dead escallonia, I noticed a nine-inch long shoot attached to the root, upon which were a few healthy-looking leaves. I carefully cut the shoot from the dead plant, keeping a little of the root to which it was attached, dipped it in rooting powder and planted it in the garden, hardly expecting it to last for more than a few days. It didn't die; nor did it show any inclination to grow until the next spring when it formed a new bush with a few white flowers appearing that July. To my amazement, it has continued to

grow, year by year, until I have had to prune it quite. Imagine my surprise when I found that the small shoot had expanded to eight feet in length with its diameter of six inches requiring the attention of a saw, not my secateurs.

The idea of a God using a remnant to renew his covenant with human beings is a theme that goes back as far as Noah and the Flood, but it was also used by Jesus in the second of his growth parables today. Jesus taught how, in the tropics, a tiny mustard seed can grow into a large shrub – almost like a tree, far out of proportion to the size of the seed itself. In a similar way, he said, the kingdom of God – led by the Church – would grow hugely – big enough to support birds, by which he meant that Gentiles would find a home within God's kingdom, not only Jews.

His first parable answers the question of how God's Kingdom can grow in a sceptical, often hostile world. The sower represents those who share the gospel message, like scattering seed upon the ground. Once the seed has been sown, the sower leaves the germination and growth to God. He does not know how the words of faith planted into people's hearts grow, but he trusts in God's grace to produce sturdy plants that bear a big harvest. In other words, if we do the part God asks of us, he will do the rest: we are not expected to do everything, for we need time to be – and to live for – ourselves, otherwise life would be no more than a burden, rather than a gift from God that we should enjoy to the full.

If numbers of people who attend church nowadays worries you, take comfort in the images in today's readings. We are part of God's remnant – from which he can build a new community of faith, better and stronger than we have seen for a long time. If you think it is unlikely, consider how Methodism mushroomed during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, or how the Great Welsh Revival of 1905 brought tens of thousands back to the faith. I believe our society is due for a revival at anytime now: perhaps coronavirus will encourage people to seek more meaning to life than they find in selfish materialism, or in reality television.

Our challenge is to witness to the amazing love and grace of God through Christ Jesus, to sow the seeds of faith in our neighbours' hearts by our deeds as well as our words, for if we dare to imitate the grace of Jesus in the way we live, those who do not know him will be intrigued by us and will want to discover our secret – and that helps the seed we have planted to germinate. God will do the rest! Amen.

Hymn number 526, 'Lord of all hopefulness,'

- 1. Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
Whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
Your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.**
- 2. Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith.
Whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
Be there at our labours, and give us, we pray,
Your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.**
- 3. Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
Your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.**

**4. Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
Whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
Your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.**

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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.