

## A service for 13<sup>th</sup> March, 2022: Lent 2 (StF)

### Lent Prayer.

Loving, heavenly Father, it is so easy to abuse our authority over others, to misuse our spiritual gifts and skills and to possess more than we need, rather than helping less fortunate neighbours. Help us to resist temptation to act selfishly and cruelly. Instead, guide us by the perfect example of your dear Son, our Saviour, who gave himself generously as the atonement offering for the sins of the world. Amen.

### Call to worship: Psalm 92 verses 1 to 4

It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High, to proclaim your love in the morning and your faithfulness at night, to the music of the ten-stringed lyre and the melody of the harp. For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD; I sing for joy at the works of your hands. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by a Methodist minister, Revd. Fred Pratt Green. We shall 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 in us, my Brother:  
Glory to God on high.**

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000} StF version

### *Let us pray*

Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth, Sustainer of all life, and Saviour of the world, we come to worship and adore you today. Your wisdom and power are as unfathomable as your love is boundless and everlasting. You for you created us in your image, gave us stewardship over the world and want to draw us into the closest of relationships with you, where, as your earthly children, your holy priesthood, we may call you 'Abba', 'Daddy'. We find it remarkable that, even when we set ourselves against you and made ourselves your enemy, you persevered with us and shared our mortal flesh through Jesus Christ.

Jesus grew up among people like us, sharing our experiences and emotions, yet lived without sinning, showing us how you want us to live. We believe his death and resurrection broke the shackles of sin and death and through Christ alone we have eternal life. Therefore, amazing heavenly Father, take away all our anxieties and distractions, so we may pray to you in faith, sing your praises joyfully and listen to your guiding word, to offer you all honour, glory power and praise in our worship, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

**Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession to the Lord. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy', please reply, 'Hear our prayer'.**

Heavenly Father, thank you for your boundless, steadfast love that offers us blessings day-by-day. Thank you for opportunities and experiences that fulfil us, for challenges that both test us and shape our character and for people who have guided and cared for us. Most of all, thank you for loving us at times when we have been faithless, loveless and unlovable.

**'Lord, in your mercy' ..... 'Hear our prayer'.**

Merciful Lord, we ask you to pardon and restore us as we recall situations when we have neither loved nor served you wholeheartedly and when we have failed to love our neighbours as we know we ought, especially when they are in distress, or need help. Forgive us, too, when we try to justify our sinfulness, rather than do what we know we should. Help us to change our ways, so we become more Christ-centred and less self-centred.

**'Lord, in your mercy' ..... 'Hear our prayer'.**

Gracious and faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow you once more, unburdened by guilt. Therefore, Lord, as you offer us a fresh start, fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in the blessed name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer our Lord 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.**

***We continue our worship as we sing a hymn written by Samuel Crossman, who lived in troubled times: in his lifetime the English Civil War and the Restoration happened; King Charles 1 was beheaded, "The Book of Common Prayer" was outlawed and the celebration of Christmas was forbidden. He was born in Suffolk, graduated from Cambridge University, was appointed King's Chaplain, became Prebendary or Dean of Bristol Cathedral, where in 1664 he wrote a pamphlet of nine poems, one of which was "My song is love unknown". We sing hymn number 277, 'My song is love unknown;'***

**1. My song is love unknown,  
My Saviour's love for me,  
Love to the loveless shown,  
That they might lovely be.**

**O who am I.**

**That for my sake  
My Lord should take  
Frail flesh and die?**

**2. He came from his blest throne,  
Salvation to bestow;  
But men made strange and none  
The longed-for Christ would know.  
But O my Friend,  
My Friend indeed,**

Who at my need  
His life did spend.

3. Sometimes they strew his way,  
And his sweet praises sing;  
Resounding all the day  
Hosannas to their King.  
Then 'Crucify!'  
Is all their breath,  
And for his death  
They thirst and cry.

4. Why, what hath my Lord done?  
What makes this rage and spite?  
He made the lame to run,  
He gave the blind their sight.  
Sweet injuries!  
Yet they at these  
Themselves displease  
And 'gainst him rise.

5. They rise and needs will have  
My dear Lord made away:  
A murderer they save,  
The Prince of Life they slay;  
Yet cheerful he  
To suffering goes,  
That he his foes  
From thence might free.

6. In life no house, no home,  
My Lord on earth might have;  
In death no friendly tomb  
But what a stranger gave.  
What may I say?  
Heaven was his home;  
But mine the tomb  
Wherein he lay.

7. Here might I stay and sing,  
No story so divine:  
Never was love, dear King,  
Never was grief like thine!  
This is my Friend,  
In whose sweet praise  
I all my days  
Could gladly spend.

© Samuel Crossman {1624 – 1684}

***We come now to our prayers of intercession. We begin with a prayer for Ukraine.  
Let us pray.***

Lord of all nations, you made us and understand everything about us. You declared creation 'good', yet we have been poor stewards of the world and our failure to live in peace with our neighbours is heart-breaking. At present our hearts go out to Ukraine and its peoples, as they face attacks by Russia.

In your mercy Lord, be with all Ukrainians: President Zelenskyy, his advisors, the armed forces and militia as they resist Russia's might; civilians, women, children and elderly, who have to shelter from bombardment and who face diminishing supplies. Grant them steadfast courage and look on them with compassion. Remember, too, Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. May they be made welcome and receive all the support they need.

We pray that a peace treaty can be negotiated to end the conflict, that the Kremlin's plans are frustrated and so Ukraine will remain a free, democracy after hostilities have ceased. May other nations continue to provide practical support and hospitality not only during the conflict, but as long as help is needed.

Above all, Lord, restore peace to Ukraine and help it rebuild what war has destroyed. We offer our prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

***We continue with prayers about our concerns for the world.***

Heavenly Father, although we have been blessed with this achingly beautiful planet, we grieve and lament about the brokenness we see here and abroad. We want to play what part we can in making the world a better place, but we recognize that our own powers are limited and confess that, at times, many complex issues threaten to overwhelm us. However, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with greater ability, power and influence than we possess; people who can heal the suffering around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Nevertheless, Lord, give us the courage to play what part we can by campaigning against injustice, by doing all we can to relieve poverty, by learning to use the earth's resources more carefully and by encouraging others to do so, too.

Lord of the world, as well as praying for an end to the conflict in Ukraine, we pray for peace across the world. Guide the leaders of all nations to find better ways of resolving disputes with neighbours by negotiation rather than resorting to force. Instead, may world leaders learn to rule with justice and mercy, for only then can true peace be established and prevail.

In your mercy, remember, O Lord, all victims of warfare, terrorism and persecution. Grant them the resources and encouragement they need to rebuild their lives and to be healed in body, mind and spirit.

We pray for the people of Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan where serious famines may lead to catastrophic loss of life. May the situation in Ukraine not divert the attention of governments and relief agencies from providing much-needed aid.

Gracious Lord of well-being, look with compassion on people around us who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, particularly those whose condition has been worsened as a result of a lack of treatment during the last two years of pandemic. May they receive the professional care and support they need to be restored to health and may they experience your loving presence to provide comfort and hope in their time of need.

Lord, hear our prayer for people who have lost loved-ones during the past two years, both because of COVID19 and for other reasons, but who have been unable either to mark their passing or to mourn because of restrictions at funerals. We pray for neighbours who are suffer from long COVID19, depression and anxiety, unemployment, or debt because of the pandemic. May they be helped to regain their well-being. Gracious God, we pray for neighbours who are lonely, or afraid, or whose relationships have broken down and, not least of all, children whose education and general wellbeing have been seriously harmed during the pandemic. Lord, wherever possible, help us to offer them practical support and friendship and we ask you to embrace everybody for

whom we pray with the warmth of your love, offering them healing, courage, comfort and lasting peace.

Holy God, we pray for churches in our district and, indeed, the World Church as we emerge from the shadow of coronavirus. Help us learn new, effective ways to serve our communities and to reflect the goodness and grace of Jesus by serving him with united, faithful hearts.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and help us to share the abundance of your love with our neighbours, so our lives bring you honour through Christ Jesus our Lord and friend. Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 13 verses 31 to 35**

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him,  
“Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.”

He said to them,

“Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’” Amen.

*Our penultimate hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for Spring Harvest in 1984. Number 272, it is often known as ‘Shine, Jesus, shine!’*

**1. From heaven You came,  
Helpless babe, entered our world,  
Your glory veiled; not to be served  
But to serve and give Your life  
That we might live. Chorus:**

*This is our God, the Servant King,  
He calls us now to follow Him,  
To bring our lives as a daily offering  
Of worship to the Servant King.*

**2. There in the garden of tears,  
My heavy load he chose to bear;  
His heart with sorrow was torn,  
‘Yet not My will but Yours,’ He said. Chorus:**

**3. Come see His hands and His feet,  
The scars that speak of sacrifice ;  
Hands that flung stars into space  
To cruel nails surrendered. Chorus:**

**4. So let us learn how to serve,  
And in our lives enthrone Him;  
Each other’s needs to prefer,  
For it is Christ we’re serving. Chorus:**

© Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Address: “..... and on the third day I will finish my work”, Luke chapter 13 verse 32.

King Herod Antipas was a vile ruler. A son of Herod the Great, who had ordered the execution of his second wife and her sons. He was made Tetrach or ruler over Galilee

and Perea by Augustus Caesar following a bitter dispute with his brothers. Antipas had scandalised many Jews by divorcing his wife to marry his niece, Herodias, who was already married to his half-brother, Herod, son of Mariamne II! John the Baptist soundly condemned this immoral and probably illegal union, as a result of which he had been imprisoned and later executed when Herodias' daughter, Salome, was rashly promised anything she wanted by her step-father. (Matters got even worse when Salome married Herod Antipas' younger brother, Philip – her Great uncle!)

Herod was not popular with the Pharisees, not only as a result of his lifestyle, but because he held power through the Romans, so it seems surprising that a group of them warned Jesus as he travelled towards Jerusalem. However, as Herod believed Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist, it is possible he wanted to warn him off, rather than add another murder to his list of offences. Therefore, although many Pharisees were antagonistic towards Jesus, some might have gone as Herod's messengers, for they acknowledged that he was a prophet, who deserved their warning, though they disliked his message. Of course, an ulterior motive may have been to want Jesus away from Jerusalem that Passover, lest he cause trouble.

Irrespective why they warned Jesus, the Pharisees were given a defiant answer by our Lord. Indeed, Herod is the only person Jesus is recorded as having treated with contempt, both in this incident and when he was brought before him after he had been betrayed. By saying, **“Go and tell that fox,”** Christ was not just indicating that Herod was a crafty, cruel, worthless man. Instead, he referred to a verse in the second chapter of the Song of Songs, **‘Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.’** Herod Antipas was like a fox that ruined the vineyard – a term often used to symbolise the Jewish nation. In other words, Jesus identified Herod as somebody who undermined the covenant between God and his chosen people. Christ stated that he still had his Father's work of healing and reconciliation to carry out now and in the near future, but his reference to **‘the third day I shall finish my work’** showed that his ministry would soon come to an end – through his act of redemption at Calvary and, of course, his resurrection three days later. Jesus was not going to allow Herod's malice to deflect him from doing his Father's will, for he had come to reconcile and reclaim sinners in a new, covenant, based on love and faith.

Jesus' lament, **“Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets, you stone the messengers God has sent you”** began with references to incidents when the kings and high priests killed prophets whose message was unpalatable: for example in the second book of Chronicles **King Joash** and his officials stoned **Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest**, when he rebuked them for worshiping Baal; in chapter 26 of his book, Jeremiah related how the prophet, **Uriah, son of Shemaiah**, who had the same warning message for **King Jehoiakim** as he did, was brought back from Egypt where he had sought refuge and killed with a sword in Jerusalem. However, instead of condemning Jerusalem and its people, Jesus expressed a deep longing to enfold them in his arms, to care for them as a hen cares for its chicks, but his complaint is that they would not let him comfort and protect them.

By rejecting him, not only Jerusalem but the Jewish nation would reject God and would suffer as a result of their choice, **‘until the time comes when you say, ‘God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord.’** This does not mean the triumphal entry at Passover, for the adoring crowd was mainly composed of Galileans who had gone to the capital city to celebrate the festival. Instead, it refers to the Second Coming, when Jesus will return in triumph and glory. In other words, although the Jews rejected God's new covenant – and would suffer as a result – the door was not completely

closed against them: Christ's second coming would provide another opportunity to return to the fold, for God's mercy is boundless and wonderful.

This Lent we are challenged to choose wisely in an uncertain world where values are constantly being undermined. We live in a society where our faith often conflicts with worldly desires for material prosperity, prestige and power, but if our faith is subverted by these false values, we become what St. Paul described as **'enemies of Christ's death on the cross.'** Remember, we are citizens of heaven whose values should be the same as Christ's. In the last few years we have seen large companies collapse, but while employees and contractors were left high and dry, company executives walked away with huge bonuses. It is abundantly clear society as a whole and we as individuals need to reassess our values and choices. There's nothing wrong getting ahead in the world, provided it is done honestly, without trampling over others and is not at the cost of relationships with family, friends and God! After all, John Wesley advocated earning as much as we can – but only to use it for the benefit of the needy. As an Oxford student he even saved £4 per annum by growing his hair long, therefore not needing a wig, so he could give the sum he saved to the poor. We can choose to follow Jesus' example of caring for others, even if we find it hard to like them, or we can turn to self-interest. We can exploit others for our own ends, perhaps buying goods made cheaply by sweated labour in the Third World, often by children as young as five, but sold at normal prices– or we can take a stand, just as Christ stood up for the poor and marginalised around him.

**Why should we choose Jesus' way? He is simply the personification of God's love for everybody. He laid down his life to cancel the debt of human sins and to draw us into a close relationship, where we can call God 'Abba' – Daddy! Surely, our only response can be our own sacrifice of love and service to our Saviour, Lord and friend. Amen.**

*Our closing hymn was written by Sydney Carter for the School of Southwark Cathedral in 1971. It was intended to be chanted unaccompanied, except by a tabor and the simple melody was named after the Provost of the Cathedral, Revd. Ernest Southcott, but has been misspelt in hymnals as 'Southcote'. Hymn number 476, 'One more step along the world I go'.*

**1. One more step along the world I go,  
One more step along the world I go;  
From the old things to the new  
Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus:*  
*And it's from the old I travel to the new;  
Keep me travelling along with you.***

**2. Round the corner of the world I turn,  
More and more about the world I learn;  
All the new things that I see  
You'll be looking at along with me: *Chorus:***

**3. As I travel through the bad and good,  
Keep me travelling the way I should;  
Where I see no way to go  
You'll be telling me the way, I know: *Chorus:***

**4. Give me courage when the world is rough,  
Keep me loving though the world is tough;**

Leap and sing in all I do,  
Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus:*

5. You are older than the world can be,  
You are younger than the life in me;  
Ever old and ever new,

Keep me travelling along with you: *Chorus*    © *Sydney Carter {1915 – 2004}*

***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.