

## A service for 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2021

### Call to worship: Psalm 34 verses 8 & 9 (New Living Translation)

Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who trust in him! Let the LORD'S people show him reverence, for those who honour him will have all they need. Amen.

*Let us sing a hymn I began three years ago, but which took until last Wednesday to finish to my satisfaction. After rewriting many of the original words, I have now changed the melody, so little remains of the original! 'Lord Jesus Christ, our Church's Head'.*

**1. Lord Jesus Christ, our Church's Head,**

**We've come to worship and adore:  
Come, feed us with the living Bread,  
Food to sustain us evermore.**

**2. O Lord, who Moses' people fed**

**When they were hungry and afraid:  
You gave them manna for their bread –  
Their anger and their doubts allayed.**

**3. Great Spirit, who, one Pentecost**

**Filled six-score wav'ers with your might  
And sent them to reclaim the lost;  
Come, turn our darkness into light.**

**4. O Trinity, with living Bread,**

**Come, fill and guide us in this hour,  
So we may follow in Christ's stead,  
Emboldened by the Spirit's power.**

*M. Rider 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 {to "Winchester New" StF182}*

### ***Let us pray***

Lord of life, your Word transformed darkness and chaos into this vast swirling universe of stars, planets and moons. You not only created life but formed eco-systems which enable life to continue. Your wisdom and might are fathomless, so we are amazed that you reached out to feeble and flawed humankind, offering us guidance through the patriarchs and prophets. Even when we rebelled against your teaching and set ourselves in opposition to you, your love for us is so great that you did not abandon us, but instead took our mortal flesh and lived among us as Christ Jesus.

He came to show us how we should live fulfilled and holy lives by his words and actions, but he also came to bear the judgment for the sins of the whole world by becoming the one perfect sacrifice on a cross at Calvary.

By dying Jesus broke the power of sin and when he was raised, he offers us everlasting life as his great gift of grace, not something we can grasp by works, nor which we deserve. Death no longer has the final word. Lord, we come to worship you with joy and awe. May all honour, glory, power and praise be yours, now and for evermore. Amen.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say "Gracious God", please respond with "have mercy on us".***

Lord, we have come to thank you for your gift of life, for this beautiful world in which we live, for the many good things we enjoy, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, for experiences and opportunities that have delighted us, but above all things, thank

you for being our Good Shepherd, for we know that even when we stray from you, when we are loveless and unlovable, you will seek us out and save us from our folly.

**'Gracious God'** ..... 'have mercy on us'.

Holy God, when we consider ourselves as straying sheep, we remember our failures to love and serve you wholeheartedly and to love our neighbours as we know we should. .... For the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do, forgive us O Lord and bring us back to you in our deeds and words, so we may be your holy people.

**'Gracious God'** ..... 'have mercy on us'.

Merciful Lord, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have already pardoned us. Lord God, teach us to share your gift of love with all-comers, so we may honour you in the beautiful name of Jesus. 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.**

*We continue our worship with Stuart Townend's 1996 version of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. Hymn number 481, 'The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;'*

**1. The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;**

**He makes me lie in pastures green,**

**He leads me by the still, still waters,**

**His goodness restores my soul. *Chorus***

*And I will trust in you alone,*

*And I will trust in you alone,*

*For your endless mercy follows me,*

*Your goodness will lead me home.*

**2. He guides my ways in righteousness,**

**And he anoints my head with oil;**

**And my cup – it overflows with joy,**

**I feast on his pure delights. *Chorus***

*And I will trust in you alone,*

*And I will trust in you alone,*

*For your endless mercy follows me,*

*Your goodness will lead me home.*

**3. And though I walk the darkest path –**

**I will not fear the evil one,**

**For you are with me, and your rod and staff**

**Are the comfort I need to know. *Chorus***

*And I will trust in you alone,*

*And I will trust in you alone,*

*For your endless mercy follows me,*

*Your goodness will lead me home.*

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

Heavenly Father, we offer praise and thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet on which we live. However, whenever we hear or read the news, we are

reminded about the world's brokenness, much of which is the result of human failure, greed, cruelty, pride, foolishness, selfishness and worst of all, indifference. Lord, we know that you have blessed us and as a result offer ourselves to serve as your earthly hands as we seek to help neighbours who are in trouble or in need. Grant us the patience, wisdom, courage and compassion to act as Jesus would act, but in situations where our best is not enough, we pray that you will reach out to others who can bring about healing and wholeness, for to you all things are possible.

Holy God, we ask you to revive our church and churches throughout the world, particularly as restrictions caused by COVID19 are eased, so that we may a blessing to our communities and to people further afield. Help us set aside our divisions and differences, so we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him as a united body of believers. Bless and use our love, gifts and graces to share Good News in all we do and say, so our lives reveal the grace of Jesus.

Almighty God, events like the terrible floods in Germany and Belgium and wildfires in many countries with mass destruction and the loss of many lives are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for people affected by the floods and fires and pray for people who are campaigning against pollution and irresponsible consumerism. May not only governments but all peoples recognize the need for change, so that future generations will have a habitable world to inherit.

God of shalom, of peace and harmony, we pray for peace in a world defiled with conflicts, persecution, terrorism, prejudice and sectarianism. We pray for national leaders to seek justice and mercy in their dealings, so peace may flow like a healing river and we pray for healing of the divisions we see in our own society. Let your peace begin our relationships with our neighbours, so our lives reflect what we ask for the world.

Author of wellbeing, we pray for people who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those whose lives are blighted with pain and anxiety especially when treatment has been held up because of the pandemic. May they receive treatment to restore their health, or at least mitigate the results of neglect and delay. We pray for everybody whose mental and spiritual health has been adversely affected by lockdown restrictions. May they not only seek but receive they support they need.

Remember, too, people who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned. ....

Lord, help us to offer them both friendship and practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be blessed with courage, hope, healing and enduring peace.

Gracious God, we continue to ask your blessing upon everybody who has been working for our wellbeing during this crisis, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and key-workers. Dearest Lord, grant them success in their work and keep them safe.

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 living bread you give us in such abundance with our neighbours, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

***We continue our worship with a hymn translated in 1940 from an Urdu lyric. The translator was Dermott Monahan, son of a Wesleyan Methodist missionary, who,***

*like his father, served in Southern India, most of his life, though he was educated in England and was trained at Handsworth College, Birmingham. The melody is a Pakistani folk song. Hymn number 252, 'Jesus the Lord said: "I am the Bread,"'*

1. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,  
The Bread of Life for the world am I.  
The Bread of Life for the world am I,  
The Bread of Life for the world am I.'  
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,  
The Bread of Life for the world am I'.

2. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Vine –  
The true and fruitful Vine am I.' .....

3. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Way,  
The true and living Way am I.' .....

4. Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the Light,  
The one true Light of the world am I.' .....

5. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,  
The Resurrection and the Life am I.' .....

© tr. Dermott Monahan (1906 – 57) *Singing the Faith* version

### **Our Gospel reading is John chapter 6 verses 51 to 58**

Jesus declared, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them,

"I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever." Amen.

**Sermon: 'All who eat my flesh and drink my blood remain in me, and I in them.'** John 6:56

In 1904, Evan Roberts, a twenty-six-year-old ex-coalminer, led a great revival of faith throughout Wales, bringing more than 100000 back to God. Not only were his congregations moved by the Holy Spirit, but he preached that they should be joyful, unlike the solemn Calvinists, for he declared his listeners were living in the light of God's salvation. How, then, could they not be happy? The hymns of that revival mirrored the fervour and joy of knowing God's love for repentant sinners.

In his letter to the Ephesian, Paul exhorted them to, '**let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. Then you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, making music to the Lord in your hearts.**' This wasn't something to be done only when things were going well, but in times of hardship and persecution also, for God does not walk away from us in those times, but gives us the strength to bear life's burdens if only we let him.

Ten years ago, I received a telephone call from a local funeral director, asking me if I would conduct a simple, basic funeral for them on next Friday morning. As I was supposed to be on duty at Wednesfield MHA, my initial thought was to say I was unavailable, but what the caller said next stopped me in my tracks: the funeral was for a man, not much older than my son, who had committed suicide because he had been unable to come to terms with his own brother's suicide a couple of years earlier! The P.A. had tried unsuccessfully every other priest and minister she knew, because the firm knows I have work commitments, but as I do not charge for funerals, they have sometimes asked me bereaved families can't afford the minister's fee. It meant I would have to make up the hours at work, but I knew I couldn't turn down the request and was confident that my Manager would be sympathetic – which she was.

I confess that, having agreed to conduct the funeral, I felt quite anxious and inadequate at the prospect of visiting the family to discuss funeral details, because the death of a young person is difficult in any circumstance, let alone when he has taken his own life. I didn't know what the deceased man's mother and sister were feeling at that time, but it was not an interview that I looked forward to, for I'd never faced that situation before. I knew all I could do was to offer practical support and prayer to the family, but I did so knowing that the Spirit will work through me if I let her. I believe the Lord will guide us through emotional minefields, as he has always done for me when I have prayed for help in situations where I have felt totally inadequate. I can still praise and thank God even in the face of awful situations like this, for I know he is with us – even though I cannot understand his purpose.

You may ask why I am convinced that God is with us even in the direst of situations. Look at our gospel reading. Bible commentators have disputed whether or not these are the actual words of Jesus, or editing by John, giving an eucharistic twist to what Jesus actually told the crowd. Whatever the case, the message is straightforward enough. Jesus is not just a prophet, a miracle-worker, a healer – but still only a man; he is God in man – the second Adam who saves us all from separation from God the Father because of our sins. At the time of Jesus, the Jews still offered sacrifices in the temple: thanksgiving offerings; guilt offerings, all were made to seek God's approval and forgiveness. Sin offerings involved the blood of the sacrifice being scattered over the altar, for blood represented life to the Israelites and – as the wages of sin is death – they offered animal's blood, or the life-giving force, back to God to acknowledge their repentance.

The Law of Moses reminded the Israelites **why** they should honour God and obey his commandments, because he had manifested himself by freeing them from slavery, guided them through the wilderness and established them in the Promised Land. Jews still base their faith on God's actions all those years ago, but the 613 Rules of Righteousness made life very difficult and despite all their sacrifices they could not restore them to a right relationship with God the Father. It is for this reason that Jesus' words are so important to us, because they reveal God's saving grace in Jesus, especially when we take Holy Communion. In that service, we remember how Christ offered himself as the perfect sacrifice to atone for all the sins of the world, an offering that broke Satan's power. His blood, scattered metaphorically on the altar is our justification by faith. The bread he talks of is love, our spiritual food: his teachings which show us how to live and the gift of the Holy Spirit who empowers our discipleship. When we remember such grace, how can we fail to rejoice and sing the Lord's praises? We receive that living bread through prayer, fellowship and Bible study. Then, having

refreshed our souls, we are ready to go out into the world to serve in his name and we certainly need to.

As we emerged from the worst of the pandemic, we need to ensure we recover as a body of believers, so we can address some of the brokenness that COVID19 has wrought during the past eighteen months: loneliness; depression; anxiety; unemployment; debt and bereavement, to name but a few. We cannot do everything on our own, but we can support groups or charities that are striving to help or we can befriend and support people around us who have been broken by coronavirus. Our Church is built upon the foundations of God's amazing, redemptive love, living bread that sustains our discipleship. Let us use that love to bring healing and hope in Jesus' name. Amen.

*We close our worship with a hymn written by the Welsh equivalent of Charles Wesley. William Williams of Pantycelyn, nicknamed "The sweet singer of Wales", wrote eight hundred hymns, all in Welsh. Fortunately for us, this one was translated by Peter Williams – no relation of William's – and was set to John Hughes' tune, "Cwm Rhondda", in time for the Welsh Revival of 1905. We shall sing hymn number 465, 'Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,'*

**1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty;  
Hold me with thy powerful hand:  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
Feed me now and evermore.**

**2. Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through:  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
Be thou still my strength and shield.**

**3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of death, and hell's destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side:  
Songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever give to thee.**

*© William Williams (1717 – 1791) trans. by P. Williams (1722 – 1796)*

### ***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.