

A service for 16th August, 2026 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him. Amen.

We are Church, people with many differences, yet united in Jesus Christ: people with a variety of gifts and graces, yet invited by Jesus to use them for God's kingdom. Our opening hymn was written in 1998 by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter, when he was only thirty-three years old. Hymn number 24, 'Come, now is the time to worship.'

Come, now is the time to worship.

Come, now is the time to give your heart.

Come, just as you are to worship.

Come, just as you are before your God, come.

One day every tongue

Will confess you are God,

One day every knee will bow.

Still, the greatest treasure remains

For those who gladly choose You now.

Come, now is the time to worship

© Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we are gathered here to worship and adore you today, for you are the Light of the universe, King of Glory, a God of wisdom, might and love. Although we rebelled against you, at the right time you came as Jesus Christ to teach us how we should live through his words and deeds. His life, death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death, offering us eternal life through faith in him, not as something we deserve or can earn. Amazing God, as we come before your throne of grace, take away all our anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Thank you, Lord, for the many blessings we receive from you: our wonderful world, the beauty of nature on this summer's day, our work and our rest, our homes, food, family and friends. Above all these blessings, thank you for loving us even when we are loveless and unlovable, for, whilst you are holy, our lives are marred by our sinfulness.

Merciful heavenly Father, we confess that, however hard we try, we still say and do things that 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, you hear our prayer and breathe forgiveness upon us. In response to your grace, help us, Lord, to love and serve both you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, 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.

We continue our worship with a hymn by Gerald Coates and Noel Richards. Gerald Coates was an evangelical who founded the Pioneer movement of churches, whilst Noel Richards is a Welshman, who was inspired to write hymns as a teenager, after he heard a concert by Graham Kendrick. It was this darkness that Jesus brought the light of love to defeat and the same light which we are charged to continue to bear in his name. Hymn number 405, 'Great is the darkness that covers the earth'.

**1. Great is the darkness that covers the earth,
Oppression, injustice and pain
Nations are slipping in hopeless despair,
Though many have come in your name.
Watching while sanity dies,**

Touched by the madness and lies. *Chorus:*

Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus,

Pour out your spirit we pray.

Come Lord Jesus, come Lord Jesus,

Pour out your spirit on us today.

**2. May now your church rise with power and love,
This glorious gospel proclaim.**

In every nation salvation will come

To those who believe in your name.

Help us bring light to this world

That we might speed your return. *Chorus:*

Great celebrations on that final day

When out of the heavens you come

Darkness will vanish, all sorrow will end

And rulers will bow at your throne.

Our great commission complete,

Then face to face we shall meet. *Chorus:* Gerald Coates (b. 1944) & Noel Richards (b. 1955)

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others. When I say 'Lord, in your mercy', please respond with, 'Hear our prayer'.

Lord of all, we pray for our amazing world which is suffering because of our failure to live as you have commanded us to. In particular, we remember all places where there is war, conflict, discrimination and fear. Lord we pray that you will inspire leaders of nations to turn away from violence and seek justice and mercy for those they govern. We ask for swift and

just conclusions to wars that are being waged at present, especially in the Holy Land, Ukraine and Iran and, at the same time, we remember victims of conflicts, prejudice and persecution, asking that they may find peace, refuge and security.

‘Lord, in your mercy’,**‘Hear our prayer’**.

Creator God, we pray for victims of disasters both natural and man-made, refugees, people who are hungry, overlooked and homeless. We think in particular of the people of Venezuela and Japan as they recover from earthquakes and Canada and much of Europe, where wildfires are wreaking havoc. We ask blessings on emergency and relief workers in these troubled areas. May you strengthen and comfort them.

‘Lord, in your mercy’,**‘Hear our prayer’**.

Lord of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, we bring our concerns to you for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit, for those who are lonely, needy, troubled and afraid. We pray for people whose lives are coming to an end and for all who are grieving the loss of loved-ones. In a time of silence, we offer names of those for whom we are especially concerned, confident that you already know their needs and will reach out to them.....

Help us to offer them practical support and friendship and enfold them into your merciful arms, that they may find healing, hope, comfort and transcending peace.

‘Lord, in your mercy’,**‘Hear our prayer’**.

Almighty God, we pray for this church, churches in ours and local Circuits and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth. Unite us in mission, so we build up your kingdom with acts of grace and goodness.

‘Lord, in your mercy’,**‘Hear our prayer’**.

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends, keeping us safe and free from sin. Most of all, help us to share your abundant love with friends and strangers, in Jesus’ wonderful name. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 15 verses 10 to 28

Jesus called the crowd to him and said,

“Listen and understand. What goes into a person’s mouth does not make them ‘unclean’, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what makes them ‘unclean.’” Then the disciples came to him and asked,

“Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?”

He replied,

“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

Peter said,

“Explain the parable to us.”

“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a person ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a people ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make them ‘unclean.’”

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out,

“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

He answered,

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him.

“Lord, help me!” she said.

He replied,

“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”

“Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered,

“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. Amen.

“For the love of God is broader / Than the measures of the mind; / And the heart of the Eternal / Is most wonderfully kind. // But we make his love too narrow / By false limits of our own; / And we magnify his strictness / With a zeal he will not own.”

The fourth and fifth verses of our third hymn tell us a great deal about divine and human attitudes to mercy. The hymn was written by Revd. Frederick Faber, an admirer of John Henry Newman and who worked with him at the Oratory in Edgbaston. Then, after falling out with him, he founded Brompton Oratory which Cardinal Newman described as ‘Second-rate’! This hymn is definitely first-rate! Number 416, ‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy’

1. There’s a wideness in God’s mercy

Like the wideness of the sea;

There’s a kindness in his justice

Which is more than liberty.

2. There is plentiful redemption

In the blood that has been shed;

There is joy for all the members

In the sorrows of the Head.

3. There is grace enough for thousands

Of new worlds as great as this;

There is room for fresh creations

In that upper home of bliss.

4. For the love of God is broader

Than the measures of the mind;

And the heart of the Eternal

Is most wonderfully kind.

5. But we make His love too narrow

By false limits of our own;

And we magnify his strictness

With a zeal he will not own.

6. If our love were but more simple,

**We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be illumined
By the presence of our Lord.**

© Frederick William Faber {1814 – 63}

Address 1: *‘But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make people ‘unclean.’*

Jews have an expression for someone who is in a bad mood: they say he is **oy oy miz!** Our reading from Matthew’s gospel shows Jesus to be **oy oy miz** as he arrived in the region of Tyre and Sidon, for he had argued with both Scribes and Pharisees at Gennesaret after they had criticised his followers for breaking Hebrew traditions, particularly the intricate hand-washing customs prior to eating. Jesus, had responded by telling them that observing Jewish traditions was not as important as following the Torah, the laws given to Moses. He said that the Kosher tradition was not anywhere as important as the Pharisees thought it was, for, in his own words, **“Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make people ‘unclean.’** The Pharisees were offended when they were told that to be righteous did not require Jews to observe Hebrew traditions, but to honour God’s commands, **‘to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord’**, for their scrupulous observance of traditions made them feel superior to others.

It is a challenge for us, too. Do our traditions and practices drive a wedge between us and other churches, denominations or faiths? If so, how important or valuable are they to the kingdom’s work? I firmly believe that Jesus calls us to accept and set aside our differences, so we may work together in building up his kingdom with small acts of loving-kindness. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Revd. Andrew Pratt, who has a MSc in Marine Biology, an MA for research into Frederick Faber’s “Hymns on the four last things” and a PhD for research on the origins of the 1933 “Methodist Hymn Book”. In addition to these achievements, he has written a number of lovely hymns, including this one, based on John Wesley’s final words. We shall sing hymn number 610, ‘Best of all is God is with us,’ (to “All for Jesus” StF341)

**1. Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail.**

**2. Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.**

**3. Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.**

**4. Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,**

till that final acclamation:
'life is Christ, and death is gain'.

5. Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

© Andrew Pratt (born 1948)

Address 2: *“even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”*

Almost as soon as Jesus and his disciples arrived in the region of Tyre and Sidon, they were accosted by a Canaanite woman, who began to shout loudly at Jesus, **“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”** By doing so, the woman broke a number of taboos, as far as Jews were concerned: no Jew would accept being spoken to by a male or female Canaanite in such circumstances, for they were traditional enemies of the Jews, their ancestors having worshipped Baal; certainly, no Hebrew woman would have dared address a strange man in public, let alone create a disturbance by continuing to cry out to him and certainly none would have referred to Jesus in Messianic terms, as **‘Son of David’** – unless, of course, the Canaanite believed that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah!

Although Jesus chose to ignore the Canaanite mother, her shouting upset and embarrassed his disciples, who urged him to send her packing, so he turned to the woman and said,

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” Instead of being put off by the rebuff, the mother threw herself at his feet and asked,

“Lord, help me!” At first glance, what Jesus said next would have had him branded a racist in contemporary society:

“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” However, I feel confident that his eyes sparkled as he uttered a response that she could have expected from an orthodox Jew, for while our reading used the term **‘dogs’**, Jesus used the Greek word **kunaron** which means **‘puppies’**, not **‘kuon’**, and would have been considered provocative, rather than insulting. In fact, Jesus was testing the depth of the woman’s faith and her answer delighted him.

“Yes, Lord,” she said, **“but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”** Her answer was humble, but witty, for she had realised that Jesus had been satirising the traditional Jewish position to Gentiles, a tradition that had developed after the return from exile in Babylon under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah. Indeed, if we go back to the time when the Torah was given to Israel, these words from Deuteronomy express the true wishes of God: **‘He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.’** Jesus was clearly delighted by her answer, praised her faith and cured her daughter!

This story challenges us especially at this time, when our society seems more divided into **‘us and them’** than ever. Jesus did not treat the Canaanite woman as a member of a despised group of foreigners, but as an individual with a deep need to be helped. He cast off traditional attitudes, which his followers had expected him to observe, offering grace and mercy rather than bitter rejection. Here was the real-life version of the parable of the Good Samaritan with the Jew showing compassion to the Gentile, rather than vice versa. The

passage reminds us that God loves everyone, irrespective of colour, creed, gender, or customs, not just a chosen few. Jesus lived, was crucified and was raised for all people, not just the Jews. We must avoid thinking ourselves superior to others, writing off people as 'hopeless cases'. Instead, we are called to treat them as Jesus did with the Canaanite woman.

Last week there were several public disturbances in Thetford, where crowds assembled to protest about asylum-seekers being housed in the town. Matters escalated, resulting in a number of police officers being hurt and protestors arrested. Last year when my wife, daughter and I returned from a visit to our son in Lowestoft, we passed through Burnt Tree in Dudley and encountered a crowd of protestors outside what used to be "The Ward Arms", with a heavy police presence and much shouting. They, too, were opposing asylum-seekers being housed there – but in fact no asylum-seeker was. The people inside were homeless Brummies, sent there by the City Council! As an exiled Brummie, my heart went out to them, for I can only guess how afraid they would have been. Whatever the rights and wrongs of asylum-seekers, the issues are not black and white, but are far too complicated for a normal sermon.

The fact is that this nation is becoming ever more polarized over many issues. The art of polite debate seems to have been lost and society seems to resort to megaphone diplomacy, resorting to threats and insults. We see and label groups rather than individuals, for it is easier to demonize those we see as 'other' rather than 'like us'. Youngsters are often portrayed by the Media as antisocial 'hoodies', getting drunk, or taking drugs, or committing acts of vandalism, but we shouldn't accept that image in case it becomes self-fulfilling. Instead, if we treat young people as individuals which of course they are, you will generally be pleasantly surprised. Even the drunkard and drug addict may be seeking something to give life meaning – the Gospel message, perhaps! However, it is far too easy to write them off as 'hopeless cases'.

Many people seeking refuge in the United Kingdom are fleeing persecution or desperate poverty and want to contribute to society, not to gain at our expense. That is not a case to accept them all, but it ought to prompt us to separate the sheep from the goats. In the same way, we shouldn't rush to condemn all Muslims or Jews because of events two thousand miles away. Despite this, synagogues and individual Jews are being attacked, as are mosques and Muslims, so let us see past the kippah or kufi and encounter the individual instead. Remember each of us is an individual, made in the image of God, and we must treat one another as we would like to be treated, for only by being open-hearted and open-handed can we hope to earn our neighbours' trust.

Jesus saw the Canaanite woman as an individual in desperate need of help, so he dispensed with prejudice and helped her. Ought we not to respond in the same way? Through Jesus Christ, God extended his loving-kindness to all people and as his followers, we are challenged to follow his example, remembering that in Christ's heart there are no 'dogs' or 'kunarion', except for the four-legged variety. Amen.

We conclude our worship with a hymn written by Marty Haugen, a composer and performer from Minnesota. He is composer-in-residence at Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis. The house in this hymn is Mother Church, a community, not a building. Hymn number 409, 'Let us build a house where love can dwell,'

1. Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions: *Chorus*
All are welcome,
All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.

2. Let us build a house where prophets speak,
And words are strong and true,
Where all God's children dare to seek
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
And of symbol of God's grace;
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus: *Chorus*

3. Let us build a house where love is found
In water, wine and wheat:
A banquet hall on holy ground
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and space;
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us: *Chorus*

4. Let us build a house where hands will reach
Beyond the wood and stone
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
And live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
Bear the image of God's face;
Let us bring an end to fear and danger: *Chorus*

5. Let us build a house where all are named,
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: *Chorus*

© Marty Haugen (born 1950)

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.