

A service for 16th August, 2020 (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.

The author of our first hymn, Brian Doerksen is a Canadian singer-songwriter and worship leader. He wrote this hymn at the end of the darkest and lowest season of his life in the summer of 1977, shortly after moving to London. This is how he wrote it, in his own words: "One morning, within months of moving to London, I went for an exercise/prayer walk, as I often did. I walked just to clear my head, to pray, to give my day to God, and to pour out some of my pain and my dreams. As I was walking through southwest London, very close to Wimbledon Stadium, I heard a message floating through the air. It was as clear as a bell, 'Come, now is the time to worship.' I thought, WOW!, the call to worship is being sounded all of the time and in all kinds of ways. God is reaching out to his creation, inviting us to come, to do the very thing we were created to do." Let us sing hymn number 24, 'Come, now is the time for 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.

Holy, holy, holy Lord our God, we have come to worship you today, for you are the Everlasting Father of all creation, mighty, faithful and wise in all you do. You are the Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and friend, whose life, crucifixion and resurrection have broken the hold of sin and death, establishing such a relationship with God the Father that we may boldly address him as Abba, daddy. You are the Spirit of truth and love, our guide, strength and comforter in our discipleship. Great God, the Three in One, breathe your boundless,

everlasting love into our inmost being and warm our hearts, so we may offer healing, hope and grace to our forlorn and broken world, as we are called to do.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things with which you have blessed us, for loving us even when we are loveless and unlovable, but most of all, thank you for coming as Christ, for without him we would be hopeless and helpless.

Merciful God, forgive us when we fail to live out the good news in our lives, when we hurt or exclude our neighbours by our thoughtlessness or our prejudices, when we make excuses for not helping people we see in trouble or in need, when we deliberately keep quiet when we witness injustice or persecution and when we neglect to answer our call to serve you.

Help us to change our ways. Help us copy the example of Christ Jesus and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and that you have forgiven us. Let us serve you in the power of the Spirit, so we can make a difference to our communities, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

We shall pray the words 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.

We shall lead into our prayers of intercession by either singing, or just listening to the Peruvian Gloria, which was collected by John Ballantyne. It is number 753 in "Singing the Faith".

**Glory to God, glory to God,
Glory in the highest!**

*Glory to God, glory to God,
Glory in the highest!*

To God be glory for ever!

To God be glory for ever!

Alleluia! Amen.

Alleluia! Amen.

Alleluia! Amen.

Alleluia! Amen.

Peruvian traditional chant via John Ballantine (b. 1945)

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

God of all grace, may your name be glorified in the highest for you have given us stewardship over a beautiful, living planet and have blessed us in so many ways. Therefore, grant us the courage, steadfastness, wisdom and

compassion we need to serve our neighbours as you want us to, but in circumstances where we lack power ourselves, we turn to you, for to you all things are possible.

Lord, we pray for the peoples of the world, especially countries afflicted by drought and famine, conflict and oppression, that the leaders of the nations and NGOs will work together for justice and peace, to end the distress and suffering of so many people. May your Holy Spirit breathe hope and new life into the dry bones of situations that we have considered beyond hope and may your love drive away the darkness of prejudice and hatred in the world.

Help us to build a world where we stand up against poverty, here and abroad and where we desire fairness for all-comers. Let us be willing to work together in mutual trust, to always seek the common good and to share justly the earth's resources, rather than to fight over them.

God of wellbeing and wholeness, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, a dementia, mental or spiritual troubles, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their time of need.

Heavenly Father, we continue to pray for deliverance of victims of COVID 19, here and abroad. Guide our national leaders to adopt policies that will protect us until this pandemic is brought under control. Help us to play our part in defeating Coronavirus by patiently following the guidelines laid down by the Government, difficult though they may be, and help us all face an uncertain, even threatening future, with hope grounded in your saving grace.

Lord of life, we ask your blessing on the NHS and key-workers who have been steadfastly supporting the sick and vulnerable throughout this crisis, often at the cost of their own health and safety. We ask that you will keep them safe in their work.

Loving God, we bring to you neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, unemployed, or who face the loss of their jobs when furlough ends. We pray for those who, possibly because of the strains of lockdown are facing a broken relationship, as well as all who mourn the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, confident that you will know their needs and will reach out to them. Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, in which they may find, hope courage, strength and peace.

Gracious Lord, we ask you to strengthen and help the Church to share the Good News, united in words and deeds, so everybody may believe that Jesus is the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. And grant that the life of Christ is revealed in all we do and say.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead good lives but to boldly take the light of the gospel to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Thomas Colvin wrote our next hymn during a day training course for evangelists at Chereponi, Ghana in the mid 1960s. I wonder whether he was inspired by the course to pen these words, or wrote them because he was bored? Whatever the reason, he set his words 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 Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 56 verses 1 to 8

This is what the LORD says:

“Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the one who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.”

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say,

“The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.”

And let not any eunuch complain,

“I am only a dry tree.” For this is what the LORD says:

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”

The Sovereign LORD declares—he who gathers the exiles of Israel:

“I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.” 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 man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean’, but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him ‘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 man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘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.” We sing a hymn 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}

Sermon: ‘Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.’ Matthew 15:28

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 him 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 a man 'unclean.' For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man 'unclean'; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him 'unclean.'" In our Old Testament reading, Isaiah wrote, "**Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. Blessed is the person who does this, the one who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath without desecrating it, and keeps their hand from doing any evil.**" Isaiah added that the blessing was offered both to Gentiles and eunuchs, who had formerly been excluded from God's Covenant, provided they joined themselves to the Lord. Notice, these groups were not required to observe Hebrew traditions, but to honour God's commands, **'to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord'**.

Almost as soon as he 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; 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 **kunarion** which means **'puppies', not 'kuon'**, and would have been considered provocative, rather than insulting. 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, cured her daughter and certainly was cured of his oy oy miz!

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 desire 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, 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.

At a time when youngsters are portrayed by the Media as antisocial 'hoodies', getting drunk, or taking drugs, or committing acts of vandalism, don't accept that image in case it becomes self-fulfilling. Instead, treat young people as individuals which of course they are and you will generally be pleasantly surprised. Even the drunkard and drug addict may be seeking something to give life meaning – the Gospel message, perhaps! 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. In the same way, don't rush to condemn all Moslems because of the actions of a small number of fanatics. 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. Only by being open-hearted and open-handed can we hope to earn our neighbours' trust.

Currently, the Coronavirus Emergency Appeal by both All We Can and the Disasters Emergency Committee exposes the plight of over 6 million internally displaced people in Syria, many of whom are living in overcrowded camps. The UN has called for an immediate country-wide ceasefire to allow an unrestricted response to the outbreak, but ten years of conflict have decimated the health care systems. DEC charities are reporting urgent concerns about the risks of the virus spreading, as vulnerable people are unable to take the basic measures to protect themselves. This news may cause us to throw up our hands in despair at another crisis in the world at a time when we are preoccupied with COVID19 in this country. It may even provoke the onset of **'APPEAL FATIGUE'**, an unwillingness to be as generous as we know we ought to be. Just stop and think how many times we have had to appeal to God for forgiveness: **it is as well that he doesn't suffer from 'appeal fatigue', isn't it!**

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 close our worship with a hymn by Mart Haugen, a liturgical composer and musical performer from Minnesota. He is composer-in-residence at Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis. 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 now and for evermore. Amen.