

Call to worship Psalm 98 verses 4 to 9

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Robert and Dawn Critchley in 1988, a short time after the death of their two-day-old son, Gideon. In the circumstances, this is a remarkable hymn, but it reflects the deep faith of the Critchleys. Robert is an associate minister of Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship where he continues to lead worship at conferences and renewal meetings. He and his wife Dawn were senior worship pastors on full-time staff in Toronto from 1996-2002. They live near Midland, Ontario with their children Bethany, Noah and Elijah. Robert wrote that 'the song reflects a revelation of the God of All Comfort's faithfulness to us through a difficult time'.

We shall sing hymn number 58, 'Lord, I come before your throne of grace;'

Lord, I come before your throne of grace;
I find rest in your presence,
And fullness of joy.
In worship and wonder
I behold your face,
Singing what a faithful God have I. (Chorus)
*What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God!
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.*

Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry;
Through the storm, you're the beacon,
My song in the night.
In the shelter of your wings,
Hear my heart's reply,
Singing what a faithful God have I. (Chorus)

Lord all-sovereign, granting peace from heaven,
let me comfort those who suffer
with the comfort you have given.
I will tell of your great love for as long as I live,
singing, 'What a faithful God have I.' (Chorus)

© Robert Critchley (born 1959) & Dawn Critchley (born 1965)

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, Word of life, you brought our universe into being and maintain it with your love. Your glory is revealed both in the vastness of space with its myriad suns, planets and moons, as well as the beauty and complexity of life on this planet. In the light of your wisdom, might and holiness, we are amazed that you should care for flawed human beings so much that you took human form and lived among us as Christ Jesus, revealing your boundless love by his life, death and resurrection. Amazing God, take away all anxieties and distractions so we can pray to you in faith, sing our hymns of praise joyfully and both understand and respond to your holy word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many blessings we have received from you: for all the good things that we enjoy, for challenges that have tested us and shaped our character and for people who have cared for us, guided and inspired us. Above all else, thank you for Jesus, who broke the power of sin and death, and offers us new life at the end of our earthly days.

Merciful God, despite Jesus' example and teaching, we confess that we have sinned against you and other people by what we have said or done. Moreover, we don't always help neighbours who are in difficulty, or distress, yet we try to excuse our heartlessness, though our guilt stands before us. Lord, we are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong, asking your forgiveness in Jesus' name.

God of grace, we believe you have heard and answered our prayer, pardoning us for our sins and offering us a fresh opportunity to renew our discipleship. Therefore, Lord, fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit, so hereafter we may serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully, in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

We shall say the Lord's Prayer

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.

Our second hymn was written by an American lady, Love Maria Willis, in 1856 and was published as a hymn a year before the end of the US Civil War. It reflects the tensions and hardships of the time and its opening reminds us that discipleship is not expected to be easy and idle, but committed to working for the kingdom. Listen to the first verse: 'Father, hear the prayer we offer: / Not for ease that prayer shall be, / But for strength that we may ever / Live our lives courageously.' We shall sing hymn number 518, 'Father, hear the prayer we offer:'

1. Father, hear the prayer we offer:

**Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.**

2. Not for ever in green pastures

**Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.**

**3. Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would smite the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.**

**4. Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.**

© Love Maria Willis {1824 – 1908}

We shall now bring our concerns for people nearby and far away to the Lord our God. When I say, ‘Lord, in your mercy’, please reply, ‘Hear our prayer’.

Heavenly Father, your generous, constant love is evident in the wonders and beauty of this self-sustaining world, the blessings we receive day by day and knowing that you have redeemed us through Christ Jesus. We know we ought to be joyful, yet all too often our spirits are cast down by the brokenness we see and hear about so much in the news Media, much of which is the result of human greed, pride, foolishness and indifference. Where we are able, use us as your earthly hands. Grant us compassion, courage, wisdom and steadfastness as we serve others in Jesus’ name, but where we can’t make as much difference as we’d like, we ask you to do so, for all things are possible to you.

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

Lord, our thoughts turn to Ukraine and Palestine, where fighting has and is causing unspeakable horror and suffering, particularly to civilians, young and old. We pray that the peace plan brokered by President Trump will hold, that the bodies of dead hostages will be repatriated and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank will experience an end to their suffering. Like prophets of old, we cry out for mercy and justice: for just, swift ends to the fighting, not only in Ukraine and the Holy Land, but also in Congo, Myanmar, Sudan and Somalia.

Lord of the nations, teach world leaders to negotiate and compromise in order to avoid taking up arms and help this country to listen to and discuss opinions that are challenging, rather than growing ever more polarized by shutting them off. Remind us of our common humanity and that Christ died to save everybody, not only people who share our viewpoint, but including people whose views offend us.

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

Generous God, we pray for organizations like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid that are working to provide desperately-needed aid to the Developing World. May their work reduce the numbers of migrants who are fleeing from poverty as well as warfare.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to levels where some will need to choose between heating their homes and eating. We thank you for food banks and for other organisations which help the poor and pray that we may be able to offer support to our less fortunate neighbours.

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

Lord of healing and wellbeing, hear our prayer for neighbours who are ill in body, mind or spirit, or people in any kind of need or trouble. Remember neighbours who living with anxiety or depression, or whose relationships have broken down and, particularly, all

who mourn the loss of somebody dear. In a time of silence; we offer names of those for whom we are most concerned. Empower us to offer them practical support and friendship, by serving as your earthly hands, but where we can't do as much as we'd like, enfold them in your loving arms, comfort, encourage, strengthen and heal them.

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

Holy Lord, we ask you to inspire this church, churches in our district and indeed throughout the World to serve you in love and unity. Guide us with your Holy Spirit, so we bear good news boldly to a world that desperately needs it.

Abba, Father God, Bless us, our families and friends. Inspire us to keep Christ at the centre of our lives, so we share the abundance of your love with both friends and strangers, in the wonderful name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

John Bode wrote hymns to be sung by his congregation, often penning them for special occasions, or for church seasons, but of all his works only “O Jesus, I have promised” has survived. The manner in which it was written is, however, well worthy of note: Rev. Bode and his family moved to Castle Camps, Cambridge, where he became Rector.

His daughter and two sons attended confirmation classes, so that they could make their vows together in 1866. Revd. Bode decided that such a special occasion deserved a special hymn which was a rededication of oneself to Christ, but it also recognises that the path of discipleship is not an easy one, so it appeals to Jesus to guide them through life. We sing hymn number 563, ‘O Jesus, I have promised to serve thee to the end’.

**1. O Jesus, I have promised
To serve you to the end;
Lord, be for ever near me,
My Master and my Friend:
I shall not fear the battle
If you are by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If you will be my Guide.**

**2. O let me feel you near me:
The world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
The tempting sounds I hear;
My foes are ever near me,
Around me and within;
But, Jesus, now draw nearer,
And shield my soul from sin.**

**3. O let me hear you speaking
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,**

To hasten or control;
Lord, speak and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.

4. O Jesus, you have promised
To all who follow you,
That where you are in glory
Your servant shall be, too;
And Jesus, I have promised
To serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
My Master and my Friend!

© J.E. Bode {1816 – 1874}

The first reading is the Second Letter to the Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 6 to 13

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If someone will not work, they shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is right. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 21 verses 5 to 19

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said,

"As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down."

"Teacher," they asked, "when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?" He replied:

"Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am he,' and 'The time is near.' Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away." Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. But before all this, they will lay hands on you and persecute you. They will deliver you to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. This will result in your being witnesses to them. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everybody will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. By standing firm you will gain life." Amen.

Sermon: "Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right." 2 Thes.3:13

If you were told to give a presentation at an interview for a much better job, but were also told that you'd be given the job whether or not the presentation was any good, it would be tempting to put in little effort, especially if there was something you would rather do than compose your ideas. If the television news declared that **'The Day of the Lord'** is here, so God's judgment is imminent, would we rush around all the harder, trying to evangelise, or would we throw up our hands in relief and sit around waiting for the last trump? In our passage from Luke, Jesus warned his disciples not to presume that wars and disasters were signs of the imminent end of the world, lest they were diverted from their calling. I am often asked whether current wars or natural disasters are warning of end-times and my usual reply is, 'Yes, they are, but end times have lasted for two thousand years of similar wars and disasters.' Instead of dwelling up[on the Second Coming, we ought to be doing our best to build up God's Kingdom.

Paul wrote his letters to the church at **Thessalonica around 50AD**, while he was staying with **Aquila at Corinth**, supporting himself by making tents. The Thessalonian church had been established only shortly before the letters and Paul had been asked to leave the city before he wanted to, because the Jews in the city had been stirring up trouble. Consequently, he wanted to ensure the new church thrived and grew in spirit, truth and love. However, he soon heard that some members of the community had misunderstood the idea of the Second Coming, had given up work and were not only idling their time away, but they were living off others and were engaged in gossip and mischief-making.

Paul needed to resolve this misconception quickly, so he did not mince his words: there is none of today's consensual leadership in this reading; he commanded the Thessalonians to separate themselves from brothers and sisters who had become lazy and disorderly, who were no longer living up to their responsibilities, such as working and church disciplines. By separate, he probably meant excluding them from church life generally, until they amended their ways.

Paul declared that as the Second Coming had not happened, the church should imitate his and his co-workers' examples, for they were self-supporting and did not live off the charity of others, partly to show that they were not false teachers, but also to demonstrate that, as Christ's followers, we still have responsibilities. Though we are called to be a holy people, we must live in the real world, governed and inspired by the Good News of Christ's salvation. Paul declared he had chosen to lead by example: **'Do as I do, rather than do as I say'**.

The idlers in the church at Thessalonica were compounding their lack of **busy - ness by being busybodies**, who were potentially destructive to the community. Paul quoted from **'Bereshith Rabba'** and **Proverbs 19: 15**, **'Anyone unwilling to work should not eat,'** as a directive to Thessalonians to bring their erring fellow-Christians back into the fold by not going out of their way to support those whose conduct was undermining the church. All members were called to use their talents, gifts and graces for the benefit of all, for everybody has something he or she can contribute to Christ – as Paul told the Corinthians when he compared the Church to a body in which every organ, limb and digit has a part to play. Even a little finger is significant if it is deformed, as I found out nearly thirty years ago.

In my periodic Victor Meldrew moments, I am impatient with church-based activities which begin enthusiastically, then peter out because members fail to follow them through, because they expect others to do the work. Here is a story about four people, named:

Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and **Everybody** was sure that **Somebody** would do it. **Anybody** could have done it, but **Nobody** did it. **Somebody** got angry about that because it was **Everybody's** job. **Everybody** thought **Anybody** could do it, but **Nobody** realised that **Everybody** wouldn't do it. It ended up that **EVERYBODY** blamed **SOMEBODY** when **NOBODY** did what **ANYBODY** could have done.

Here's another story, adapted from **Rabbi Lionel Blu**: a Methodist minister was carried to the Pearly Gates by the angel Gabriel. She asked the angel what difference there was between heaven and hell, whereupon Gabriel took her to hell where there was a group of people set around a table on which there was a sumptuous feast. Each person there had a spoon eight feet long. Everybody there was cursing God in despair and was as thin as a rake because they could not feed themselves. The minister cried out, **'Take me away from this awful place,'** so the angel took her to heaven, where to the minister's amazement, the same number of people she had seen in hell sat around a table upon which was identical food. They also had eight feet long spoons, but were well-fed and praising God for his goodness. Each had learned to feed a neighbour with the oversize spoon, so by sharing the task everybody thrived.

It is too easy to opt out of active Christianity, because every church has its number of **'doers'**, so we can excuse our inaction by saying to ourselves, **"We'll only get in the way if we offer to help"**, or, **"We're too old, or too young, or inexperienced to be of any use"**. God called **Jeremiah** when he was sixteen and he told **Abram** to leave Haran when he was seventy-five, so age is no excuse. He also called me to preach, so neither is ability an issue! There is so much good needed to be done in our community, let alone in the world, so why do we hang back? Are we suffering from appeal fatigue, with the many campaigns for the poor and underprivileged here and abroad that claim our money and time? If so, it is as well that God has no such problem, for he heard the prophets' appeals to save humankind and gave everything he held dear to redeem us: his beloved, Only Son, nailed to a cross like the basest of criminals, abandoned by his friends and mocked by his enemies. In the face of such amazing grace, how can we, how dare we choose not to do good as a fitting response, **best summed up by Isaac Watts in the final verse of "When I survey the wondrous cross": "Were the whole realm of nature mine, / That were an offering far too small; / Love so amazing, so divine, / Demands my soul, my life, my all."** As Paul said, **'Brothers and sisters, never become tired of doing good.'** Amen.

We shall end our worship with a hymn by the prolific and long-lived Methodist Minister, Revd. Fred Prat Green. It was written in 1969, entitled "the Caring Church". Hymn number 415, 'The Church of Christ, in every age,'

1. The Church of Christ, in every age,
Beset by change, but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.
2. Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.
3. Then let the servant Church arise,

**A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.**

**4. For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.**

**5. We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.**

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Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all forever more. Amen.