A service for 18th October, 2026 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 96 verses 1 to 3

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth. Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Revd. Henry Francis Lyte in 1834 and is his version of Psalm 103. He wanted to write something that he could leave behind to 'live to the glory of God'; a hymn that would not be ephemeral. Certainly, two of his hymns, this one and 'Abide with me', have stood the test of time. We shall sing hymn number 83, 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven'.

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To his feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!

2. Praise him for his grace and favour
To our fathers in distress;
Praise him still, the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.

3. Father-like, he tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame he knows;
In His hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.

4. Angels, help us to adore him,
Ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

© Henry Francis Lyte {1793 – 1847}

Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.

Almighty God all glory, honour, power and praise are yours, for you are the living Word who spoke our universe to life; you made the earth on which we live and not only created human beings, but honoured us with stewardship of this beautiful planet. Through your great faithfulness, you sustain us and all living things. In your love, you call us to you as your earthly sons and daughters, offering us a covenant of love and faithfulness.

You know everything about us and, despite our sinfulness, you love us so much that you took human form and lived among us as Christ Jesus, so we might understand how you want us live. His death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death, offering us a special new relationship with you and the offer of everlasting life

through faith in him. Loving God, we ask you to remove all distractions and anxieties, so we can offer you the best in our worship today.

Heavenly Father, we come to offer heartfelt thanks for the many blessings we have received from you. Most of all, thank you for loving us even when we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves and do not love and serve you wholeheartedly, as we know we ought. Forgive us when we say and do things that cause offence to and hurt our neighbours, then help us to lead better lives, for Jesus said if we repent in his name, you will pardon us.

Merciful Lord, as you hear and answer our prayers, we believe that you have forgiven us and call us to follow you. May we do so, serving our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, in order that we may honour you always, in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

Let us say the prayer our Lord taught us:

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 Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed Kendrick's visit to India the previous year when he saw the great gulf between the lives of the wealthy and Dalits, the poor, despised untouchables. Hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'

1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!

2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills;
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. ***Chorus:***

God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray:
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
Make us content with the things that we need. ***Chorus:***

5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of your ways,
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. ***Chorus:***

© Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

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

Lord of all, thank you for this beautiful planet upon which we live, for it ought to allow everybody to live in the abundance of your creation. However, we know the earth has been abused by human foolishness, greed and, worst of all, our indifference. The effects of climate change are becoming abundantly clear, with series of heatwaves and droughts, melting ice caps, huge storms and severe floods. Show us how to use resources thoughtfully and carefully, so we may play our part in helping the world recover from the damage we have done over several centuries. Help us preserve a habitable world for future generations.

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

Loving Lord and Prince of Peace, we ask you to inspire leaders of nations to turn away from using violence when they can't have their own way and bid them 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, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Congo, Sudan and Somalia. In grief, we remember all victims of conflicts, discrimination, injustice and violence, praying that they find peace, safety, refuge and security, in order to rebuild their lives.

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

Lord of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, we remember people in our community who are sick, lonely, fearful, troubled and broken, for those whose lives are coming to an end and everybody who mourns the loss of loved-ones. In a time of silence, we offer names of people 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, but also enfold them in your merciful arms, that they may find healing, hope, comfort and an enduring peace.

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

Almighty God, we pray for this church, churches in local Circuits and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth. Unite us all in mission, so we help build up your kingdom with acts of grace and goodness. May we find ways of bringing good news to a world that dearly needs it.

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

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe and fill our hearts to overflowing with your love. Then help us share it freely with both friends and strangers, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

Our third hymn was published posthumously in 1946, seven years after the death of Rt. Revd. Timothy Rees, Bishop of Llandaff. Bishop Timothy had served as a Chaplain to the forces during the Great War and was awarded the Military Cross. After he became Bishop of Llandaff in 1931, he devoted most of his time and energy supporting the unemployed of South Wales and their families during the Depression. We shall sing hymn number 103, 'God is Love: let heaven adore him;'

1. God is Love: let heaven adore him;
God is Love: let earth rejoice;
Let creation sing before him,
And exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
He who spread the heavens above,
He who breathes through all creation,

He is Love, eternal Love.

2. God is Love: and he enfoldeth
All the world in one embrace;
With unfailing grasp he holdeth
Every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find that selfsame aching
Deep within the heart of God.

3. God is Love: and though with blindness
Sin afflicts the souls of men,
God's eternal loving-kindness
Holds and guides them even then.
Sin and death and hell shall never
O'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love: so Love for ever
O'er the universe must reign. ***© Timothy Rees (1874 – 1939)***

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 22 verses 15 to 22

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.
"Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said,
"You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?"

"Caesar's," they replied.

Then he said to them,
"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. Amen.

Graham Kendrick wrote our next hymn in 1993, basing it upon Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 3. He was born in in August 1950, a son of a Baptist Pastor and began writing hymns and worship songs in the early 1970s. His grasp of theology and music has made him a great evangelist – a Twentieth Century Charles Wesley in my opinion. We shall sing hymn number 489, 'All I once held dear'.

1. All I once held dear,
Built my life upon,
All this world reveres,
And wars to own,
All I once thought gain
I have counted loss,
Spent and worthless now,
Compared to this: ***Chorus***

Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,

There is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord.

2. Now my heart's desire
Is to know you more,
To be found in you
And known as yours;
To possess by faith
What I could not earn,
All-surpassing gift
Of righteousness. ***Chorus***

3. Oh, to know the power
Of your risen life,
And to know you in
Your sufferings;
To become like you
In your death, my Lord,
So with you to live
And never die! ***Chorus***

(C) Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

Sermon: ***"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."*** **Matthew 22: 21.**
Few people enjoy paying taxes, so it was unsurprising that the Government declared that it would not raise income tax in its election manifesto. Unfortunately, as Harold Macmillan once said, when he was asked what shaped his policies, "Events, dear boy, events!" Demands on public funds are huge, as a result of the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, investment in National Defence of at least 3% of GDP, crises in the NHS and education and the need for a National Care Service. I don't envy John Healey as he tries to balance the books in his forthcoming Budget, as his options are very limited unless he breaks the Manifesto pledge and incurs the wrath of the general public. After all, nowadays so many items seem to be taxed. We take income tax for granted, yet it was introduced by William Pitt as a temporary measure to pay for the Napoleonic Wars – some temporary measure! Nevertheless, unpopular though it is, taxation is essential if our country is not to grind to a standstill.

However, in First Century Judea, tax was a major issue, because as part of the Roman Empire, Jews had to pay taxes to Rome. It was bad enough for many Jews to be occupied by a foreign power, let alone having to contribute to its treasury, but the Romans added insult to injury, for the denarius – a coin which had to be used for tax purposes – bore the image of the Emperor, who had declared himself a god. Now the Torah forbade the making of images and for coins to have the image of somebody who set himself up as divine was an outrage for devout Jews. Indeed, Judas of Galilee led an unsuccessful rebellion when the tax was established in 6 AD, as a result of which the Romans minted special copper coins without the Emperor's head, that Jews could use for everyday commerce, but not employ to pay their taxes.

This then was the background to our gospel reading, in which some Pharisees and Herodians laid a trap for Jesus, who they thought was a false Messiah and who they wanted to destroy. Herodians were wealthy, influential Jews, who supported King Herod Antipas and favoured both Greek customs and Roman law, rather than Torah, hoping to

gain favour from Rome. Their enquiry, prefaced by sycophantic courtesy, was a double trap:

"Teacher, we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?"

The Herodians hoped Jesus would reply that it was unlawful to pay taxes to Caesar, for they could denounce him to the Roman Governor as another Galilean zealot, like Judas of Galilee – somebody who opposed Roman authority. The Romans gave rebels short shrift! On the other hand, the Pharisees, who were not at all keen on Rome, hoped Jesus would say that it was in accordance with the Torah, not because they wanted to pay taxes, but because many Jews felt passionately that they should not, so, by his affirmation of the tax, Jesus would forfeit much of his popular support**.** Whatever reply Jesus gave, it seemed he would be condemned by someone.

However, Jesus realised that they were setting a trap, so he innocently asked them to show him the money for the tax. Without thinking, the questioners produced a denarius, not the plain copper coin they were supposed to use for mundane transactions – and Jesus had trapped the trap-setters! **They** were using the hated Roman coins – hence Jesus' charge, **'Hypocrites'** – for their insincerity was palpable! He exposed them to the crowd by demanding, **"Whose likeness and inscription is this?"** They could only reply, **"Caesar's."**

Jesus' reply was stark, **"Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's – and to God the things that are God's".** In other words, **if you use Caesar's currency, then you owe him his tax.** He added, very significantly, that whilst Caesar could claim his monetary rights, God claims our loyalty and love. It is not surprising that his opponents marvelled at Jesus' reply and went away to devise another trap, for he had given an answer that could offend neither Rome nor ordinary Jews, but which had humbled the Pharisees and Herodians. Moreover, by asking them to produce a coin, Christ had shown that he didn't carry any, for he aligned himself with the poor and powerless.

This story challenges us to play our part in civil life as fully as possible, whilst remaining faithful to Christ. After recent political scandals, it is easy to dismiss politicians and political parties as self-seeking, disingenuous, too alike to be worthy of our attention, let alone our vote. Yet if we don't take an interest, don't go to pre-election forums or challenge those who would represent us, things will never change. Worse still, our indifference can easily lead to the rise of extremist groups, so we must not fall into the trap of considering politics 'too dirty'. As Jesus said, we must render to Caesar what is Caesar's – that is, we must fulfil our social obligations, from paying taxes, to being good neighbours and ensuring that our democracy works by being part of it. It is no use singing hymns lustily, praying fervently and listening attentively to sermons if, once the service has ended, nothing in our daily lives reflects anything of the love of Christ! We must never forget that God's own Son reached out to sinners, the ceremonially unclean and despised, not to self-righteous hypocrites. My image of Jesus is of God with his sleeves rolled up, getting his hands dirty for our sake.

What then ought we render to God? Our praise and thanksgiving for his redemptive love and our service to others as our response to his grace. No act of kindness is too trivial for God to notice and bless it; nobody is beyond the reach of God's grace, however base their lives may appear. Remember John Wesley's assertion in the Methodist Catechism: **'All need to be saved; all may be saved; all may know**

themselves saved and all may be saved to the uttermost.' By living out this creed, our forefathers lifted many people from squalor and hopelessness to fulfilled – Christ-filled lives. They got their hands dirty, metaphorically and literally, by serving Christ, but they rendered to God what is his: obedient, faithful love. Are we willing, as Twenty-First Century followers, to live out our calling to love the Lord and serve our neighbours as our response to his amazing grace? Amen.

We conclude our worship as we sing a hymn written in 1961 for the Blackburn Diocese by Canon Edward Burns – a real battle-cry for all of us. Hymn number 418, 'We have a gospel to proclaim,'

1. We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his story, tell his worth.

2. Tell of his birth at Bethlehem –
Not in a royal house or hall,
But in a stable, dark and dim,
The Word made flesh, a light for all.

3. Tell of his death at Calvary:
Hated by those he came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross,
For all he loved his life he gave.

4. Tell of that glorious Easter morn;
Empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share his victory.

5. Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his church
To live for him, the Lamb who died.

6. Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.

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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 evermore. Amen.