

A service for 19th June, 2022

Call to Worship: Psalm 22 verses 25 to 28

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfil my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. Amen.

Hymn: 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness;'

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness,

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

Light for the world to see. *Chorus:*

Christ, be our Light!

Shine in our hearts,

Shine through the darkness.

Christ be our Light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice. *Chorus:*

3. Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

Shared until all are fed. *Chorus:*

4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.

Longing for warmth, many are cold.

Make us your building, sheltering others,

Walls made of living stone. *Chorus:*

© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}

Let us pray.

Almighty and everlasting God, we have come to worship you this afternoon as we acknowledge your might, wisdom and boundless, undying love.

You spoke the universe into life, creating for us a world of infinite variety, a planet that is self-sustaining, beautiful and wonderful. You sustain us with your love and seek to draw us close to you as your earthly children a holy priesthood. When your efforts to make us righteous by the Commandments and the prophets of old, you took human form as Jesus Christ. He not only set aside the glories of heaven to live among us but he suffered, died and was raised from the tomb to break the power of sin and to offer us everlasting life through faith in him.

Although he ascended to be with you once more, you gave us the Holy Spirit as our guide, wisdom, comforter and inspiration when we seek to serve you. This afternoon, let us remember that you are here with us, not only now but at all times and may we pray to you in faith, sing your praise with gratitude, and listen to your word with eagerness, for you alone are worth of all honour, glory, power and praise. Amen.

In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, 'Merciful Lord', please respond with, 'Forgive and restore us'.

Almighty God, we offer heartfelt thanks for all the many blessings we receive from you, but most of all for your undying love. Forgive us when we are selfish or self-righteous, unforgiving or judgmental. Pardon us when we have been unwilling to trust in your saving grace or when we fail to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

'Merciful Lord' 'Forgive and restore us'.

Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sinfulness. Warm our hearts with your Holy Spirit, kindle the embers into a blaze of love and faith, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death and so we may play our part in building your kingdom here.

'Merciful Lord' 'Forgive and restore us'.

Loving God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only pardoned us, but invite us to walk with you once more. Hereafter, may the Holy Spirit enable us to love and serve you and our neighbours gladly and faithfully, so our lives honour you in Jesus' beautiful 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.

Our opening hymn was written by Bernadette Farrell, a social activist from West Yorkshire and one of the best contemporary hymn-writers. Although she is a Roman Catholic, her hymns are as ecumenical in nature as they are profound. This hymn seems particularly apt in these time of pandemic and uncertainty. We shall sing hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'

1. Christ is the world's Light, he and none other;

Born in our darkness, he became our Brother.

If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:

Glory to God on high.

2. Christ is the world's Peace, he and none other;

No one can serve him and despise his brother.

Who else unites us, one in God the Father?

Glory to God on high.

3. Christ is the world's Life, he and none other;

Sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother –

He, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:

Glory to God on high.

4. Give God the glory, God and none other;

Give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;

Give God the glory, God in Man, my Brother:

Glory to God on high.

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

In our prayers of intercession, we bring our concern for people nearby and far away unto the Lord. Let us pray.

Gracious God, in response to your generous love for us, help us play what part we can to build a better world by seeking justice for all-comers, by sharing the earth's resources

instead of fighting over them, by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting our differences, even celebrating diversity and resisting prejudice. Heavenly Father, as our response to the many blessings you have bestowed on us, let us act as your earthly hands, feet, eyes and voice, seeking the wellbeing of all-comers. May the Holy Spirit inspire and guide us in your service, but in situations that are beyond our powers, we ask you to intervene, for all things are possible for you.

Gracious Lord, inspire and guide the leaders of all nations in the way of peace. Teach them to lead with justice and mercy, so that real, lasting peace is established. At present, our thoughts are with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia and we pray that peace can be negotiated to bring the conflict to a swift end. Meantime, we pray for President Zelenskyy and his advisors, the armed forces and militia, that they may remain steadfast, courageous and undaunted, and will receive the equipment they need to resist Russia's might and frustrate the Kremlin's plans, so that when fighting ends, Ukraine will be an independent democracy.

In your mercy, Lord, remember the civilians, mainly women, children, the elderly and disabled, who are trapped in cities that are being bombarded by Russian forces. We pray, also, for Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. Bless those lands and people who offer shelter and support for as long as it is needed. Hold them close in your care that they may be comforted and protected. We pray that friendly countries will continue to provide support not only during the war, but for the time it takes to rebuild Ukraine from the ashes of destruction.

Lord of grace, we pray for people who campaign for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including the distribution of vaccines to impoverished countries where COVID19 is rampant, from where new strains may come to create another crisis. We pray for organizations like All We Can and Christian Aid that are working to provide desperately-needed aid to famine-stricken Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen that the blockade of grain from Ukraine is broken, so they receive the means to support the starving of those countries. We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to manage as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels. We thank you for those who supply and run food banks and for organisations like the Salvation Army which help the poor. Guide those in authority to find ways of helping the poor.

We offer our prayer for neighbours who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are in any kind of need or trouble; neighbours who are living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear, thinking in particular of everybody who has been unable to mark their loved-one's passing because of restrictions at funerals and gatherings. Lord, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but warm them with your love, so they may find comfort, healing, courage and enduring peace.

We pray for all churches in our Circuit and neighbouring Circuits and, indeed, for the World Church, as we celebrate its birth two thousand years ago. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission. May the Spirit of truth and love empower us to bear the gospel light to this suffering and sin-darkened world. Renew and invigorate our calling as we seek new ways to serve our communities as we emerge from the dark shadow of Coronavirus.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and centre our lives upon Jesus. So, Lord, as you give us an abundance of love, may the Holy Spirit help us to share it freely wherever we go, in the name of Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our reading is St. Paul's Letter to the Galatians chapter 3 verses 23 to 29

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Amen.

We sing a hymn written by Revd. Hugh Sherlock, a Methodist minister, born in Jamaica who became the first President of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas and Secretary of the World Methodist Council in the 1970s.

Hymn number 410, 'Lord, your Church on earth is seeking'

1. Lord, your church on earth is seeking

Your renewal from above;

Teach us all the art of speaking

With the accent of your love.

We would heed your great commission:

Go you into every place –

Preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,

Serve with love and share my grace.

2. Freedom give to those in bandage,

Lift the burdens caused by sin,

Give new hope, new strength and courage,

Grant release from fears within:

Light for darkness; joy for sorrow;

Love for hatred; peace for strife.

These and countless blessings follow

As the Spirit gives new life.

3. In the streets of every city

Where the bruised and lonely dwell,

Let us show the Saviour's pity,

Let us of his mercy tell.

In all lands and with all races

Let us serve, and seek to bring

All the world to render praises,

Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

© Hugh Sherlock (1905 – 1998)

Address: *"In Christ, there is no difference between Jew and Greek, slave and free person, male and female.*

You are all the same in Christ Jesus." Galatians 3:28

"The biggest shock I had when I came here was – having gone to church to worship for the first time. I was elated as I went to worship at a church of the same denomination as I attended back home. I joined in the worship, but at the end of the service I was greeted by the vicar, who politely and nicely told me, 'Thank you for coming, but I would be delighted if you didn't come back.' I asked him why and he replied, 'My congregation is uncomfortable in the company of people like you.' Just imagine what that meant to me. I went home and never told anybody about it for months." What kind of person was the speaker? An asylum-seeker, a refugee, gay, a drug addict, an ex-prisoner, or somebody with a mental-

illness? **In actual fact, the speaker was Mr. Carmel Jones, who came from Jamaica in 1955**, but who found no welcome for black people in a church of his former denomination – a shameful, disgraceful, but all-too-common situation during that era. Thank God, he found a welcome in a new church and became a Minister in it.

One of the human beings' greatest failings is to exclude anyone who is outside what the "in-crowd's" expects in any kind of way, not just race, colour, gender, faith politics or life-style. In our reading, St. Paul is explaining to the churches of Galatia what being a Christian is all about. These early Christians were from mixed backgrounds: slaves and freemen and women; wealthy female traders; Jews and Gentiles; wealthy and poor. The Jewish faction wanted their Gentile brothers and sisters to conform to Jewish religious observances – not only festivals, but observing the Rules of Righteousness, the Law given to Moses, dietary rules and circumcision. In other words, Christians were to remain as a sect within Judaism.

Paul told them that we no longer need to be slaves to Hebrew religious practices, nor to be bound by the restrictions imposed by Torah, the Law of Moses, and the 613 rules derived from the Ten Commandments. After all, few Jews, if any, could observe every rule as required to be considered 'righteous' before God; nor could they find salvation through good deeds. Instead, God sent his Only Son, Jesus, to pay the price of the world's sins by becoming the One Perfect Sacrifice at Calvary, so we are forgiven when we repent in Christ's name. In other words, we are saved from God's condemnation through faith in Christ Jesus alone, not by anything we do to try to earn his forgiveness.

When St. Paul said that the law no longer has any hold over us, he doesn't mean that the Ten Commandments are redundant. No, he meant that we don't have to live according to Jewish practices and he added later that all the commandments are fulfilled if we love other people as ourselves, for if we do, we won't deliberately do anything to hurt them. In other words, we are free to care for others in response to the grace of God, not because we have to, which means that we do so more willingly.

St. Paul taught the Galatians that in this new order, we are clothed with Christ. Now in the Roman world, when boys reached adulthood, they changed their childish garments for a **toga virilis** – men's clothing. Christians, therefore, gained the status of becoming God's sons and daughters – mature in faith, and hopefully in love, too. Most importantly, in this new state all former distinctions are changed, for God loves each of us to the uttermost. In addition, salvation is offered to everyone in equal measure, irrespective of race, or colour, wealth or poverty, gender or anything else society uses to exclude one group from another.

This good news has powerful implications for us: Jesus calls us to care for everybody around us, whether or not they are like us in appearance, race, creed, sexual orientation, faith or politics and whether or not we find them likeable, or approve of them. Remember Jesus brings his gift of salvation to the whole world, not to an exclusive few and there must be times when things we say or do make us unlikable even to the King of Love. So, let's continue to look out for one another, to prove that we are indeed, part of Christ's flock, responding freely to his gracious call. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written in 1963 by Sydney Carter, based on an American Shaker tune, 'Simple Gifts'. Sydney was a freelance writer and broadcaster, as well as a poet and folk singer from the 1950s. During that time, he was approached by Donald Swann to write new material for Flanders and Swann reviews, honing his skills by writing for television programmes and even

*producing a hit song, 'My last cigarette', for Sheila Hancock! .Hymn number 247,
'Lord of the dance'*

1. I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth
At Bethlehem I had my birth. *Chorus:*

*'Dance, then, wherever you may be;
I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he.*

*'And I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the dance,' said he.*

2. I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John –
They came with me and the dance went on. *Chorus:*

3. I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,
And they left me there on a cross to die. *Chorus:*

4. I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black –
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body and they thought I'd gone,
But I am the dance and I still go on. *Chorus:*

5. They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die:
I'll live in you if you'll live in me –
'I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he. *Chorus:*

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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 for evermore. Amen.