

## A service for 19<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 86 verses 9 and 10

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God. Amen.

*The writer of our opening hymn, Revd Tim Hughes was born in 1978 the son of an Anglican vicar. He grew up in High Wycombe, before moving to Birmingham as a teenager when his father was appointed vicar of St John's Church, Harborne. He is a British worship leader and singer-songwriter. Formerly the Director of Worship at Holy Trinity, Brompton, he has since been ordained as a minister in the Church of England and appointed Vicar of St Luke's, Gas Street, Birmingham. We shall sing Tim Hughes' Advent hymn, 'Light of the world, / You stepped down into darkness,' number 175.*

**1. Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness,**

**Opened my eyes, let me see**

**Beauty that made this heart adore you,**

**Hope of a life spent with you. Chorus:**

*So here I am to worship,*

*Here I am to bow down,*

*Here I am to say that you're my God,*

*And you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,*

*Altogether wonderful to me.*

**2. King of all days, oh so highly exalted,**

**Glorious in heaven above.**

**Humbly you came to the earth you created,**

**All for love's sake became poor. Chorus:**

**3. And I'll never know how much it cost**

**To see my sin upon that cross.**

**And I'll never know how much it cost**

**To see my sin upon that cross..... Chorus:**

© Tim Hughes (born 1977)

### **Let us pray.**

Almighty Everlasting God, we have come here to offer you our worship and adoration, for you are the Holy One, our Lord and Saviour. From the very beginning you have sought to draw us to you, as your earthly children. In order to fulfil our salvation, you shared our mortal frame, coming as Jesus Christ. He lived amongst ordinary people, like us, bringing good news of your boundless mercy and he died on a cross at Calvary to redeem the world from its sins. His resurrection means that death itself no longer has the final word and we may inherit everlasting life through faith in him.

Amazing God, thank you for all the good things we enjoy: this beautiful world; our home, food, families, friends and all who care for us; for everything you have done for us and most of all for your presence in our lives, for without you we are hopeless and helpless.

Merciful God, in shame we confess that whereas you are holy and true, we know that our own lives are marred by failure and sin. We don't love others as we love ourselves and we are sometimes half-hearted in our love for you. We don't always answer your call to serve others in Jesus' name because of our laziness, fear, selfishness, or sense of unworthiness. O Lord, in Jesus' lovely name help us to change our ways and pardon us both for the sins we have committed as well as for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we know you hear and answer our prayers and are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you once more. From now on, may we serve you and our neighbours with joyful, faithful hearts, in Jesus' precious 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 shall continue our worship with a hymn written in 1993 by Bernadette Farrell a social activist and hymn-writer whose works are ecumenical and popular. Hymn number 706, '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:***

**5. Many the gifts, many the people,**

**Many the hearts that yearn to belong.**

**Let us be servants to one another,**

**Making your kingdom come. *Chorus:***

© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}

***In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others.***

Creator God, although we find delight in this wonderful, self-sustaining world we are only too well aware of the brokenness that blights many peoples' lives and which is damaging the environment. Whilst natural disasters contribute to the brokenness, we know that mankind's failure to honour and uphold kingdom values is a major cause of the problems faced by the world and its peoples. As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to help our neighbours, both local and far afield. Grant us the spiritual resources we need to answer our call, and, where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to motivate and empower people who can really make a difference to the world.

Gracious God, we pray for the governments of the nations of the world. Guide them to work for justice and peace, to learn to negotiate and resolve disagreements without resorting to violence and oppression. We hold before you the victims of war, terrorism and persecution: people who have been killed and their families and friends, who mourn them; victims who have suffered life-changing injuries in mind and spirit and not forgetting refugees, many of whom face exploitation and long, dangerous journeys in their search for security. Grant all of them practical support and encouragement, so they may rebuild their lives.

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 reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we can 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.

Lord of wellbeing, may the light of your love shine upon people in our community who are sick, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only through the professional care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their time of need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them; grant them a sense of being loved and valued for who they are, despite the problems they face.

Loving God, we remember 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 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, from which there is healing, courage, strength and peace.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: make us all one, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of everybody. Help us begin to plan for the ending of lockdown, as we face many serious issues that have arisen during the past four months. Unite us in love and action, so we can continue to bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and often hostile world.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm, help us to lead good lives and to share your abundant gift of love with all-comers, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

*In 1741, Joseph Hart, published a tract, "The Unreasonableness of Religion", attacking a sermon by John Wesley, but found faith after a sermon in a Moravian church fifteen years later. His conversion was so strong he became a Minister at Jewin Street Independent Chapel, London two years later – and he wrote a short but superb hymn that we shall now sing. Number 67, 'This, this is the God we adore'.*

**1. This, this is the God we adore,  
Our faithful, unchangeable friend,  
Whose love is as great as his power,  
And neither knows measure nor end:**

**2. 'Tis Jesus, the first and the last,  
Whose Spirit shall guide us safe home;  
We'll praise him for all that is past,  
And trust him for all that's to come.**

© Joseph Hart {1712 – 1768}

## **The Old Testament reading is Isaiah chapter 44 verses 6 to 8**

“This is what the LORD says—Israel’s King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come—yes, let him foretell what will come. Do not tremble, do not be afraid. Did I not proclaim this and foretell it long ago? You are my witnesses. Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.” Amen.

## **Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 13 verses 24 to 30 & 36 to 43**

Jesus told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner’s servants came to him and said,  
‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him,  
‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said,

“Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He answered,  
“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” Amen.

*Our next hymn clearly has its origin in our gospel reading, though the suggestion of predestination in the second and third verses sets them at odds with John Wesley’s*

*teaching that all may be saved! We shall sing hymn number 123, 'Come, ye thankful people, come,'*

**1. Come, ye thankful people, come,  
Raise the song of harvest-home!  
All is safely gathered in,  
Ere the winter storms begin.  
God, our maker, doth provide  
For our wants to be supplied;  
Come to God's own temple, come,  
Raise the song of harvest-home!**

**2. All the world is God's own field,  
Fruit unto his praise to yield;  
Wheat and tares together sown,  
Unto joy or sorrow grown:  
First the blade, and then the ear,  
Then the full corn shall appear;  
Lord of harvest, grant that we  
Wholesome grain and pure may be.**

**3. For the Lord our God shall come,  
And shall take his harvest home;  
From his field shall in that day  
All offences purge away;  
Give his angels charge at last  
In the fire the tares to cast,  
But the fruitful ears to store  
In his garner evermore.**

**4. Even so, Lord, quickly come;  
Bring thy final harvest home;  
Gather thou thy people in,  
Free from sorrow, free from sin;  
There for ever purified,  
In thy garner to abide:  
Come, with all thine angels, come,  
Raise the glorious harvest-home!**

© Henry Alford {1810 – 1871}

**Sermon 'In gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.'** Matthew 13:29  
Several years ago, whilst I was still teaching full time, I faced a problem in my garden. It was a crisis of my own making, for I had neglected the garden for a fortnight since I had transplanted my sugar pea seedlings and, inevitably weeds had established themselves around the seedlings. One of the unwanted crops that my garden produces every year – despite the measures I have taken to eliminate it – is chickweed. As any gardener here knows, chickweed spreads its roots over a wide area and, if one simply attempts to pull it up, nearby plants are very likely to be uprooted, too. I spent a long time, painstakingly separating pea seedlings from chickweed, yet I still lost at least half a dozen pea plants, so Jesus' parable about the wheat and tares has a poignant edge for me.

The weed referred to as tares, is almost certainly darnel which closely resembles wheat in its early stages, yet which produces toxic seeds, not grain. As it grows, darnel roots intertwine with those of neighbouring plants, so the householder was wise to instruct his servants NOT to pull up the weeds, as much good wheat would have been lost. Lest you consider the story is fanciful, think again, as it was a punishable offence in Roman law to sow darnel amongst an enemy's wheat: clearly, such an act of revenge must have occurred on a number of occasions! Whereas the story of the sower and the seed, refers to how people receive the gospel message, the parable of the wheat and tares refers to problems within the Christian Church itself. These problems are not disputes or grievances, for which Matthew advocated a policy in chapter 18; the issue concerns the authenticity of believers within the community.

The parable establishes the field as the Church upon which Christ's followers, the wheat, grow. However, there is an enemy within the Church; people who appear to be genuine followers, but who could ultimately damage the faith community. The real problem lies in correctly identifying the darnel and the wheat within a church. When Matthew wrote his gospel, the Church was already experiencing problems with the **Kerygma**, or what should be preached. Unorthodox views caused major problems, which is why we have the various creeds, such as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which are intended to guide members of the faith to the core beliefs. If you wonder whether or not such creeds were necessary, consider two heretical viewpoints of the early church. **Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch**, who paid his 'supporters club' to applaud his sermons, asserted that Jesus was definitely not God, but only a divinely inspired man, whom God had adopted at a particular point of time. Such a heresy is called '**adoptionism**'.

Bishop Paul's view contrasted with **docetism**, which held that as 'the flesh' is evil, Jesus only appeared to be human, but was fully divine. **Docetists** maintained that Christ cast no shadow and only appeared to die on the cross. I think all of us would agree that, were that the case, God would have played the biggest trick in human history, but the God we worship is the Author of truth and would never stoop to deceive. We can see how heresies undermine faith and why the leading Bishops of the early Church met to devise a uniform Creed. Incidentally, during the **Council of Nicea in 325AD**, **St. Nicholas** is said to have struck **Arius the Heretic** on the jaw during a heated exchange. It lifts my spirits when I compare the real saint – strong in faith and arm – with the usual image of a jolly Father Christmas promoted by the commercial sector!

One of the real tragedies in the World Church is the inability of many Christians to set aside differences of opinion and to work in unity. I am certain that St. Paul would feel the same frustration with the Church in the Twenty-First Century as he did with the Churches at Corinth, two thousand years earlier. The division within the Anglican Communion over the appointment of gays and lesbians as bishops, is still a talking-point in the Media, but other denominations have their own internal differences, so none of us has the right to feel complacent. After all, we Methodists have issues with bishops of any kind; consider John Wesley's appointment of Bishop Francis Asbury in the USA during 1784. Divisions weaken us, so we need to work together and allow Christ Jesus to be our judge, bearing in mind **Frederick Faber's** verse in "**There's a wideness in God's mercy**": "**But we make God's love too narrow / By false limits of our own; / And we magnify his strictness / With a zeal he will not own.**"

We should concentrate on more important issues, such as: post coronavirus society; pollution and diminishing resources; establishing lasting peace; social and economic justice, particularly in the light of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement; crime, especially gun and knife crime, mainly involving young people; the re-establishment of stable family life in this country; appropriate punishment of offenders, so that most can rebuild their lives; acceptable boundaries for scientific research; the care of the vulnerable in society – both young and elderly. There is much work to be done and, not least of all, what of inter-faith relations?

Above all these issues, Christians need to promote our belief that God loves everybody so much that Jesus died and was raised to free us from the burden of our sins and to offer us new life. If we fail to do that because we are distracted from mission by internal arguments, we might well prove to be dandelion and not the wheat we would like to be! Don't allow differences of opinion to drive us apart from one another, for only Satan benefits from division. Jesus said that, in the end, we shall be judged fairly by the quantity of seed we bear. May our daily lives show that we belong to Jesus by the way we care for other people in both words and deeds: in other words, may we not only accept the Gospel message, but live it out day-by-day. Amen.

*“The kingdom of God is mercy and grace, / The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place, / The outcast are welcomed God’s banquet to share, / And hope is awakened in place of despair.” We close our worship as we sing Bryn Rees’ vision of the kingdom of God. Hymn number 255, ‘The kingdom of God is justice and joy,’*

**1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,  
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;  
God’s power and glory in Jesus we know,  
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**

**2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,  
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,  
The outcast are welcomed God’s banquet to share,  
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**

**3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,  
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,  
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,  
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;  
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,  
And all things cry glory to God all in all!**

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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.**