

A service for 19th October, 2025 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 121 (a Song for going up to worship)

I look up to the hills, but where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. He will not let you be defeated. He who guards you never sleeps. He who guards Israel never rests or sleeps. The LORD guards you.

The LORD is the shade that protects you from the sun. The sun cannot hurt you during the day, and the moon cannot hurt you at night. The LORD will protect you from all dangers; he will guard your life. The LORD will guard you as you come and go, both now and forever. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written in 1998 by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter, when he was only thirty-three years old. His earliest hymns were published when he was in his mid-twenties. Hymn number 24, ‘Come, now is the time to 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.

Word of life, you brought our universe into being and sustain it with your love. Your glory is revealed both in the vastness of space with its myriad suns, planets and moons, besides the beauty and complexity of life on this planet. In the light of your wisdom, might and holiness, we are amazed that you 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. All honour and glory, power and praise be yours now and forevermore. Amen.

When I say, ‘Merciful Lord’, please respond, ‘restore us to righteousness’. Let us pray.

Lord, our Good Shepherd, you bless us day by day with good things to enjoy, with opportunities and experiences that warm our heart. You bring us safely through trials and temptations and you guide and protect us. You are truly amazing and we rejoice to be part of your flock.

However, like sheep we confess that we have strayed from the path you want us to follow: we ignore your calls and go our own way. We are often selfish and self-centred, ignoring the needs of our neighbours; we give way to anger and prejudice, saying things that hurt and offend other people. As we reflect on these things

Merciful Lord restore us to righteousness

Like sheep, we find ourselves in barren places because of our pride and greed. We take more than we need and will not share what we don't want. We are loveless and unlovable, lost and ashamed.....

Merciful Lord restore us to righteousness

Loving, faithful God, you hear and answer our prayers. You seek us out and carry us home to the path of righteousness, rejoicing that we can journey with you once more. Help us to centre our discipleship on Christ and to lead lives of loving service in his precious 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.

We continue with a hymn written by Colin Ferguson, a Scot who worked as a probation officer, then for family courts, helping to establish mediation services and training for bereavement care. He is an elder and licensed preacher in the URC. Hymn number 629, 'God of my faith, I offer you my doubt'.

**1. God of my faith, I offer you my doubt,
For life at times seems far too dark for me,
And my belief becomes more insecure,
When worldly cares produce uncertainty.**

**2. God of my hope, I offer you my fear,
When I am scared by my anxiety,
When all I hear is suffering and woe,
In all my shadows you will walk with me.**

**3. God of my joy, I offer you my grief,
When I sink down in sadness or despair,
When in depression I cannot be touched,
I pray in all my depths to find you there.**

**4. God of my love, I offer you my pain,
When I'm alone and feel nobody cares,
In aching age or in rejected youth,
You bear my cross and dry my human tears.**

**5. God of my life, I offer you my dreams,
Light in the darkness where I hide from view,
Light in my faith, my hope, my joy and love,
Light in my life and all my life in you.**

© Colin Ferguson (born 1937)

In our prayers of intercession we bring our concerns for neighbours nearby and far away. I am basing it upon Graham Kendrick's hymn, 'Beauty for brokenness'. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy', please answer 'hear our prayer'.

**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!**

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 ought to be joyful, yet our spirits are cast down because of the brokenness we see in the News Media. We do indeed pray for the

needs of the poor and marginalised to be met, for justice, peace and blessing for all humankind, not just a select few.

*Lord, in your mercy..... **hear our prayer***

**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.**

Merciful God, remember people in our church, our families, workplaces and community who are suffering illness, trouble, or need. Those who are lonely, anxious or depressed and especially all who are mourning the loss of somebody dear to them. In a time of silence, we offer names of those for whom we are especially concerned, asking that you will reach out to them, heal, restore and comfort them, granting them courage and peace. Lord, empower us to offer them practical support and friendship, as your earthly hands.

*Lord, in your mercy..... **hear our prayer***

**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.**

Lord, our thoughts turn to Ukraine and Palestine, where fighting is causing unspeakable horror and suffering, particularly to civilians, young and old. We pray that the peace plan brokered by President Trump will be accepted by both Hamas and Israel, that hostages will be released, prisoners freed and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank will experience an end to their suffering. We remember worshippers at the Heaton Park Synagogue which was attacked by a terrorist on Yom Kippur and pray that the attack fails to break community relations in that area. Like prophets of old, we cry out for justice: for just, swift ends to the fighting, not only in Ukraine and the Holy Land, but also in Congo, Sudan and Somalia, Myanmar.

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, including people whose views offend us.

*Lord, in your mercy..... **hear our prayer***

**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.**

Lord of all, you gave us stewardship of the beautiful planet, but we have broken it, as wildfires, storms, droughts and floods bear witness. Help us change our ways, to give the world a chance to heal itself, so future generations do not have to pay the price of our pride and negligence.

Holy God, hear our prayer for Dame Sarah Mullarby, the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Grant her wisdom, patience and grace to heal some of the Anglican church's divisions and be the good shepherd she aspires to be. We ask you to inspire this church, churches in our local circuits and indeed throughout the World to serve you in love and unity, so we bear good news to a world that desperately needs it.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends as we walk in the way of the Lord. Keep us free from harm, help us to resist the temptation to sin and teach us to

share your overflowing love with both friend and stranger, in the wonderful name of Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

The Old Testament reading is Genesis chapter 32 verses 22 to 32

During the night Jacob rose and crossed the Jabbok River at the crossing, taking with him his two wives, his two slave girls, and his eleven sons. He sent his family and everything he had across the river. So Jacob was alone, and a man came and wrestled with him until the sun came up. When the man saw he could not defeat Jacob, he struck Jacob's hip and put it out of joint. Then he said to Jacob,

"Let me go. The sun is coming up." But Jacob said,

"I will let you go if you will bless me." The man said to him,

"What is your name?" And he answered,

"Jacob." Then the man said,

"Your name will no longer be Jacob. Your name will now be Israel, because you have wrestled with God and with people, and you have won."

Then Jacob asked him,

"Please tell me your name." But the man said,

"Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed Jacob there.

So Jacob named that place Peniel, saying,

"I have seen God face to face, but my life was saved." Then the sun rose as he was leaving that place, and Jacob was limping because of his leg. So even today the people of Israel do not eat the muscle that is on the hip joint of animals, because Jacob was touched there. Amen.

Address 1

Shabbat shalom chaverim, I am Jacob, son of Isaac, a patriarch of my nation. You might have expected a patriarch to be a man of integrity, favoured by the Lord and an example for others to copy, but I wasn't until I met the Lord by the river Jabbok. My birth name was Ya-aqob, meaning 'heel-catcher', not only because I was born clutching the heel of my elder brother, Esau, but because Ya-aqob means a trickster, deceiver or con-man. I lived out that title, deceiving my father into giving the blessing meant for Esau, after making my brother yield his birth-right for a meal. I even managed to outwit my devious Uncle Laban, who made me labour for him over fourteen years, so I could marry Rachel. I used my knowledge of breeding sheep to cheat Laban of a great number of his flock by bargaining with him that I should have the speckled, spotted and black sheep and ensuring that was all I bred. I think that a modern counterpart of mine would be Derek Trotter!

I left my uncle and set off to Beer-Sheba with my wives, children servants and all my livestock. Although I have been away for many years, I knew I would have to face Esau and feared that he would massacre me and my family in revenge for being cheated of his birthright. I decided to divide my people into two groups, so that if Esau and his four hundred men attacked us, one group might survive. As I re-crossed the ford of the Jabbok where I encountered a figure with whom I wrestled all night. I didn't know who I was wrestling, but he was stronger, but I gripped him as strongly as I'd gripped Esau's heel year before and even after the stranger had disabled my hip, I refused to let go until he gave me his blessing, for I had realized by then that the man I was holding onto was Adonai Elohim, the God of my ancestors and the fight hadn't just been physical combat, but a spiritual one, too.

The Lord asked my name and told me, **"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have prevailed."** Notice that the name-change preceded his blessing, for God's shalom was

given to me as the struggler, not to me the former cheat. In other words, as Israel, rather than Jacob, my relationship with the Lord and mankind had been changed completely. God had taken me as I was – made me cling to him and had blessed me. Shabbat shalom! Amen

Our next hymn was written by Noel and Tricia Richards. Noel was born in Llantrisant, near Cardiff in 1956 and was inspired to become a hymn-writer and composer after he saw Graham Kendrick at Colston Hall when Noel was fifteen. He married Tricia in 1978 and they have complemented one another in producing several albums of fine hymns and worship songs. Hymn number 430, ‘My lips shall praise you’.

My lips shall praise you,

My great Redeemer;

My heart will worship

Almighty Saviour.

**1. You take all my guilt away,
Turn the darkest night to brightest day,
You are the restorer of my soul. (Chorus)**

**2. Love that conquers every fear,
In the midst of trouble you draw near,
You are the restorer of my soul. (Chorus)**

**3. You're the source of happiness,
Bringing peace when I am in distress,
You are the restorer of my soul. (Chorus) © Noel Richards (1955) Tricia Richards (1960)**

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 18 verses 1 to 8

Then Jesus used this story to teach his followers that they should always pray and never lose hope.

“In a certain town there was a judge who did not respect God or care about people. In that same town there was a widow who kept coming to this judge, saying, ‘Give me my rights against my enemy.’ For a while the judge refused to help her. But afterwards, he thought to himself,

‘Even though I don’t respect God or care about people, I will see that she gets her rights. Otherwise she will continue to bother me until I am worn out.’”

The Lord said,

“Listen to what the unfair judge said. God will always give what is right to his people who cry to him night and day, and he will not be slow to answer them. I tell you, God will help his people quickly. But when the Son of Man comes again, will he find those on earth who believe in him?” Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn by the prolific and long-lived Methodist Minister, Revd. Fred Prat Green. It was written for the Dean and Chapter of Norwich Cathedral to mark the late Queen’s Silver Jubilee in 1977, entitled “A Hymn for the Nation”. Hymn number 705, ‘It is God who holds the nations’.

1. it is God who holds the nations

In the hollow of his hand;

It is God whose light is shining

In the darkness of the land;

It is God who builds the City

On the Rock and not on sand:
May the living God be praised!

2. It is God whose purpose summons us
To use the present hour;
Who recalls us to our senses
When a nation's life turns sour;
In the discipline of freedom
We shall know God's saving power:
May the living God be praised!

3. When a thankful nation, looking back,
Has cause to celebrate
Those who win our admiration
By their service to the state;
When self-giving is a measure
Of the greatness of the great:
May the living God be praised!

4. God reminds us every sunrise
That the world is ours on lease;
For the sake of life tomorrow
May our love for it increase;
May all races live together
share its riches, be at peace:
May the living God be praised!

© Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

Address 2

The judge in Jesus' parable was another rogue, like Jacob. He neither feared God, nor respected people's opinions, so he probably followed his own inclinations and had no time for the widow and her pleas for justice. In Jesus' time, widows were powerless, having neither wealth with which to bribe the judge, nor anyone to speak up for her. Under normal circumstances, therefore, the unjust judge would have ignored her or sent her away, but this widow was made of stronger character and she persisted in her struggle, just as Jacob had with God. She wore him down, until he relented and judged in her favour. It is worth noting that the Greek used for '**wore him down**' is **hupopiazō**, which **means to irritate unbearably, to buffet, or even strike a blow under the eye, so the widow's pleas were both continuous and powerful.**

The point that Jesus was making is that if even a stony-hearted and unjust judge can be prevailed upon by constant, fervent requests, then how much more likely will the loving and merciful God answer the prayers of his people? If our prayers are not answered swiftly, we should continue to pray, because God will answer them in his own way and in his own time. Jesus' instruction to pray diligently and not lose heart went beyond the contemporary Jewish teaching, which was to **limit the times of prayer to three a day, 'lest they weary God.'** As if

Jesus' comment, "**When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?**" does not mean that, when he comes again, no one will believe. Instead it was a challenge to us, his followers, to remain constant and continue to pray faithfully for all our needs, even if the Second Coming takes longer than we expect. Jesus encouraged his listeners to pray, for God the Father is just and will respond to believers' pleas.

If you ask why we should have faith that our prayers will be answered, consider Jesus. He prayed often to praise God as well as calling on him to heal or help. Jesus

never doubted that his prayers would be answered, even when he prayed for Lazarus, four days after he had died. His two most poignant prayers were in the Garden of Gethsemane when he knew that what he wanted was contrary to his Father's will, so he submitted to his fate, and then as he hung on the cross, he prayed for the forgiveness of those who were killing him, instead of calling for retribution. That is grace, unearned, undeserved yet boundless love. Would God have gone through so much to draw us close to him at Calvary if he intended to ignore our prayers? No, God wants a close relationship with us, so that we can experience his real peace.

However, if we want shalom then we must work for **mishpat – justice and chesed – loving-kindness**, for Christ challenges us – his Twenty-First Century disciples – to be active in our concern for the poor and powerless everywhere, which is what our Methodist forebears did. At home, rising energy costs and food inflation may make it difficult for us to be as generous as we have previously, but at least let us give what support we can to foodbanks and local charities which support people who are have fallen into fuel and food poverty. Though money may be tight, can we offer practical support to foodbanks, or holiday clubs that provide children who qualify for free school meals with a midday meal during school holidays, or offer warm spaces this winter? Warm spaces schemes require volunteers to work. Could you spare time to help in any capacity?

It would be so easy to throw up our hands in despair when we consider these issues, but whether or not you can give all you would like or offer practical support, please pray for the disadvantaged as often as you can, because our prayers can make all the difference. Jesus proclaimed the Great Commandment as, **“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.** Love is the answer to the world's problems: not wishy-washy, sentimental love, but love with her sleeves rolled up. The most valuable thing we possess is love and God showers that on us in abundance. The more we share the love God gives us, the more we shall receive – like a magic box of chocolates which, unlike mine never runs out! Amen.

We close our worship with a hymn by Jacqueline Jones to challenge us. She was originally from South Africa, but now lives in Christchurch, NZ as a vicar's wife! Hymn number 662, ‘Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?’

1. Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

**Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
Though the way be rough and narrow? Chorus:**

**Will you walk the path that will cost you much
And embrace the pain and sorrow?**

**Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?**

**2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?**

**Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent? Chorus:**

3. In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless? *Chorus:*

4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
And believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?

Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:*

We will walk the path that will cost us much

And embrace the pain and sorrow.

We will trust in One who entrusts to us

The disciples of tomorrow.

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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 evermore. Amen.