

A service for 1st August, 2021 (StF)

Call to Worship: Isaiah chapter 55 verses 1 and 2

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. 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

Loving heavenly Father, all glory, honour, power and praise are yours alone, for your Word transformed darkness and chaos into this vast swirling universe of stars, planets and moons. Your power and wisdom not only created life but formed self-sustaining eco-systems which enable life to continue. In your love you reached out to humankind, offering guidance through the patriarchs and prophets by your holy word. Even when we rebelled against your teaching and set ourselves in opposition to you, your love for us is so great that you did not abandon us, but instead came as Christ Jesus.

Jesus came to show us how we should live through his words and actions, but he also came to bear the judgment for the sins of the world by becoming the one perfect sacrifice on a cross at Calvary. His death broke the power of sin, but when he was raised, Jesus overcame death and offers us everlasting life as his great gift of grace, not something we can grasp by works, nor which we deserve. Lord, we come to worship you with joy and awe. Amen.

In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession.

Lord, we have come to thank you for this beautiful world in which we live, for all the good things we enjoy, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, for rich, fulfilling experiences and for opportunities that have enhanced our days, but above all things, thank you for being our Good Shepherd, for even when we stray from you, when we are loveless and unlovable, we know you will seek us out and save us from our folly.

Holy God, when we consider ourselves as straying sheep, we reflect upon our failures to love and serve you wholeheartedly and to love our neighbours as we know we should. For the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do, forgive us O Lord and bring us back to you in our deeds and words, so we may be your holy people.

Merciful Lord, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have already pardoned us. Lord God, teach us to share your gift of love with all-comers, so we may honour you in the beautiful name of Jesus. 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 next hymn was written by the Welsh equivalent of Charles Wesley. William Williams of Pantycelyn, nicknamed “The sweet singer of Wales”, who wrote eight hundred hymns, all in Welsh. This one was translated by Peter Williams – no relation of William – and set to John Hughes’ tune, “Cwm Rhondda”, in 1905. Hymn number 437, ‘Guide me, O thou great Jehovah’.

**1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.**

**2. Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.**

**3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell’s destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan’s side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.**

© William Williams (1717 – 1791) trans. by P. Williams (1722 – 1796)

In our prayers of intercession we think of people near and far away.

Heavenly Father, we offer praise and thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet which displays your power and glory. However, whenever we hear or read the news, we are reminded about the world’s brokenness, much of which is the result of human failure, greed, cruelty, pride, foolishness and selfishness. Lord, we acknowledge that you have blessed us and as a result offer ourselves to serve as your earthly hands as we seek to help neighbours who are in trouble or in need. Grant us the patience, wisdom, courage and compassion to act as Jesus would act, but in situations where our best is not enough, we pray that you will reach out to others who can bring about healing and wholeness, for to you all things are possible.

Holy God, we ask you to revive our church and churches throughout the world, particularly as restrictions caused by COVID19 are eased, so that we may a blessing to our communities and to people further afield. Help us set aside our divisions and differences, so we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve

him as a united body of believers. Bless and use our love, gifts and graces to share Good News in our actions as well as our words, so our lives reveal the grace of Jesus.

Almighty God, events like the terrible floods in Germany and Belgium with mass destruction and the loss of many lives are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for people affected by the floods and for campaigners against pollution and irresponsible consumerism. May not only governments but most of the population recognize the need for change, so that future generations will inherit a habitable world.

God of shalom, of peace and harmony, we pray for peace in a world defiled with conflicts, persecution, terrorism, prejudice and sectarianism. We pray for national leaders to seek justice and mercy in their dealings, so peace may flow like a healing river and we pray for healing of the divisions we see in our own society. Let your peace begin our own dealings with our neighbours, so our lives reflect what we ask for the world.

Author of wellbeing, we pray for people who are ill in body or mind, whose lives are blighted with pain and anxiety especially those whose treatment has been held up because of the pandemic. May they receive treatment that will restore their health, or at least mitigate the results of neglect and delay. We pray for those whose mental and spiritual health have been adversely affected by lockdown restrictions, asking that that they will not only seek but will receive they support they need. Lord, remember people living with a dementia, their families, friends and carers whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Help them come safely through these testing times.

We offer our prayer for people who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned.
Lord, help us to offer them both friendship and practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be comforted and healed. Bless them with courage, hope and enduring peace.

Gracious God, guide most people in the country to behave responsibly as legal COVID restrictions have been eased, so coronavirus can be kept in check and vulnerable people remain safe. Meanwhile, we continue to ask your blessing upon everybody who has been working for our wellbeing during this crisis, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and key-workers. Bless all of them, grant them success in their work and keep them safe.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us be beacons of good news, day by day. May we learn to share the love you give us in such abundance with everybody we meet, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn translated in 1940 from an Urdu lyric. The translator was Dermott Monahan, son of a Wesleyan Methodist missionary, who, like his father, served in Southern India, most of his life, though he was educated in England and was trained at Handsworth College, Birmingham. The melody is a Pakistani folk song. Hymn number 252, 'Jesus the Lord said: "I am the Bread,"'

1. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,

The Bread of Life for the world am I.

The Bread of Life for the world am I,

The Bread of Life for the world am I.'

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread, / The Bread of Life for the world am I'.

2. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Vine –
The true and fruitful Vine am I.'

3. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Way,
The true and living Way am I.'

4. Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the Light,
The one true Light of the world am I.'

5. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,
The Resurrection and the Life am I.'
The Resurrection and the Life am I,
The Resurrection and the Life am I.'

Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,
The Resurrection and the Life am I.' © tr. Dermott Monahan (1906 – 57) Singing the Faith version

Our Gospel reading is John chapter 6 verses 24 to 35

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

Jesus answered them,

"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him,

"What must we do to perform the works of God?"

Jesus answered them,

"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

So they said to him,

"What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them,

"Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

They said to him,

"Sir, give us this bread always."

Jesus said to them,

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Amen.

Sermon: 'Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life': John 6:27

Last week's Gospel reading told how Jesus fed a crowd of more than five thousand with five loaves and two fish, mirroring God's provision of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness and thereby pointing that he is the Messiah. However, the crowd wanted to

seize him and make him King, not as God's anointed, but as a source of easy food. They were motivated by material desires, not spiritual ones.

Some people confuse spirituality with religiousness, so let me clarify what I mean. Our spirituality is what makes us come alive, what makes us who we are and experience wellbeing. We can gain spiritual food when we go on holiday, or hear a piece of music that moves us, or read a poem that uplifts us, or do something we enjoy, or share the company of somebody we like. It can be a sunrise, or sunset, a striking panorama, even a wonderful meal. Most of all, our well-being is enhanced by knowing that we are valued and loved for who we are, warts and all.

The day after Jesus fed the five thousand, they found him on the other side of the lake. He told the multitude, **"I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."** They responded by asking for him to perform a miracle by which they might have faith in him as the Messiah. Jesus replied, that it was God, not Moses, who had sent manna for the Israelites, while he was the bread, the source of life lived fully, not only for the Jews, but for the whole world. The crowd demanded this bread that he offered, but many lacked both understanding and faith to receive it. Faith in Jesus is the key to salvation, because it doesn't only satisfy our physical hunger, but our spiritual needs, too.

We should not set our sights on material things alone, for our spiritual health is vital to our general well-being. Consider how, even in our materialistic society, people still seek answers to the meaning of life, even though many no longer attend church. Some dabble in New Age practices, or turn to spiritualism; others, like Madonna, have turned to Kabbalah, a form of Medieval Jewish mysticism. Naturally, I think they're hopelessly misguided, but their striving for answers shows that they have a spiritual hunger which the Christian Church should be fulfilling.

In our Gospel reading Jesus was inviting the crowd to see the possibilities for the world if only they would believe in him. If only we can hold onto Kingdom values and trust God to work through us, we can make a difference. Here is how a crippled shoemaker transformed the lives of thousands of poor children in the Nineteenth Century. John Pounds was born in Portsmouth in 1766 and became a rough cobbler in his late teens after he fell from a ship in dry dock at the Royal Dockyards when serving an apprenticeship. In 1803, he bought a small, wooden shop with a living room above the workshop and made a good living. When John's brother, a sailor, was unable to look after his crippled son, John took him in. He made special boots for the boy that – in time – cured his condition. However, John also taught him the trade and made him a partner.

John became concerned about the street urchins who begged and stole in Portsmouth's streets. He realised that they needed more than food and shelter if they were to have worthwhile lives, so he enticed them into his workshop with the promise of a baked apple or a baked potato, so that he could teach them. Despite the size of his shop, John taught up to forty of these rough children at a time, without recourse to corporal punishment, yet no child was said to have left unable to read, write, or do simple sums. In addition, he taught them nature study, history and the Scriptures. He nursed them when they were ill and begged respectable clothes, so that some could accompany him to church. He put a sign above the shop door, **'Little vagabonds preferred'** and accepted only children whose parents could not afford to pay for their education.

John Pound not only provided the young vagabonds material needs, he fed them spiritually to, not just educating them but making them feel valued and loved, warts and all. His legacy was the founding of The Ragged School Union, so by the mid-1800s there were more than six hundred Ragged Schools in England and Wales and they served children of the poor until universal education became law in 1871.

The bread Jesus offers us is God's salvation – a vision of a just world where not only are physical and material hungers fed, but the deep spiritual needs of people are fulfilled. It is a vision of a world where people are not judged by race, colour, creed, gender, wealth or status, but are valued as beings made in the image of God and loved so much by the Lord that his Only Son died for them. What can we do to turn that vision into practice?

The past eighteen months of the COVID19 pandemic have affected us all in a variety of ways. As we begin to emerge and recover from the shadow of coronavirus, it is a good time to think of how we as a body of believers can address some of the issues that face society at large: supporting the bereaved, or people suffering with depression and anxiety; working with people burdened by debt, or who have lost their jobs, or others whose relationships have broken down, or become abusive, or trying to reach out to neighbours who have endured isolation and loneliness. And these are just scratching the surface of need around us.

We cannot do everything on our own, but we can address one or perhaps two issues, using the expertise and help of charities, possibly offering them a base at church. We can work as a group of churches, or as a Circuit, or, heaven help us, sharing the task with other denominations. **Our Church is built upon the foundations of God's amazing, redemptive love, a love that lives in us as the Holy Spirit. Let us use our love to bring healing and hope in Jesus' name. Amen.**

We conclude our worship with a hymn written by Karen Lafferty at a point in her life when money was tight after she had given up a successful singing career in order to serve as a missionary to drug addicts and prostitutes in Amsterdam. She lived out the words of the hymn we are about to sing. Hymn number 254, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,'

**1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;**

Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:

Alleluia, Alleluia,

Alleluia, Allelu–, Alleluia!

**2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;**

Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:

**3. We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;**

Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:

© Karen Lafferty (born 1948)

Benediction

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