

A service for 20th August, 2023 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations. May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. May the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples justly and guide the nations of the earth.

May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us. God will bless us, and all the ends of the earth will fear him. Amen.

Our opening hymn offers us a moment of stillness as we begin our worship. It was written by David Evans in 1985, as his reaction to some contemporary worship songs which he felt were over-familiar to the Lord. We shall sing hymn number 20, “Be still, for the presence of the Lord.”

1. Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;

Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.

In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

2. Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;

He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.

How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light;

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

3. Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;

He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.

No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place. © David J. Evans

Let us pray.

Holy, holy, holy Lord our God, we have come to worship you today, for you are the Everlasting Source of all creation, mighty, faithful and wise in all you do. Jesus Christ, you are our Saviour and friend, whose life, crucifixion and resurrection have broken the hold of sin and death, establishing such a relationship with God the Father that we may boldly address him as Abba, daddy. Holy Spirit of truth and love, you are our guide, strength and comforter in our discipleship. Great God, the Three in One, breathe your boundless, everlasting love into our inmost being and warm our hearts, so we may offer healing, hope and grace to our forlorn and broken world, as your followers.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things with which you have blessed us, for the colours and beauty of this summer's day, for people who have cared for us, guided us, loved and inspired us and for loving us even when we are loveless and unlovable, but most of all, thank you for coming as Christ, for without him we would be hopeless and helpless.

Merciful God, forgive us when we fail to live out the good news in our lives, when we hurt or exclude our neighbours by our thoughtlessness or our prejudices, when we make excuses for not helping people we see in trouble or in need, when we deliberately keep quiet when we witness injustice or persecution and when we neglect to answer our call to

serve you. Help us to change our self-centred ways to Christ-centred lives and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

Heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and that you have forgiven us. Let us serve you in the power of the Spirit, so we can make a difference to our communities by serving our neighbours with joyful, faithful hearts, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

We shall pray the words Jesus taught his disciples:

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.

Thomas Colvin was ordained as a Church of Scotland minister and became a missionary who served in Malawi and Ghana until 1976. He wrote our next hymn during a day training course for evangelists at Chereponi, Ghana in the mid-1960s. I wonder if he was bored by the course, or inspired by it. He set his words to a Ghanaian love song. Hymn number 249, 'Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love,'
Jesu, Jesu

Fill us with your love,

Show us how to serve

The neighbours we have from you.

1. Kneels at the feet of his friends,

Silently washes their feet,

Master who acts as a slave to them: *Chorus*

2. Neighbours are rich folk and poor,

Neighbours are black folk and white,

Neighbours are nearby and far away: *Chorus*

3. These are the ones we should serve,

These are the ones we should love.

All these are neighbours to us and you: *Chorus*

4. Kneel at the feet of our friends,

Silently washing their feet,

This is the way we should live with you: *Chorus*

© T.S. Colvin {born 1925}

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others. When I say 'Your kingdom come', please respond with, 'Your will be done'.

Lord of all, help us to respond to your amazing grace by serving you in whatever way we can. Grant us the power of your Holy Spirit to give us the courage, steadfastness, wisdom and compassion we need to serve our neighbours as you call us to, but in circumstances where we know we are powerless, we turn to you, for to you all things are possible. We ask you to warm the hearts of and motivate people with power and influence who can really make a difference to the world.

'Your kingdom come', 'Your will be done'.

Gracious God, hear our prayer for those who hold authority in the nations of the world. Guide them in the way of your righteousness, so that they govern justly and mercifully and seek fairness for all-comers. Help us build a world where people stand up against poverty, here and abroad, where we see others as you see them, as your children who are to be protected and nurtured. Help us to be willing to work together in mutual trust, to always seek the common good, rather than our own selfish desires and to share justly the earth's resources, rather than fighting over them.

'Your kingdom come', **'Your will be done'**.

God of love, truth and justice, we grieve for countries afflicted by disasters resulting from climate change and for our part in the failure of humankind to act as faithful stewards of the planet you gave us. The evidence is here before us: droughts and famine; unbearable heatwaves and wildfires; devastating floods, exceptionally powerful storms, depletion of resources and melting ice-caps. In the last week we have seen the devastation and many deaths wrought by wildfires on Maui in Hawaii. Help us do what we can to rebuild the environment by changing our lifestyles, by supporting people whose lives are being ruined by extremes of weather and so our descendants will inherit and habitable world.

'Your kingdom come', **'Your will be done'**.

Lord of shalom, we pray for the establishment of peace throughout the world and for the end of fighting particularly in Ukraine, Sudan and between Jews and Palestinians in Jerusalem. Bless with success the work of peacemakers and everybody who works with victims of conflict, terrorism, persecution and prejudice, for they are worthy to be called your sons and daughters.

'Your kingdom come', **'Your will be done'**.

God of healing and well-being, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for neighbours who are lonely, anxious, overworked, or who feel undervalued and unloved as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them. Lord, help us play our part by offering them practical support as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, from which they may find healing, courage, hope, strength and peace.

'Your kingdom come', **'Your will be done'**.

Holy God, grant that this church, churches in our Circuit and, indeed, churches throughout the world may unite in love and action, so we may bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world in Jesus' name.

'Your kingdom come', **'Your will be done'**.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead good lives but to boldly take the light of the gospel to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 15 verses 10 to 28

Jesus called the crowd to him and said,

"Listen and understand. What goes into a man's mouth does not make him 'unclean', but what comes out of his mouth, that is what makes him 'unclean.'" Then the disciples came to him and asked,

"Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"

He replied,
“Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. Leave them; they are blind guides. If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

Peter said,
“Explain the parable to us.”
“Are you still so dull?” Jesus asked them. “Don’t you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’; but eating with unwashed hands does not make him ‘unclean.’”

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out,
“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.”

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

He answered,
“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” The woman came and knelt before him.
“Lord, help me!” she said.

He replied,
“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.”
“Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”

Then Jesus answered,
“Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour. Amen.

“For the love of God is broader / Than the measures of the mind; / And the heart of the Eternal / Is most wonderfully kind. // But we make his love too narrow / By false limits of our own; / And we magnify his strictness / With a zeal he will not own.” The fourth and fifth verses of our third hymn tell us a great deal about divine and human attitudes to mercy. The hymn was written by Revd. Frederick Faber, an admirer of John Henry Newman and who worked with him at the Oratory in Edgbaston. Then, after falling out with him, he founded Brompton Oratory which Cardinal Newman described as ‘Second-rate’! This hymn is definitely first-rate! Number 426, ‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy’

**1. There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There’s a kindness in his justice,
Which is more than liberty.**

**2. There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members
In the sorrows of the Head.**

3. There is grace enough for thousands
Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations
In that upper home of bliss.

4. For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

5. But we make His love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify his strictness
With a zeal he will not own.

6. If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be illumined
By the presence of our Lord.

© Frederick William Faber {1814 – 63}

Sermon: *'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.'* Matthew 15:28

Jews have an expression for someone who is in a bad mood: they say he is **oy oy miz!** Our reading from Matthew's gospel shows Jesus to be **oy oy miz** as he arrived in the region of Tyre and Sidon, for he had argued with both Scribes and Pharisees at Gennesaret after they had criticised him for breaking Hebrew traditions, particularly the intricate hand-washing customs prior to eating. Jesus, had responded by telling them that observing Jewish traditions was not as important as following the Torah, the laws given to Moses. He said that the Kosher tradition was not anywhere as important as the Pharisees thought it was, for, in his own words, **"Don't you see that whatever enters the mouth goes into the stomach and then out of the body? But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man 'unclean.'**" The Pharisees were offended when they were told that to be righteous did not required Jews to observe Hebrew traditions, but to honour God's commands, **'to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with the Lord'**, for their scrupulous observance of traditions made them seem superior to others.

Almost as soon as he and his disciples arrived in the region of Tyre and Sidon, they were accosted by a Canaanite woman, who began to shout loudly at Jesus, **"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession."** By doing so, the woman broke a number of taboos, as far as Jews were concerned: no Jew would accept being spoken to by a male or female Canaanite in such circumstances, for they were traditional enemies of the Jews, their ancestors having worshipped Baal; certainly, no Hebrew woman would have dared address a strange man in public, let alone create a disturbance by continuing to cry out to him and certainly none would have referred to Jesus in Messianic terms, as **'Son of David'** – unless, of course, the Canaanite believed that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah!

Although Jesus chose to ignore the Canaanite mother, her shouting upset and embarrassed his disciples, who urged him to send her packing, so he turned to the woman and said,

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” Instead of being put off by the rebuff, the mother threw herself at his feet and asked,

“Lord, help me!” At first glance, what Jesus said next would have had him branded a racist in contemporary society:

“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” However, I feel confident that his eyes sparkled as he uttered a response that she could have expected from an orthodox Jew, for while our reading used the term **‘dogs’**, Jesus used the Greek word **kunarton** which means **‘puppies’**, not **‘kuon’**, and would have been considered provocative, rather than insulting. Jesus was testing the depth of the woman’s faith and her answer delighted him.

“Yes, Lord,” she said, **“but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.”** Her answer was humble, but witty, for she had realised that Jesus had been satirising the traditional Jewish position to Gentiles, a tradition that had developed after the return from exile in Babylon under the guidance of Ezra and Nehemiah. Indeed, if we go back to the time when the Torah was given to Israel, these words from Deuteronomy express the true wishes of God: **‘He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.’**

Jesus was clearly delighted by her answer, praised her faith, cured her daughter and certainly was cured of his *oy oy miz*!

This story challenges us especially at this time, when our society seems more divided into **‘us and them’** than ever. Jesus did not treat the Canaanite woman as a member of a despised group of foreigners, but as an individual with a deep desire to be helped. He cast off traditional attitudes, which his followers had expected him to observe, offering grace and mercy rather than bitter rejection. Here was the real-life version of the parable of the Good Samaritan with the Jew showing compassion to the Gentile, rather than vice versa. The passage reminds us that God loves everyone, irrespective of colour, creed, gender, or customs, not just a chosen few. Jesus lived, was crucified and was raised for all people, not just the Jews. We must avoid thinking ourselves superior to others, writing off people as ‘hopeless cases’. Instead, we are called to treat them as Jesus did with the Canaanite woman.

At a time when youngsters are portrayed by the Media as antisocial ‘hoodies’, getting drunk, or taking drugs, or committing acts of vandalism, don’t accept that image in case it becomes self-fulfilling. Instead, treat young people as individuals which of course they are and you will generally be pleasantly surprised. Even the drunkard and drug addict may be seeking something to give life meaning – the Gospel message, perhaps! Many people seeking refuge in the United Kingdom are fleeing persecution or desperate poverty and want to contribute to society, not to gain at our expense. In the same way, don’t rush to condemn all Moslems because of the actions of a small number of fanatics. Remember each of us is an individual, made in the image of God, and we must treat one another as we would like to be treated. Only by being open-hearted and open-handed can we hope to earn our neighbours’ trust.

Currently, the Disasters Emergency Committee is likely to appeal for extra donations in response to the many crises, wildfire, floods and storms that have wrought havoc in the last few months. This country, of course is under great fiscal pressure with high food and energy costs and interest rates higher than any time since the 1980s, so we may feel as beleaguered as the milkman, Tevye, was in the opening of “Fiddler on the Roof”. When he was asked for money by the village beggar, but declined to give him a coin, saying he’d had a bad week, the beggar quipped, **“You’ve had a bad week, so I should suffer!”** An appeal by the DEC or All We Can may cause us to throw up our hands in despair at when we are preoccupied with this country’s problems. It may even provoke the onset of **‘APPEAL FATIGUE’**, an unwillingness to be as generous as we know we ought to be. Just stop and think how many times we have had to appeal to God for forgiveness: **it is as well that he doesn’t suffer from ‘appeal fatigue’, isn’t it!**

Through Jesus Christ, God extended his loving-kindness to all people and as his followers, we are challenged to follow his example, remembering that in Christ’s heart there are no **‘dogs’** or **‘kunarion’**, except for the four-legged variety. Amen.

We close our worship with a hymn I wrote fourteen years ago, but modified this month. It reflects part of our catechism – John Wesley’s teaching that ‘All need to be saved; all may be saved; all may know themselves saved; all may be saved to the uttermost.’ hope you like it!

**1. For all Christ died; for all was raised –
He offers hope to all.**

**Then let our Saviour’s name be praised;
His grace embraces all.**

**2. For all Christ came: the lame; the blind;
The fallen and deranged:
He healed them – body, soul and mind,
Their social status changed.**

**3. To all Christ offers life again,
For all died on his cross
He bled for all, so we may gain
Redemption by his loss**

**4. By faith the Spirit warms our heart,
Empowers our words and deeds.
Christ calls us all to play our part
To meet our neighbours’ needs.**

**5. To all Christ calls, for if we choose
To follow where he leads –
Then we’ll be heralds of Good News
In speech and Kingdom deeds.**

M. Rider 29th March, 2009 - @ AmblecoteWordsley a.m. (to ‘St. Magnus’ HP2 /StF 312, or ‘St. Fulbert’ HP823/ StF 769) Modified 7th August, 2023 – John Wesley’s ‘All may be saved’

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

