

A service for 21st June, 2026 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 89 verses 1 and 2

I will sing of the LORD'S great love for ever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that your love stands firm for ever, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself. 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.

Heavenly Father, Word of life throughout the universe, you first revealed yourself to human beings through the Patriarchs and prophets, so we might know, love and serve you, but when we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, you displayed amazing grace and goodness by taking human form as Jesus Christ and living with us. Jesus not only brought Good News in words and deeds of love which reveal your true nature, but gave his life at Calvary to atone for the sins of the world. Through his resurrection, he broke the power of sin and death and by means of the gift of the Holy Spirit he lives within each of us, encouraging, guiding and empowering us as we seek to serve him.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of gifts you offer us: for everyone who has brought inspiration, love and joy into our lives and for loving us even when we are unloving, faithless and unlovable.

Merciful God, we confess that whilst you are holy and loving, our own lives are marred by our failure to live as you call us to. We say and do things that cause pain and offence; we spurn chances to help neighbours who are in need or distress and we are often neglectful in our discipleship, setting our own wants before the needs of others. We find it easier to condemn other than it is to forgive, even though we know how much sin offends you. We ask you to please help us change our ways, so that Christ is at the heart of all we do and say and, as we repent, we ask you to pardon us.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers, so we are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you desire us to and use our gifts of the Spirit for the good of the Church and our neighbours, in Jesus' holy 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 continue with a hymn written by Colin Ferguson, a Scot who worked as a probation officer, then for family courts, contributing much to the establishment of mediation services and training for work as well as bereavement care.

He is an elder and licensed preacher in the United Reformed Church. 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)

We come to our prayers for people nearby and far away. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with, 'Hear our prayer'. Let us pray

Almighty God, we have heard your call to be bearers of good news to this beautiful but broken world. May the Holy Spirit enable us to serve you as you want us to by helping our neighbours and acting as your earthly hands, offering comfort, friendship and hope in Jesus' name. Keep us active and diligent in our service, even if this means we are led from our comfort zone. Loving Lord, we know that some situations are beyond our scope, but nothing is impossible for you, so we pray that you will heal our wounded world by warming the hearts of people who possess greater power and influence than we do and inspiring them to reach out in compassion.

'Lord in your mercy' 'Hear our prayer'

Lord of all, may the leaders of nations learn to govern with justice and mercy, so their peoples may live in peace. Teach them to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, to avoid disagreements from escalating into warfare. We pray for swift and just resolutions to conflicts in Ukraine, Palestine, Lebanon and Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Congo and Myanmar. We pray too for victims not only of wars, but of terrorism, discrimination and persecution, remembering Jewish and Moslem communities under attack here in

the United Kingdom and for communities affected by recent violent protests. Help us speak out against violence, injustice and prejudice and build up our communities by offering peace to all. Grant victims of hatred and intolerance the courage and support they need to find security and rebuild their lives.

'Lord in your mercy' **'Hear our prayer'**

Hear our prayer for people we know who are ill in body, mind, or spirit, recovering from injuries or operations, who are troubled, anxious or lonely, people who live with a dementia, their carers and everybody bearing the pain of bereavement. In a period of silence, we pray for everyone we know who needs your help at this time Help us to reach out to them, Lord, offering friendship and practical support wherever possible, but we ask you to enfold them in the warmth of your redemptive grace, so they may regain their health, find courage, hope and experience an enduring peace.

'Lord in your mercy' **'Hear our prayer'**

Lord God, we pray for our church, churches in our local Circuits and the World Church. May the Holy Spirit end our divisions and unite us in love and mission to bear good news to a world that dearly needs it. May the Christ light shine brightly through our words and actions as we seek to do his will.

Abba, Father, bless us our families and our friends as we answer our call to serve you. May our joy of knowing how dearly you love us inspire us, in the Spirit's power, to share the abundance of your love with both friends and strangers, so we honour you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Old Testament reading is Jeremiah chapter 20 verses 7 to 13

O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Report him! Let's report him!" All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."

But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonour will never be forgotten. O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the LORD! Give praise to the LORD! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked. Amen.

We shall sing a hymn written by Matt and Beth Redman in 2002. They live near Brighton and are worship leaders, performers and composers of contemporary hymns. This hymn reflects the faith of Jeremiah, whose love of the Lord remained constant in both good and bad times. We shall sing hymn number 41, 'Blessed be your name'.

1. Blessed be your name

In the land that is plentiful,

Where your streams of abundance flow,

Blessed be your name.

And blessed be your name

When I'm found in the desert place,

Though I walk through the wilderness,
Blessed be your name.
Every blessing you pour out
I'll turn back to praise.
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say:

*Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your name.*

*Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your glorious name.*

2. Blessed be your name

When the sun's shining down on me,
When the world's 'all as it should be,'
Blessed be your name.
And blessed be your name
On the road marked with suffering,
Though there's pain in the offering,
Blessed be your name.

Every blessing you pour out
I'll turn back to praise.
And when the darkness closes in, Lord,
Still I will say:

Blessed be the name of the Lord

You give and take away,
You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say,
Lord, blessed be your name.

Blessed be the name of the Lord

© Matt & Beth Redman

The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 10 verses 24 to 39

"A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household! So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known.

What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge them before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before people, I will disown them before my Father in heaven.

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'

Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever find their life will lose it, and whoever lose their life for my sake will find it.” Amen.

We shall continue our worship with a hymn written by Mary Peters in 1847. She married a former Rector of Queenington, Gloucestershire after he had left his living to run a Plymouth Brethren chapel. She wrote 58 hymns in a short life, passing to glory in Bristol, aged only 43. The second and third verses give an assurance of faith in difficult times, echoing Julian of Norwich’s ‘All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well’. Hymn number 639, ‘Through the love of God our Saviour’

1. Through the love of God our Saviour

All will be well.

Free and changeless is his favour;

All, all is well.

Precious is the blood that healed us,

Perfect is the grace that sealed us,

Strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;

All must be well.

2. Though we pass through tribulation,

All will be well.

Christ has purchased full salvation,

All, all is well.

Happy still in God confiding,

Fruitful, if in Christ abiding,

Holy, through the Spirit’s guiding;

All must be well.

3. We expect a bright tomorrow

All will be well.

Faith can sing through days of sorrow

All, all is well.

On our Father’s love relying,

Jesus every need supplying,

Then in living or in dying,

All must be well.

© Mary Peters (1813 – 1856)

Sermon: *“anyone who does not take their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” Matthew 10:38.*

Nobody guarantees that following the Lord is easy. Certainly, for Jeremiah God’s call was very demanding. He began a forty-year ministry when he was as young as sixteen, possibly slightly younger, knowing that the message he was to preach would bring him trouble, not blessings. Jeremiah warned the people of Judah that they would be crushed and exiled by the Babylonians, although the Jews reasoned that, since the Ark of the Covenant resided in Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem, the Lord would not permit Gentile aggressors to triumph over them. However, Jeremiah preached that they had broken their covenant with the Lord, so they would suffer the same humiliation as the Northern kingdom had experienced about a hundred and fifty years earlier. He took a clay pot to the Potsherd Gate in Jerusalem and broke it in the presence of priests and elders, declaring that, just as a potter will break and remould a defective pot, so the Lord God

would break and remould his unfaithful people of Judah. Consequently, Pashhur, the priest and Chief Officer in the Temple arrested Jeremiah, had him beaten and put in the stocks for a day, which is where today's lament begins.

Thus, in our reading the prophet complained that he suffered both physically and spiritually for doing the Lord's bidding – even his friends mocked him for his warnings of doom and destruction unless the Judeans repented their evil ways. He found it impossible to keep quiet, even though he knew silence would make life easier, for **'his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones.'** He knew that the Spirit within compelled him to obedience and, despite his complaints, he recognised that God would vindicate him against those who mocked and persecuted him.

Our gospel reading also seems gloom-laden, for Jesus was warning his followers of hard times to come, when opponents would liken them to Satan's servants, just as they had already labelled Christ as Beelzebub. They would persecute and threaten them, but he told them to remain faithful in their discipleship, for human opponents could only destroy the body, not the soul of the faithful. He asserted that, as even the commonest of wild birds is precious to God, who knows our every detail, he would bring his followers through their troubles into his glory. Jesus warned them not to allow fear of persecution to make them deny either him or the Good News he was commissioning them to take to the world, for if they denied him, he would deny them in turn. Like good soldiers, they were to remain steady in the face of the enemy.

The next part of Jesus' discourse is often misinterpreted, so I shall try to explain precisely what Jesus meant by the sentences, **'Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.'** The Greek word Matthew used for peace, **eirene**, is not the same as the Hebrew, **Shalom**, which is the peace Jesus offers to the world. **Eirene** simply means non-conflict, while **Shalom** means a new relationship between human beings and God where there is harmony, prosperity, well-being, rest and fulfilment as well as an absence of conflict. Christ's reference to the sword is not a direct allusion to warfare, but to deep division between those who accepted discipleship and others who would reject it. **"For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man's enemies will be the members of his own household,'" is a paraphrase of Micah chapter 7**, in which the prophet lamented about the divided society in which he was living, with those faithful to God opposed by their nearest and dearest.

Don't forget, Matthew's gospel was aimed at a mainly Jewish audience and early Judeo-Christians faced profound hostility from families and neighbours, especially after the **Council of Jamnia in 70AD** banned Christian Jews from worshipping in synagogues. From then on Jewish families turned their backs on Christian relatives, because they proclaimed not only the Lordship of Christ, but his death and resurrection, too – claims that are blasphemous to Jews. Like Jesus, Matthew knew that early followers would have to make agonising choices which would split their families irrevocably, but Jesus claims his followers above all human and familial claims. **We're either for him, or against him: there is no third way! If we won't accept the consequences of discipleship, then we are not fit to consider ourselves Christ's people.** Jesus is not saying that we have to fight and die for him, but we must be wholehearted in our commitment, including at times when our faith makes life difficult.

At a time when the President of the United States disparages the Pope and the Vice President has the audacity to warn the Pope of making pronouncement about

religion, we may feel reluctant to put our head above the parapet even when we see injustice and wrongdoing.

We are living in a deeply polarized society in which megaphone politics and social media are fuelling the flames of hatred. Demagogues on both sides of the Atlantic are seeking to divide communities by playing upon our prejudices and fears, demonizing people because of their race, colour, faith, gender identities and politics, rather than seeking to find the common ground that helps us to co-exist peacefully. Recent rioting about the murder of Henry Nowak in Southampton and the terrifying assault on Steven Ogilvy in Belfast has been fuelled by activists on the Internet. In the former case, the ineptitude of two policemen should not lead to condemnation of a police force, most of whose members are conscientious and good.

Whilst it is reasonable to question why Sikhs may carry a kirpan, a small ceremonial dagger, it is wrong to condemn the 535000 Sikhs in this country for the malign actions of one Sikh, who used a dagger, not his kirpan, for the murder. Sikhism forbids the use of a kirpan in a fight, as it is one of the 5Ks – symbols of their faith, as a cross, or ichthus is to Christians. The attack on Steven Ogilvy is indefensible and I suspect that the attacker is criminally insane, it does not excuse mobs from attacking homes and property of non-Europeans in Belfast, whether or not they are asylum-seekers, or indeed illegal immigrants. It should be left to the authorities to separate the genuine from those who do not qualify and to act promptly.

Never forget that Jesus sees us as individuals, created and loved by his Father, not as amorphous members of ethnic or political groups. We need to see our neighbours in the same light as Christ does and to care for them even if our views and lifestyles differ from theirs. Our attitudes and actions matter, for they can reconcile or inflame. We are challenged to be willing to be Christ's witnesses in a wicked world: to steadfast in promoting kingdom values against prejudice and indifference to our struggling neighbours. May we be willing to stand up for what we know is right, in Jesus' name. Amen.

We close our worship with a hymn written by Charles Wesley in 1749, one of a group of hymns entitled 'Hymns for a Preacher of the Gospel'. It was radically altered by John Wesley in 1780 and has remained unchanged since. Hymn number 661, 'Give me the faith which can remove'.

**1. Give me the faith which can remove
And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the child-like praying love,
Which longs to build thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
And all my simple soul devour.**

**2. I would the precious time redeem,
And longer live for this alone;
To spend, and to be spent, for them
Who have not yet my Saviour known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe, to breathe thy love.**

**3. My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
Into thy blessed hands receive;
And let me live to preach thy word,
And let me to thy glory live;**

**My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinners' friend.**

**4. Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless charity divine;
So shall I all my strength exert,
And love them with a zeal like thine;
And lead them to thy open side,
The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.**

© *Charles Wesley {1707 – 1788}*

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.