

**A service for 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 2022 (StF) (Aldersgate)**

**Call to Worship: Psalm 47 verses 5 to 9**

God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted. Amen.

*We shall worship our risen Lord as we sing a hymn written by Noel and Tricia Richards in 1987. Hymn number 293, 'All heaven declares'*

**1. All heaven declares**

**The glory of the risen Lord.**

**Who can compare**

**With the beauty of the Lord?**

**Forever He will be**

**The Lamb upon the throne.**

**I gladly bow the knee**

**And worship Him alone.**

**2. I will proclaim**

**The glory of the risen Lord,**

**Who once was slain**

**To reconcile man to God.**

**Forever You will be**

**The Lamb upon the throne.**

**I gladly bow the knee**

**And worship You alone.**

© Noel & Tricia Richards / Thank You Music 1987.

***Let us pray.***

Lord of all creation, whose Word created our universe and whose compassion sustains life, you entered our world as Christ Jesus, to share our lives and experiences, to bring Good News to all peoples in words and deeds. We rejoice that his death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death, reconciling fallen humanity to you, our heavenly Father. Jesus offers us everlasting life through his grace, not by anything we deserve, or can do to earn it. Therefore, we come to offer you all our praise, adoration and thanksgiving in our worship today, for all honour and glory are yours by right.

Loving Lord, accept our wholehearted thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet that you made for us, for all the good things that we enjoy: for opportunities to serve you and for people who have guided, inspired and loved us. Most of all we thank you for redeeming us at such a tremendous cost. Thank you for Jesus. Amen.

***Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing and seeking forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.***

Merciful God, we confess our failure to live as you want us to, for we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly and disregard your call to serve others in Jesus' name, even though we try to excuse our faithlessness. In a time of reflection we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, recalling unkind words or actions that hurt them, shames us and fills you with grief and anger.

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

Lord of righteousness, help us turn away from wrongdoing and back to you.

Soften our hearts and guide us with your truth. Bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness for the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do.

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

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow Christ Jesus as his disciples, freed from the burden of guilt. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives may we be a beacon to draw others to know, love and serve our risen Saviour. 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.**

*Although, our next hymn is one of the best known of our Pentecost season hymns, very little is known about the original author, Bianco da Siena. We Bianco da Siena was a member of the Order of Jesuates, lay brothers who followed the order of St. Augustine, not to be confused with Jesuits, who were founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola, sometime later. Bianco wrote an eight verse poem in his native Italian, rather than Latin in which religious verse was expected to be produced. The poem, entitled, 'Descendi Amor Santi', prays for the gifts of the Holy Spirit, light, love, humility and grace, yet it was forgotten for four centuries until discovered in 1851. In 1867, Revd. Richard Frederick Littledale, included his translation of Bianco da Siena's verse, now reduced to four stanzas, in "The People's Hymnal" and it remained largely unnoticed until it was printed in the "English Hymnal" of 1906, set to the lovely melody, "Down Ampney" by Ralph Vaughan Williams. Since then it has featured in most popular hymnals. We shall sing hymn number 372, 'Come down, O Love divine'.*

**1. Come down, O Love divine,  
Seek thou this soul of mine,  
And visit it with thine own ardour glowing;  
O Comforter, draw near,  
Within my heart appear, / And kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.**

**2. O let it freely burn,  
Till earthly passions turn  
To dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;  
And let thy glorious light  
Shine ever on my sight,  
And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.**

**3. Let holy charity  
Mine outward vesture be,  
And lowliness become mine inner clothing;  
True lowliness of heart,  
Which takes the humbler part,  
And o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.**

**4. And so the yearning strong,  
With which the soul will long,  
Shall far outpass the power of human telling;  
For none can guess its grace,  
Till he become the place  
Wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.**

© *Bianco de Sienna (d. 1434) / R. F. Littledale (1833 – 1890)*

***We come now to our prayers of intercession. Let us pray.***

Loving God, Jesus' passion, death and resurrection remind us that you care for us with boundless, unconditional, redemptive love. Therefore, grant us faith, wisdom, compassion and steadfastness to serve you as you desire. Do not let us not close our eyes and hearts to injustice, prejudice or neglect, but instead bid us strive courageously for the wellbeing of everyone. Teach us to share your love with our neighbours, both nearby and far away.

Almighty God, our Saviour has commanded us to love one another as we love ourselves, yet our failure to live in peace is heart-breaking, especially as we witness the suffering of Ukraine as the country faces intensive attacks by Russia. Lord, we pray for an end to the fighting, for a negotiated peace that will endure in which Ukraine will be able to remain a free democracy and in which the Kremlin's plans are frustrated.

In your mercy Lord, reach out to the Ukrainian people, from President Zelenskyy and his advisors, the armed forces and militia, the civilians, mainly women, children, the elderly and disabled, who are trapped in cities that are being bombarded by Russian forces. May they remain courageous and undaunted, so they will be able to resist Russia's might. We pray that friendly countries will provide support not only during the war, but for the time it takes to rebuild Ukraine from the ashes of destruction. Remember, too, Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. Bless those who offer shelter and support for as long as it is needed and may their compassion ease the trauma of the refugees.

God of truth and righteousness, Guide the rulers of all nations in the ways of mercy and justice, so we may live in lasting peace. We pray for victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. May they receive the help, resources and encouragement they need to be healed in body, mind and spirit, so they can face the future with grounded hope.

We pray for organizations like All We Can and Christian Aid that are working to provide desperately-needed aid to Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen, where millions are facing starvation, because of famine. May governments also reach out to offer support, even if they disapprove of the regimes in those stricken lands.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels. We thank you for those who supply and run food banks and for organisations like the Salvation Army which help the poor. Speak to the hearts of the Government, business leaders and local councils so they may find ways of helping the poor and offer hope in place of bleak despair.

Lord of healing, we pray for who are sick, infirm, troubled or lonely, in particular everybody whose conditions have deteriorated during the past two years because of the restricted treatments during the pandemic. May they begin to receive the help and support they need to be returned to health and strength. Reach out to them in mercy, offering them comfort, hope and peace in their time of need.

We remember, too, all who have lost loved-ones during the past two years, particularly all who have been unable either to mark their passing or to mourn because

of restrictions at funerals and gatherings. We pray for you to reach out to neighbours who are suffering from the physical, social, psychological and economic effects of the pandemic, not least of all, for children whose education and general wellbeing have been seriously harmed during the past two years, many of whom are beginning important examinations. In a time of silence, we bring to mind people around us who are in special need of your care and, as we name them before you, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out to them in loving-kindness: .....  
Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as our sympathy, but we ask you to embrace everybody for whom we pray with the warmth of your love, from which flows healing, courage, comfort and lasting peace.

Holy God, we pray for our church and other churches in our district and, indeed for the World Church. Unite us in spirit, love and truth as we emerge from the dark shadow of coronavirus. Help us learn new, effective ways of meeting the needs of our communities, ways that demonstrate the goodness and grace of Jesus, our risen Lord.

Abba, Father God, may the news that neither sin nor death has the final word inspire us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to share the abundance of love with which you bless us, so our lives glorify your name through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

### **The Epistle is Romans chapter 5 verses 1 to 11**

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Amen.

*Our next hymn is Charles Wesley's 'Give me the faith which can remove' which is number 661.*

**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}

*Address: 'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' Rom 5:1*  
Our reading from Paul's letter to the Church in Rome reveals the power of the Spirit who reminds us of the grace and peace we receive through our faith in Christ Jesus. Because of his death and resurrection, we are put into a state of righteousness with the Father, not the prickly self-righteousness of some Pharisees, but of being God's earthly children because of his redemptive love. I still grieve when somebody tells me he or she isn't worthy to come to church! All of us are sinners; all stand in need of God's grace; if we turn to the Lord, that grace is assured, however far we have fallen from what God wants us to be. Just as John Pounds had a notice over the entrance to his ragged school, '**Little vagabonds preferred**', I wish that every church would have a sign on its doors, '**Sinners preferred**'! I wonder how many churchgoers would refuse to enter because they don't think themselves sinners!

On 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1738 a small, young man with shoulder-length hair sat alone at a house in Temple Bar, London, in total despair, because he doubted if he was even a Christian, although he had been an Anglican priest for thirteen years. That man, John Benjamin Wesley, was born into a God-fearing family: he and his younger brother, Charles, were good sons; they were honours students at Oxford University; they gave generously to charity – so much so that the young priest grew his hair long so that he could save the cost of buying a wig and £4 per annum, to give to the poor, instead; they regularly visited the sick and ministered at Newgate Prison, even comforting the condemned as they were on the scaffold. Despite these virtues, John Wesley declared that he '**was no better than the vilest offender in the kingdom**', because of a great burden of unworthiness he carried.

Part of the reason for his sense of unworthiness was, in 1735, shortly after their father's death, the Wesleys had sailed for Georgia, America with high hopes to be great evangelists. However, their ministries were marked by a series of scandals and tactless enthusiasm that culminated with John summoning his flock to church by beating a drum loudly, early on the Sabbath. He grew so unpopular that someone fired a gun at him. The bullet missed its target, but the Governor told the brothers to return forthwith to England.

They reached home in February, 1738 with a profound sense of failure. Clearly, their efforts to gain salvation by works had not succeeded! On the evening of 24<sup>th</sup> May, three days after his younger brother, Charles, had declared himself saved, which probably added to John's misery, John Wesley went to a Moravian service @ Aldersgate Street, London, where in his own words:

**“In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther’s preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, *even mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.’**

The strange warming of his heart was the Holy Spirit taking charge. He brought about a remarkable transformation – the Wesleys felt freed from a sense of obligation to earn redemption for their sins and realised that forgiveness of sins and failure were God’s free gift. That knowledge left them free to serve God’s call as a loving response to his graciousness and led to one of the greatest spiritual and social revolutions in British history. Realising that Jesus wanted them to minister to the outcasts and marginalized of society in the early Industrial Revolution, the Wesleys and their followers brought Good News to parts of our industrial towns and villages that the established church daren’t even enter! Methodism was as much a social movement as a worship movement, but it made a deep impression on British society as well as much further afield.

As Twenty-first Century disciples, the Lord challenges us to pick up the mantle passed from St. Peter to John Wesley: we are called to serve all-comers, not just fellow-Christians, just as Jesus reached out to Gentiles, outcasts and even Samaritans. No one is outside the scope of God’s love – even people we find it hard to like. Whilst I am a committed Methodist – and there are many who say I ought to be committed – I recognise that we don’t have all the answers in worship, or service, but having said that, Methodism has a proud tradition of outreach.

There is great value in the Churches Together Movement, where worshippers from different traditions meet to share ideas and serve their communities, but more can be done: imagine sharing resources, or for organisations like Christian Aid, MRDF and Cafod working collaboratively on projects; imagine all church denominations developing the work of MHA, extending care for a rapidly ageing society. Think how much more work could be done for the Lord, if we could only set aside our differences and concentrate upon the Good News Jesus lived and died for. We must let the light of God’s love shine through our actions, for only when we live out our faith will others hear and respond to our message of salvation and turn to Christ. Amen.

***Let us conclude our worship as we sing number 345, ‘And can it be’, one of the great hymns of Charles Wesley, written in 1739. It is believed by some commentators to have been the Wesleys’ Conversion hymn, rather than ‘Where shall my wondering soul begin’ and it was certainly a favourite of John Wesley. It is often referred to as ‘The Methodist Anthem’, but it has a less reverent nickname in Tipton, where it is called the ‘Bicycle Hymn’, because of the line, “my Chains fell off”! Hymn number 345.***

- 1. And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour’s blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**
- 2. ‘Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?**

In vain the first-born seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds enquire no more.

3. He left his Father's throne above –  
So free, so infinite his grace –  
Emptied himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me!

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

5. No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ my own!

© 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 now and for evermore. Amen.