

Call to Worship: Psalm 22 verses 25 to 28

From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfil my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations. Amen.

Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light of God's love to guide us. It was written by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall sing hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'

**1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness,
Longing for truth, we turn to you.**

**Make us your own, your holy people,
Light for the world to see. Chorus:**

Christ, be our Light!

Shine in our hearts,

Shine through the darkness.

Christ be our Light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

**2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.**

**Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice. Chorus:**

**3. Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.**

**Make us your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed. Chorus:**

**4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.**

**Make us your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone. Chorus:**

**5. Many the gifts, many the people,
Many the hearts that yearn to belong.**

**Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come. Chorus:**

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Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.

Sovereign Lord, your Word created our universe and all life throughout it. You sought to reconcile yourself to sinful human beings through the Law and prophets, so we become your holy people, a royal priesthood, but when we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, you displayed your boundless love and goodness in your Son, Jesus Christ, whose life death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death over us. When he ascended to heaven, you sent the Holy Spirit to inspire, comfort and guide

us through our life, as your power living within us. May we pray to you in faith, sing your praise with gratitude, and listen to your word with eagerness, for you alone are worthy of our praise and thanksgiving.

Heavenly Father accept our heartfelt thanks for all that you do for us and for every blessing we receive from you. Thank you for this wonderful planet upon which we live, the beauty of land sea and sky, for people who care for us, guide and inspire us, for opportunities and experiences that fulfil our lives, but most of all for your boundless grace upon which we depend. Help us to worship you in spirit, love and truth in the precious name of Jesus. Amen.

Almighty God, you are holy and righteous, whereas we are deeply flawed and sinful. Even when we try our best to live as you call us to, we fall short of what we ought to be. Forgive us when we are selfish or self-righteous, unforgiving and judgmental. Pardon us when we have been unwilling to trust in your saving grace. Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sinfulness. Renew and restore us, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death and may the Holy Spirit re-kindle the embers of our faith, so we play our part in building your kingdom here.

Loving God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only pardoned us, but invite us to walk with you once more. Hereafter, may the Holy Spirit enable us to serve you and our neighbours gladly and faithfully, so our lives honour you in Jesus' beautiful 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.

The author of our next hymn, Delores Dufner, is a member of St. Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, Minnesota and is a writer of liturgical, scripturally based hymn and song texts which have a broad ecumenical appeal. She is currently a member and a Fellow of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. She began work as a music teacher, but progressed to liturgy co-ordinator and Director of the Office for Worship in St. Cloud, Minnesota and is currently working on her fourth hymn collection. We shall sing number 689, 'Summoned by the God who made us'

1. Summoned by the God who made us

Rich in our diversity,

Gathered in the name of Jesus,

Richer still in unity. Chorus:

Let us bring the gifts that differ

And, in splendid, varied ways,

Sing a new church into being

One in faith and love and praise.

2. Radiant risen from the water,

Robed in holiness and light,

Male and female in God's image,

Male and female, God's delight. Chorus:

**3. Trust the goodness of creation,
Trust the Spirit strong within,
Dare to dream the vision promised
Sprung from seed of what has been. *Chorus:***

**4. Bring the hopes of every nation;
Bring the art of every race.
Weave a song of peace and justice;
Let it sound through time and space. *Chorus:***

**5. Draw together at one table
All the human family;
Shape a circle ever wider
And a people ever free. *Chorus:***

© Delores Dufner (Born 1939)

We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away. Let us pray.

Loving God, although we live on a wonderful and self-sustaining planet, improved communications mean that we hear about so much pain and suffering, here and abroad, that we are driven to despair, especially as so many of the issues result from humankind's failure to care for our neighbours. Whilst we offer ourselves to play what part we can in repairing some of the brokenness around us, we know that our powers are limited. Nevertheless, we believe that all things are possible for you, so we pray that you will inspire and warm the hearts of people with greater power and influence, so they will bring about changes rectify the results of mankind's cruelty, folly, exploitation and indifference.

Lord of all, we pray for our church, all the churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church. May the living Spirit rekindle our desire to share good news with our neighbours, both local and further afield, not only in words but through acts of grace. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission, so we bring others to know and serve our Lord Jesus.

Heavenly Father, we grieve that wars are currently being waged in Ukraine, the Holy Land and now between Iran and Israel, Myanmar, Congo, Somalia and Sudan with all the suffering, destruction, death and displacement that results from mankind's inability to co-exist with neighbours. This is all the more appalling as we commemorate the eightieth anniversary of the end of the Second World, yet seem to have failed to learn the means of co-existing in peace. May the living Spirit help the leaders of all nations to recognize that 'jaw-jaw is better than war-war'. May the Holy Spirit bring about just and lasting settlements to the conflicts we have named and for your shalom to be bestowed on all nations.

Heavenly Father, we pray for all involved in the recent airliner crash in India: not only those killed and injured, but their families and communities who have been plunged into grieving their sudden bereavement. May your Holy Spirit breathe comfort and healing upon them and may they receive the help they need to face life with hope.

Jesus is the source of healing and well-being, so we pray for people who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those brought low by loneliness, fear or need and everybody who is experiencing the agony of bereavement. Wherever possible, Lord, empower us to offer support and friendship to them. In a time of silence, we remember friends and neighbours for whom we are especially concerned.....

Loving Lord, embrace them with the warmth and power of your love, so they may be healed, encouraged, granted reassurance and enduring peace.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care. May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen us in our discipleship, guiding us by the example of Jesus Christ and sharing the love you give in such abundance with all-comers, trusting in your grace and goodness evermore. Amen.

The first reading is Paul's Letter to the Galatians chapter 3 verses 23 to 29

Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. Amen.

Address 1: *'You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus.'* Galatians 3:26

"The biggest shock I had when I came here was – having gone to church to worship for the first time. I was elated as I went to worship at a church of the same denomination as I attended back home. I joined in the worship, but at the end of the service I was greeted by the vicar, who politely and nicely told me, 'Thank you for coming, but I would be delighted if you didn't come back.' I asked him why and he replied, 'My congregation is uncomfortable in the company of people like you.' Just imagine what that meant to me. I went home and never told anybody about it for months." Can anyone here guess what kind of person the speaker was? Was he an asylum-seeker, a refugee, gay, a drug addict, someone who had been in prison, or mentally-ill? No! The speaker was **Rev. Carmel Jones**, who came from Jamaica in 1955, but who found no welcome for black people in his former denomination – a shameful, disgraceful, but all-too-common situation during that era. Thank God, he found his home in the Pentecostal Church and became a Minister in it.

One of mankind's greatest failings is to exclude anyone who doesn't fit the expectations of the 'in-crowd'. When Paul wrote this letter to the Galatian Churches in 49A.D., he was writing to a diverse community. Galatia was a Roman Colony in central Turkey, so its population would have included Romans, Jews, Gentiles, slaves and freedmen (the term includes women!) It was prosperous, but the difference between wealthy and poor would have been enormous. These factors by themselves would have caused tension, if not quarrels, but not long after Paul's visit, other Jewish-Christian teachers arrived, insisting that non-Jewish converts should be circumcised and follow Jewish festivals, Mosaic Law and traditions: effectively becoming Jews who followed Jesus.

Paul taught that faith in Jesus was enough, for it was faith that brought Salvation, God's gift of new life, not observing Jewish traditions and relying upon observing the Law which had signally failed and had been supplanted by Jesus' life, death and resurrection. This letter proclaimed that Jesus had freed humankind from slavery to the Law, so there should be no return to old practices and the all-important law was to love God and our neighbours. Nobody should be made unwelcome because of their colour, appearance, gender, denomination, politics or status, for God loves all of us, even though some of the things we say, do or think grieve him! Never forget Paul's words, **'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'** Any church that discriminates against would-be followers need to remember just how inclusive Jesus was in his ministry: Jews; Gentiles, including the

Roman occupiers; people who were physically and mentally ill; fallen women and tax-collectors – Christ reached out to them all. Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Martin Lekebusch an I.T. specialist, who was born into a Methodist family in 1962. He is now an elder at a Baptist church in Gloucester. The hymn was written when Martin was attending a Methodist church in inner-city Birmingham. He describes the congregation at that time as “a very mixed bag with a strongly evangelical character to it, with a charismatic aspect – but also an aspect of social engagement.” I have asked that we sing the hymn to “Scarlet Ribbons”, which I’m certain you will know, so you can concentrate upon the words. Hymn number 703, ‘In an age of twisted values,’

**1. In an age of twisted values
we have lost the truth we need;
in sophisticated language
we have justified our greed;
by our struggle for possessions
we have robbed the poor and weak –
hear our cry and heal our nation:
your forgiveness, Lord, we seek.**

**2. We have built discrimination
on our prejudice and fear;
hatred swiftly turns to cruelty
if we hold resentments dear.
For communities divided
by the walls of class and race
hear our cry and heal our nation:
show us, Lord, your love and grace.**

**3. When our families are broken;
when our homes are full of strife;
when our children are bewildered,
when they lose their way in life;
when we fail to give the aged
all the care we know we should –
hear our cry and heal our nations
with your tender fatherhood.**

**4. We who hear your word so often
choose so rarely to obey;
turn us from our wilful blindness,
give us truth to light our way.
In the power of your Spirit
come to cleanse us, make us new:
hear our cry and heal our nations
till our nations honours you.**

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Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 8 verses 26 to 39

They sailed to the region of the Gerasenes, which is across the lake from Galilee. When Jesus stepped ashore, he was met by a demon-possessed man from the town. For a long time this man had not worn clothes or lived in a house, but had lived in the tombs. When he saw Jesus, he cried out and fell at his feet, shouting at the top of his voice,

“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you, don’t torture me!” For Jesus had commanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Many times it had seized him, and though he was chained hand and foot and kept under guard, he had broken his chains and had been driven by the demon into solitary places.

Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss.

A large herd of pigs was feeding there on the hillside. The demons begged Jesus to let them go into them, and he gave them permission. When the demons came out of the man, they went into the pigs, and the herd rushed down the steep bank into the lake and was drowned.

When those tending the pigs saw what had happened, they ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone out, sitting at Jesus’ feet, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left.

The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying,

“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him. Amen.

Address 2: ‘Return home and tell how much God has done for you’ Luke 8: 39

Our gospel reading is about a man whose isolation was total and terrible. The setting was a Gentile district near the Sea of Galilee, so we may presume that the victim was a Gentile, therefore considered outside God’s covenant with Abraham and unclean by Jews. He was said to be demon-possessed, which could mean he was suffering from severe mental illness, for we know that he was subject to violent mood-swings, could break restraining chains when he raged and terrified local people. Certainly, his behaviour led to exclusion from his family, friends and villagers, for he had no home, but lived among the tombs, on the edge of the community. Graveyards were considered unclean, so that added to his isolation, while his nakedness would have stripped him of any remaining vestige of dignity and would have rendered him untouchable. Think of those in our society who are still rejected for problems they share with that poor man: mental illness; eccentricity or violent behaviour; homelessness – try getting a job without a fixed address, if you are dirty or poorly-clothed.

Jesus stepped onto the shore, saw the man and commanded the evil spirits to leave him. As an orthodox Jew, he would have been expected to shun a Gentile, especially one so troubled as that man was. The powers of evil which had ruined the possessed man’s life, recognized Jesus’s supremacy and begged Jesus not to destroy them. In turn, Jesus asked the man’s name and his answer, ‘Legion’, suggested that he was wholly possessed – a Roman Legion was comprised of six thousand men. He had sufficient demons to affect a herd of two thousand pigs. In effect, we are told that the man was profoundly troubled – even Mary Magdalene was said to have been cured of only seven demons. Jesus released the man’s demons, which entered that herd of pigs that promptly stampeded into the Sea of Galilee and drowned. It may seem rather a harsh fate for the pigs and their owners, but remember that Jews considered pigs to be unclean creatures – unfit even to be touched.

When the villagers arrived, they found that Jesus had restored the man in body and mind, for he was sitting at Jesus's feet, properly-dressed and of sound mind. They were afraid because of Jesus' amazing power and probably somewhat aggrieved about the material loss of two thousand pigs! The villagers asked Jesus to leave, whereupon the man formerly known as Legion asked to be allowed to follow him. You may think Jesus' reply was harsh: **"Return home and tell how much God has done for you"**, but Jesus wanted him to witness to his fellow Gentiles how great God was and how Jesus had restored him in every way, for by doing so, some of those awe-stricken neighbours would have believed and turned to Christ. It might have been easier for the man to make a fresh start elsewhere, but his most powerful witness would be amongst those who had known his former condition.

Hopefully, none of us have the same kinds of demons as the man at Gerasene, but as today's service is about discrimination, diversity and inclusion, we ought to give serious thought to how we react to people who are experiencing mental ill-health, or spiritual ill-being. This may be anxiety, depression, bipolar, psychosis, schizoid, or paranoid tendencies. These illnesses can be controlled with medication, but being labelled as living with a mental illness can result in social isolation and rejection – just like Legion. If we use safeguarding properly as a tool, there is no reason why people who live with mental illness should be feared more than anybody with a physical ailment.

It is actually far more likely that we will encounter somebody living with a dementia – more than a million are living with this disease in the United Kingdom. Dementias have nothing to do with mental illness. They occur when areas of the brain die and functions such as memory, speech, perception, mood and mobility are affected. As a chaplain, I worked in a dementia care home and found ways of supporting both people living with a dementia and their families. Any church can become dementia-friendly with a little effort: MHA and the Alzheimer's Society can give advice and the joy we can give our neighbours who are struggling with daily-living has to be experienced to be believed.

Jesus was not afraid of Legion: nor should we be if anybody come to our church with mental health issues, or a dementia. Obviously, we need to put safeguarding in place – both ways; for us as well as them. They are all part of God's kingdom and we are called to reach out to them with loving hearts, just as Jesus reaches out to us with all our spiritual imperfections. Remember, Jesus died for everybody, not an exclusive few. May God grant us the faith and love to answer Christ's gracious call. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written in January 1965 by Revd. Hugh Sherlock for the Synod service for the Jamaica District of the Methodist Church, of which he was the current Chairman. The theme of the Synod was church renewal. He later became President of the Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas. WE shall sing hymn number 410, 'Lord, your Church on earth is seeking'

1. Lord, your church on earth is seeking

Your renewal from above;

Teach us all the art of speaking

With the accent of your love.

We would heed your great commission:

Go ye into every place –

Preach, baptize, fulfil my mission,

Serve with love and share my grace.

2. Freedom give to those in bondage,

Lift the burdens caused by sin,

**Give new hope, new strength and courage,
Grant release from fears within:
Light for darkness; joy for sorrow;
Love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
As the Spirit gives new life.**

**3. In the streets of every city
Where the bruised and lonely dwell,
Let us show the Saviour's pity,
Let us of his mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
Let us serve, and seek to bring
All the world to render praises,
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.**

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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 all evermore. Amen.