

Call to worship: Psalm 138 verses 1 to 3

I give you thanks, O LORD, with my whole heart; before the gods I sing your praise; I bow down toward your holy temple and give thanks to your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness; for you have exalted your name and your word above everything. On the day I called, you answered me, you increased my strength of soul. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Robert and Dawn Critchley in 1988, a short time after the death of their two-day-old son, Gideon. In the circumstances, this is a remarkable hymn, but it reflects the deep faith of the Critchleys. Robert is an associate minister of Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship where he continues to lead worship at conferences and renewal meetings. He and his wife Dawn were senior worship pastors on full-time staff in Toronto from 1996-2002. They live near Midland, Ontario with their children Bethany, Noah and Elijah. Robert wrote that 'the song reflects a revelation of the God of All Comfort's faithfulness to us through a difficult time'. Hymn number 58, 'Lord, I come before your throne of grace,'

Lord, I come before your throne of grace;
I find rest in your presence,
And fullness of joy.
In worship and wonder
I behold your face,
Singing what a faithful God have I. (Chorus)
*What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God!
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.*

Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry;
Through the storm, you're the beacon,
My song in the night.
In the shelter of your wings,
Hear my heart's reply,
Singing what a faithful God have I. (Chorus)

Lord all-sovereign, granting peace from heaven,
let me comfort those who suffer
with the comfort you have given.
I will tell of your great love for as long as I live,
singing, 'What a faithful God have I.' (Chorus)

© Robert Critchley (born 1959) & Dawn Critchley (born 1965)

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you are the King of creation, Lord of Glory, faithful and glorious, a God of wisdom, might and love, who despite our sinfulness, has striven to draw us close to you. At the right time you came as Jesus Christ to teach us how we should live through his words and actions of grace. His life, death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death, offering us eternal life through faith in him, not as something we deserve or

can earn. Amazing God, as we come before your throne of grace, take away all our anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful world on which we live, for the many blessings we receive from you, including our homes, food, family and friends. Above all these blessings, thank you for loving us even when we are unfaithful, disobedient, selfish, loveless and unlovable, for whilst you are holy, our lives are marred by our failure to live as you want us to.

Merciful Lord, we confess that, however hard we try, we still say and do things that upset and hurt our neighbours and fill you with grief. We don't always love and serve you wholeheartedly and we certainly don't always care for other people as we would like them to care for us. Help us to change our ways, to become more loving and faithful day by day and, in Jesus' lovely name pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

Merciful heavenly Father, we believe that you hear our prayer and have breathed forgiveness upon us. Help us, Lord, to respond to your grace by loving and serving both you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your Name; your kingdom come; your will be done; on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Graham Kendrick was a Baptist pastor's son, who trained as a teacher, but was called to become an evangelist. He has used his talents as a musician, theologian and poet to write a host of hymns and worship songs to teach the faith in music, much as Charles Wesley did. Indeed, in many respects Graham Kendrick is the Charles Wesley of the late Twentieth Century. He wrote our next hymn in 1987, as a member of the Ichthus Christian Fellowship - a radical free church with considerable youth appeal. We shall sing hymn number 59, 'Shine, Jesus, shine!'

**1. Lord, the light of your love is shining,
In the midst of the darkness, shining;
Jesus, light of the world, shine upon us,
Set us free by the truth you now bring us,
Shine on me, shine on me. Chorus:**

***Shine, Jesus, shine,
Fill this land with the Father's glory;
Blaze, Spirit, blaze,
Set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
Flood the nations with grace and mercy,
Send forth your word,
Lord, and let there be light.***

**2. Lord, I come to your awesome presence,
From the shadows into your radiance;
By the blood I may enter your brightness,
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.
Shine on me, shine on me. Chorus:**

**3. As we gaze on your kingly brightness,
So our faces display your likeness.
Ever changing from glory to glory,
Mirrored here may our lives tell your story.
Shine on me, shine on me. Chorus:**

© Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

***In our prayers of intercession we pray for the needs of ourselves and others.
When I say 'Lord, in your mercy', please respond with, 'Hear our prayer'.***

Lord of all, thank you for this beautiful planet upon which we live, for it ought to allow all to live in the abundance of your creation. However, the earth has been abused by our foolishness, greed and indifference. The effects of climate change are abundantly clear, with the series of heatwaves and drought resulting in water-shortages, reduced crops, wildfires, here and abroad. We pray for our world, especially all places where extreme weather poses an ever-stronger threat. Encourage us to use resources thoughtfully and carefully, so we play our part in helping the world to recover for the damage we have done over several generations. May the pressure systems that have led to the heatwaves, shift their position, so we may be blessed with rain in this country, Europe and Canada.

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

God our Saviour, hear our prayer for the victims of earthquakes in Columbia, Venezuela and Japan. Bless and protect the rescuers, recovery teams and relief-workers. Bless, too, all who are fighting wildfires in extreme conditions and keep them safe. May you strengthen and comfort them.

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

Loving Lord, we ask you to inspire leaders of nations to turn away from violence when they can't have their own way and seek justice and mercy for those they govern. We ask for swift and just conclusions to wars that are being waged at present, especially in the Holy Land, Ukraine and Iran and, at the same time, we remember victims of conflicts, discrimination, injustice and violence, asking that they may find peace, refuge and security.

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

Lord of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, we bring our concerns to you for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit, for all who are lonely, troubled and afraid, for those whose lives are coming to an end and for all who are grieving the loss of loved-ones. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are especially concerned, confident that you already know their needs and will reach out to them..... Help us to offer them practical support and friendship and enfold them into your merciful arms, that they may find healing, hope, comfort and enduring peace.

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

Almighty God, we pray for this church, churches in local Circuits and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth. Unite us in mission, so we help build up your kingdom with acts of grace and goodness.

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

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe and warm our hearts, so we may share your abundant love with friends and strangers, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

We continue with a hymn written by Matt and Beth Redman in 2002. It is based upon the Book of Job and challenges us to remain faithful, even in the face of difficulties and disasters. 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

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 16 verses 13 to 20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

He said to them,
"But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered,
"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him,
"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah. Amen.

Address: *Peter's Confession of Christ* – Matthew 16:13 – 20

I like Simon Peter for, in many ways he was just as fallible as we are. He made mistakes, said the wrong things – got into trouble, but he always got back up and tried again; sometimes he was slow to pick up ideas, but he kept on trying to learn; he was known to speak rashly and acted before considering the consequences, but only through his enthusiasm. Above all else, although he was accepted as leader of the Church, Peter was humble enough to allow stories to be written about himself that weren't creditable, so that through him we may see the Church's human face, not an alabaster image created by spin-doctors!

Peter's three years' discipleship with Jesus was rather like a rollercoaster ride at Alton Towers. Today's reading probably shows him at his most successful during Jesus' ministry, because guided by the Holy Spirit he confessed Jesus is the Messiah, God's anointed. It was while they were near **Caesarea Philippi**, that the Lord asked his disciples who the people thought he was. They replied that many thought he was **John the Baptist, or Elijah, or Jeremiah, or some other prophet**. Then Jesus asked them who they thought he was and Peter immediately declared, **“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”**

The answer earned Jesus' praise and he declared the revelation came from God, not from human sources, for it was evident that Peter had not carefully weighed up all the evidence until he was left with the single option that Jesus was God's anointed. **Peter had based his conclusion purely on faith.** Christ added that Peter was to be the Rock on which he'd build his church – and probably made them all laugh, for he was playing on the words **Petros**, Greek for **Peter** and **Petra**, which means a **rock**. There is irony inasmuch that **petros** is a stone, or rock that can be detached and moved, whilst **petra** means a solidly-based mass of rock. The gospels show how Peter was moved by circumstances, emotions and fortune, for within minutes he was in disgrace for arguing against Jesus' announcement of his imminent passion, death and resurrection, none of which fitted Peter's idea of the Messiah. Discipleship wasn't easy for Peter, either!

When Andrew took Simon along to meet him. Christ instantly recognised his qualities, for he said he'd call him Peter henceforth, punning for the first time that he'd be Rock on which the Church would be established. It is remarkable that anybody would have taken a fisherman from such an obscure, unpromising province, which was regarded contemptuously by the people of Jerusalem, as the first leader of the movement that changed the world and its history, but Jesus did. Perhaps Jesus' decision was based upon Peter's enthusiasm, or insight, or his willingness to go where angels feared to tread, or to speak when silence would be safer; **or perhaps it was Peter's sincerity that moved Christ.**

Even Peter's greatest failure after Jesus' betrayal and arrest isn't wholly discreditable. The disciples' tiredness was evident from their inability to stay awake to keep watch in the Garden of Gethsemane, so Peter's attempts to defend Jesus with a sword shows commendable steadfastness, though Jesus rebuked him for resisting with violence. When the other followers fled, only Peter was brave enough to follow the mob into the **courtyard of Caiaphas' palace**, for he wanted to see what happened to his Master and friend. What followed is a warning to all who boast, for shortly before Christ's arrest, for Peter had declared that, even if the others deserted him, he wouldn't. Jesus

replied that, in the event, Peter would deny knowing him three times before the cock crowed twice and that's precisely what happened. How bitterly must Peter have regretted his failure of nerve, not only for denying his friend, but because he thought it certain he'd forfeited right to be the Church's Rock.

He returned, heart-broken, to that locked room in Jerusalem, remaining there while Jesus was crucified. He was still hiding inside when Mary Magdalene beat frantically on the door, two days later, crying that the Lord's body had been taken away. At once, both Peter and John left the house, disregarding all danger, and raced to the tomb. Although John hesitated at the entrance, Peter impulsively rushed inside and saw the neatly-folded burial clothes **which pointed to resurrection, not the theft of a body**. Peter was the first male follower to whom the risen Christ appeared, but he still doubted that he'd be allowed to lead the Church until the incident in **John's gospel**, when Jesus breakfasted with his disciples on the shore of Lake Galilee and asked Peter three times, **"Do you love me?"** Each time Peter affirmed his love, he had to face his failures, so he learned that, to become a true disciple, he needed to trust in Christ, not in own strength. **At that point Jesus commissioned him to tend his sheep, to become the Church's Pastor.**

Remember how, at Pentecost, Peter, inspired by the Holy Spirit, preached his first sermon, resulting in more than three thousand people being baptised in Jesus' name. Working in the power of the Holy Spirit with Paul and the apostles, Peter helped to found the movement that's changed world history and at the end, Peter's nerve held when Nero's persecution of Christians led to his crucifixion. According to tradition, Peter was crucified upside down, because he said he was unworthy to die in the same way as his Master.

Peter's discipleship gives us hope, for he was far from perfect, but never lost his zeal for the Lord and was able to accept his failures as well as his successes. Our own discipleship is marked with triumphs and failures, so we ought not get above ourselves when things are going well and we ought not give up when the going is hard. Obviously, we should strive to imitate Christ, for he is the perfect example, but we need Peter's resilience for our journey with the Lord. **Let us keep on travelling with Christ, even when the path is uncertain, or rough. Above all else, let us accept ourselves for who we are, faults and all, confident that Jesus loves us fully, just as we are. Amen.**

Our next hymn was written in 1989 by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter, when he was only twenty-four years old. He was something of a prodigy – his earliest hymns were published when he was in his mid-twenties.

Hymn number 628, 'Faithful One, so unchanging,'

Faithful One, so unchanging,

Ageless One, You're my rock of peace.

Lord of all I depend on you.

I call out to you again and again.

I call out to you again and again.

You are my rock in times of trouble.

You lift me up when I fall down.

All through the storm, your love is the anchor,

My hope is in you alone.

© Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

We shall close our worship with a hymn by Matt Redman, who was raised in Watford and began leading worship at Souls Survivor Church when he was only

twenty. He is an evangelist, singer-songwriter, perhaps best-known for '10000 reasons', but he is one of the most successful contemporary hymn-writers. We shall sing hymn number 446, 'I will offer up my life'

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth,

Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to you.

In surrender I must give my every part;

Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart. Chorus:

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring

To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?

Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung

As a praise of your name for the things You have done?

O my words could not tell, not even in part,

Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.

You deserve my every breath for you've paid the great cost;

Giving up your life to death, even death on a cross.

You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin,

Opened up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in.

Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring

To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?

Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung

As a praise of your name for the things You have done?

O my words could not tell, not even in part,

Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart. © Matt Redman (Born 1974)

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.