

A service for 23rd January, 2022 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 19 verses 7 to 14

The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring for ever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from wilful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community and is set to a Gaelic melody, like many of their hymns. We sing number 28, 'Jesus calls us here to meet him'.

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him

As, through word and song and prayer,
We affirm God's promised presence
Where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
Praise the Son who calls us friends;
Praise the Spirit who, among us,
To our hopes and fears attends.

2. Jesus calls us to confess him

Word of life and Lord of all,
Sharer of our flesh and frailness,
Saving all who fail or fall,
Tell his holy human story;
Tell his tales that all may hear;
Tell the world that Christ in glory
Came to earth to meet us here.

3. Jesus calls us to each other,

Vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender
Neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
Join the hands of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter
In their common search for truth.

4. Jesus calls us to his table

Rooted firm in time and space,
Where the Church in earth and heaven
Finds a common meeting-place.
Share the bread and wine, his body;
Share the love of which we sing;

Share the feast for saints and sinners

Hosted by our Lord and King. © *John L. Bell (born 1949) & Graham Maule (born 1958)*

Let us pray

Almighty God, you spoke life into being throughout the universe, bringing light and order to darkness and chaos. You made this beautiful, self-sustaining planet upon which we live and entrusted us to exercise stewardship over the world. You created us in your image and have striven to draw us into the closest of relationships with you. Even when we set ourselves against you, you persevered and shared our mortal flesh as Jesus Christ, who grew up among people like us, sharing our hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, our trials and temptations, yet doing so without sinning, showing us how you want us to live. He is Emmanuel, God with us and alongside us. We believe his death and resurrection broke the hold of sin and death over us and we have eternal life through faith in him.

Amazing heavenly Father, may we pray to you in faith, sing your praises joyfully and listen to your guiding word, for you are the Lord of all and our Saviour. We offer you all honour, glory power and praise in our worship, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession to the Lord. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy', please reply, 'Hear our prayer'.

Heavenly Father, we offer thanks for the many blessings we receive from you, day by day: for the many good things we enjoy; for people who have blessed us by their example and loving-care, but most of all that you love us even at our worst, when we are loveless and unlovable.

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

Merciful Lord, pardon us when we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves and for times when we see neighbours in need or distress but don't help them. Forgive us, too, for our failure to commit ourselves to you and to serve you whole-heartedly. Help us to change our ways, so that our lives become Christ-centred, not self-centred.

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

Gracious and faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow you once more, unburdened by guilt. Therefore, Lord, as you offer us a fresh start, fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in the blessed name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend. Amen.

We shall say the prayer our Lord 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.

Our next hymn was written in 1968 by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, a gifted Methodist minister. It was chosen for the service at Westminster Abbey, uniting the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches into the United Reformed Church in 1972. Hymn number 346, 'Christ is the world's light, Christ and none other'.

1. Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;

Born in our darkness, he became our Brother.

If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:

Glory to God on high.

**2. Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and none other;
No one can serve him and despise another.
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.**

**3. Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other;
Sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother –
He, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.**

**4. Give God the glory, God and none other;
Give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;
Give God the glory, God in us, my Brother:
Glory to God on high.**

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000} StF version

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

Sovereign God, Light of the world, you are our strength and refuge in times of trouble. You bless us with your love, so, we turn to you, asking you to help us to act as your earthly hands by helping neighbours who are in need or any kind of trouble. Although our own powers are limited and at times the brokenness of our world threatens to overwhelm us, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with power and influence who can heal the suffering we see around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Lord, we are aware of the brokenness of this beautiful, yet fragile world and, as we remember how our Saviour came into the world, homeless and in need, we pray for the poor, disfranchised and marginalised in the world, particularly people from the Developing world whose lives are often brutal, bitter and short. Loving heavenly Father, help us to play what part we can to build a better world by seeking justice for all, by campaigning to end poverty here and abroad, by sharing the earth's resources instead of fighting over them and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting and even celebrating our differences, rather than allowing them to divide us.

Lord, hear our prayer for people who are facing undue pressures in these troubled times: those who have been deeply affected by coronavirus: others who are suffering from long COVID19, or who have lost loved-ones because of it; others who have lost employment, or who are burdened by debt as a result of COVID lockdowns or restrictions; neighbours who are lonely and afraid, or who feel abandoned; people whose relationships have broken down; children whose lives have been constricted and whose education has been damaged; everybody whose spiritual and mental health has been severely challenged during the past two years.

As Jesus came as Lord of healing and wellbeing, look with compassion on people who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. Help them find healing, renewed strength and hope, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but by experiencing your holy presence in their need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them and for whom the pandemic has been a living nightmare. Comfort them in their distress and ease their brokenness, O Lord.

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: Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but embrace everybody for whom we pray with your love, so they receive healing, courage, comfort and peace.

Heavenly Father, in his infancy Jesus experienced what it is to be a refugee, so it is right, therefore, to pray for the victims of wars, terrorism, prejudice and persecution, for you understand their plight. Teach leaders of all nations to find better ways of resolving differences with neighbours, rather than resorting to force and inspire them to rule with justice and mercy, for only then can true peace prevail.

Hear our prayer for the victims of war and terrorism: those who have lost loved ones; for people who have suffered life-changing injuries to body, mind or spirit and for refugees, who have not only been driven far from their homes, but who face exploitation and danger in order to try to escape from man's inhumanity to man. Compassionate God, may they all receive the support and encouragement required to rebuild their broken lives. Remember in your mercy people in Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Sudan where strife is threatening to result in catastrophic famine in these countries.

Holy God, we pray for our church, churches in our district and, indeed, for the World Church as we begin to emerge from the shadow of the pandemic. Help us learn new, effective ways to serve our communities and to reflect the goodness and grace of Jesus by proclaiming Good News with one voice and serving him with united hearts.

Lord, we ask you to bless people who have worked steadfastly to support us throughout this pandemic: workers in the NHS, carers, scientists who are producing anti-COVID vaccines and medicines, besides key-workers throughout the country. May they remain successful and safe in their work, Lord.

Abba, Father God, look upon us, our families and our friends with compassion. Keep us safe and guide us in your holy ways throughout this year, so we may bear the light of the gospel message into the darkest corners of your kingdom, in the glorious name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our reading is Paul's first letter to the Corinthians chapter 12 verses 12 to 31a

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptised by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?

As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honour to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.

If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are

all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts. Amen.

The Gospel reading is Luke chapter 4 verses 14 to 21

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 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)

Sermon “*All of you are Christ’s body, and each one is a part of it.*” 1Cor. 12:27

The remarkable American evangelists, Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey, led major revivalist campaigns in Britain and the United States between 1873 and 1899, in which tens of thousands turned to Jesus. However, until they became partners, Moody was only modestly successful in his hometown, Chicago, even though he was a very gifted preacher. Their meeting was dramatic: in 1870, thirty year-old Ira Sankey travelled to an international YMCA convention at Indianapolis, where he attended a rally led by Dwight Moody.

Despite Dwight Moody’s inspired preaching, the rally was clearly failed to inspire the congregation, for the music was abysmal. The organist played too slowly and the singing lacked conviction. Sankey waited until there was pause, then rose and sang William Cowper’s, “**There is a fountain filled with blood**”, unaccompanied. There was an awed silence during the first verse; then everyone stood to sing the remaining verses with gusto. Thereafter a new spirit flowed through Mr. Moody’s rally.

At the end of the meeting, Dwight Moody sought out Ira Sankey and immediately enquired,

“**Where are you from? Are you married? What is your business?**” Ira Sankey replied **he was from Newcastle, Pennsylvania, was married with two children and was a government tax inspector.** Impulsively, Mr. Moody retorted,

“**You will have to give it up!**” adding, “**I have been looking for you for eight years.**” Thus began a twenty-six-year evangelical partnership, rivalling the secular one between W.S. Gilbert & Arthur Sullivan.

What does the story of Moody and Sankey have to do with our Bible readings? Dwight Moody was a gifted preacher, whilst Ira Sankey was a superb singer, hymn-collector and musician. On their own, however, they would probably not have made a great impact on the world, but by pooling their God-given talents – **fruits of the Spirit** – they were a great force for spreading the Good News brought by Christ Jesus. Half a century later, Billy Graham used the same formula, leading the preaching himself, but relying on singers like George Beverly Shea and Cliff Barrows to raise the spirits of congregations with hymns such as “**Great is thy faithfulness**” and “**How great thou art!**”

When Paul wrote his letters to the Church at Corinth, he also directed his audience to pool the talents, gifts and graces – **fruits of the Spirit** – bestowed on them by the Holy Spirit, rather than arguing over which spiritual gift was most important. Paul was attempting to unite a troubled group of followers, whose differences threatened to tear the communities apart. Had the Corinthian Church been a school, it would not simply have failed an Ofsted inspection, but would have by-passed special measures and been closed down!

Corinth itself was a major commercial city, with an unenviable reputation for immorality and drunkenness. The Church in Corinth had a very mixed membership: slaves and freed men; wealthy, influential merchant women; Jews and Gentiles. The differences in social standing, wealth and racial background resulted in enormous quarrels. Arguments raged over the manner of worship, whose preaching was best, **{Paul’s, Apollos’, or Peter’s}**, whether or not Hebrew customs and laws should be observed, sexual morality and the role of women in church. Even the eucharist was a shambles: they brought their own food and drink, but did not share it, so the wealthy ate themselves sick and became inebriated whilst the slaves stood by hungry and parched.

Paul knew that unless something was done to rectify the situation, Corinth would soon have no church at all.

He likened the Church to a body with Christ as its head. Every one of us is part of that body, each with a particular role to perform. If a limb, or an organ does not function, the body is handicapped and, if we do not offer our own talents and time, the church will suffer. If you think you have little to offer, you deceive yourself, for even as seemingly unimportant a part as a little finger, or toe causes problems if it doesn't work properly!

Luke recorded that, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, where he was handed the scroll of Isaiah. He found chapter 61 and read an oracle of the coming Messiah: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”** After he had read, Jesus stated, **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”** By making his claim, Jesus so enraged his fellow Nazarenes, they attempted to throw him from a cliff, but for the next three years he lived out what he had read. He showed in words and deeds that God loves the poor, the marginalized, the despised and victimised. His healing was not confined to physical and mental needs, but to spiritual ones, too. In other words, Jesus gave people a sense of self-worth, respect, a belief that life was not only worth living, but to be lived fully in the light of God’s love.

His claim was not a meaningless slogan in the fashion of many mission statements used by businesses today. Instead, Jesus reached out to heal the blind, lame and leprous; he offered forgiveness and dignity to sinners and showed that, despite our flawed nature, God loves us so much that he gave the most precious thing he had, his only Son’s life, to redeem us from the power of sin and death. Moreover, Christ Jesus not only died for our sakes, but was raised and sent the Holy Spirit, so that we can continue his work. We are challenged to use our Spiritual gifts to share the Good News in kind deeds as well as words, to reflect the light of his love upon our neighbours each day and to work for a just world where poverty and ignorance are overcome. The challenge is huge, but we can make a difference, for Christ Jesus is at our head, so how can we fail, if we trust him? Therefore, let us share our spiritual gifts to build up God’s kingdom. Amen.

We close our worship with a hymn by Jacqueline Jones that challenges us. Jacqui is a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, who was based in the UK for 5 years and now lives in Christchurch, NZ as a vicar's wife! Hymn number 662, ‘Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?’

1. Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,

Though the way be rough and narrow? *Chorus:*

Will you walk the path that will cost you much

And embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you

The disciples of tomorrow?

**2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?**

**Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent? *Chorus:***

**3. In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?**

**Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless? *Chorus:***

**4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
And believe it could be different?**

**Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:***

***We will walk the path that will cost us much
And embrace the pain and sorrow.***

We will trust in One who entrusts to us

The disciples of tomorrow.

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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 now and for evermore. Amen.