

A service for 23rd July, 2023 (StF).

Call to Worship: Psalm 86 verses 9 and 10

All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, O Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God. Amen.

The writer of our opening hymn, Revd Tim Hughes was born in 1978 the son of an Anglican vicar. He grew up in High Wycombe, before moving to Birmingham as a teenager when his father was appointed vicar of St John's Church, Harborne. He is a British worship leader and singer-songwriter. Formerly the Director of Worship at Holy Trinity, Brompton, he has since been ordained as a minister in the Church of England and appointed Vicar of St Luke's, Gas Street, Birmingham. We shall sing Tim Hughes' hymn, 'Light of the world, / You stepped down into darkness,' number 175.

1. Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness,

Opened my eyes, let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore you,

Hope of a life spent with you. *Chorus:*

So here I am to worship,

Here I am to bow down,

Here I am to say that you're my God,

And you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy,

Altogether wonderful to me.

2. King of all days, oh so highly exalted,

Glorious in heaven above.

Humbly you came to the earth you created,

All for love's sake became poor. *Chorus:*

3. And I'll never know how much it cost

To see my sin upon that cross.

And I'll never know how much it cost

To see my sin upon that cross..... *Chorus:*

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Let us pray.

Almighty God, we come to offer our worship and adoration to you this morning with songs of praises in our voices and in our hearts, for you are the creator and sustainer of life throughout the universe, whose glory wisdom and power are matched only by your love. Despite our unworthiness, you have brought us salvation through your Son, our Saviour, Christ Jesus and you offer us eternal life through faith in him, not by anything we deserve nor do. Amazing heavenly Father, accept our heartfelt praise for your grace and goodness.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy and for the wide variety of gifts you have bestowed upon us: our lives, our work, our homes, our food, our friends, our carers and our families and for experiences and challenges that have enriched our lives. Loving God, as we look around on this Summer's day, we thank you for this beautiful world and for your enduring love, for even when we stray from you, in love you seek us out and welcome us home. Loving heavenly Father, all glory, honour, power and praise be yours now and evermore.

Merciful God, although we try hard to do your holy will, we know that we still say and do the very things we know we shouldn't. We confess that we don't always love and serve you wholeheartedly. Nor do we love our neighbours as we want them to love us. Help us to amend our ways, O Lord, and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe 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 actions, so we do as you desire and use our gifts of the Spirit for the good of all, 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.

Our next hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed Kendrick's visit to India the previous year.

Hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'

**1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.**

**Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!**

**2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills;
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,**

Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. *Chorus:*

God of the poor, friend of the weak,

Give us compassion we pray:

Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;

Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.

**3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.**

**Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.**

**4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;**

Make us content with the things that we need. *Chorus:*

5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame

Until your justice burns brightly again;

Until the nations learn of your ways,

Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. *Chorus: © Graham Kendrick (born 1950)*

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others. When I say ‘Your kingdom come’, please respond with, ‘Your will be done’.

Loving Lord, thank you for this beautiful, life-sustaining world over which you gave us stewardship, but we are only too well aware of its brokenness, some of which is caused by natural disasters, but much of which is the result of our failure to honour kingdom values such as justice and loving-kindness. Lord, help us to respond to your amazing grace by serving you in whatever way we can to help our neighbours, nearby and far. Help us build a world where people stand up against poverty, here and abroad, where we see others as you see them, as your children who are to be protected and nurtured. Help us to be willing to work together in mutual trust, to always seek the common good, rather than our own selfish desires and to share justly the earth’s resources, rather than fighting over them.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

God of love, truth and justice, hear our cry of grief for the countries afflicted by famine and natural disasters. Warm the hearts of governments of wealthy countries to give assistance to victims of disasters and bless the work done by charities like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Lord of compassion, hear our prayer for peace throughout the world, particularly in Ukraine, Afghanistan and Sudan and for peace among Jews and Palestinians in Jerusalem. Bless the work of peacemakers and those who work with the victims of conflict, terrorism, persecution and prejudice.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Lord of healing and well-being, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for neighbours who are lonely, anxious, overworked, or who feel undervalued and unloved as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion to them.....

Lord, help us to offer them practical support as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, from which they may find healing, courage, hope, strength and peace.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Holy God, grant that this church, churches in our Circuit and churches throughout the world may unite in love and action, so we offer your full blessing to all-comers. May we bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world in Jesus’ name.

‘Your kingdom come’, **‘Your will be done’.**

Abba, heavenly Father, look upon us, our friends and families with loving-kindness. In the power of the Holy Spirit, keep us safe, help us resist the temptation to sin, and, most of all

help us to live out the gospel message in all that we do and say, so our lives honour your holy name through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 13 verses 24 to 30 & 36 to 43

Jesus told them another parable:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared.

The owner’s servants came to him and said,

‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’

‘An enemy did this,’ he replied. The servants asked him,

‘Do you want us to go and pull them up?’

‘No,’ he answered, ‘because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowd and went into the house. His disciples came to him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field.”

He answered,

“The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Martin Lekebusch an I.T. specialist, who was born into a Methodist family in 1962. He is distinctly ecumenical and has been a member of Methodist, Anglican, Pentecostal congregations and is 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.” Within this context, a series of lunchtime services was planned, in which Bob Dunnnett of the Birmingham Bible Institute spoke about problems in society, drawing on passages from the prophet Isaiah. With just a week’s notice, Martin was asked to write a hymn that reflected this theme. 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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Sermon: ‘In gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them.’ Matthew 13:29
I rarely begin a sermon with an advertisement, but today I shall. The Core Bible Study Group at Kingswinford meets at 7.30 p.m. on Mondays – or on line, if you prefer. We are currently studying Revelation, a book often avoided by preachers, both ordained and lay, but one of the most fascinating, nonetheless. In chapter 5, John of Patmos’ vision of a lamb who had been slain – Jesus Christ – whose death and resurrection has fulfilled God’s work of redemption. That is the good news: **God has won; the final victory is his.** The next few chapters warn that between now and the Second Coming, believers will face all manner of trials and tribulations that will test their / our faith, for the forces of evil will try their best to disrupt our lives until satanic powers are destroyed at Christ’s return in glory. Evil co-exists with us and we cannot remain authentic if we try to separate ourselves from the world, for we have been called to be witnesses of Christ’s goodness and glory. In this parable we are the wheat in a field of tares.

The weed called tares, is almost certainly darnel which closely resembles wheat in its early stages, yet which produces toxic seeds, not grain. As it grows, darnel roots intertwine with those of neighbouring plants, so the householder was wise to instruct his servants NOT to pull up the weeds, as much good wheat would have been lost. Lest you consider the parable is fanciful, think again, as it was a punishable offence in Roman law

to sow darnel amongst an enemy's wheat: clearly, such an act of revenge must have occurred on a number of occasions! The parable of the wheat and tares refers to problems within the Christian Church itself and to the Church within the world. These problems are not disputes or grievances, for which Matthew advocated a policy in chapter 18, but address the authenticity of believers within the community.

The parable establishes the field as the Church upon which Christ's followers, the wheat, grow. However, there is an enemy within the Church; people who appear to be genuine followers, but who could ultimately damage the faith community. The real issue lies in correctly identifying the darnel and the wheat within the Church. When Matthew wrote his gospel, the Church was already experiencing problems with the **Kerygma**, or what should be preached. Unorthodox views caused major problems, which is why we have the various creeds, such as the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, which are intended to guide members to the core beliefs. If you wonder whether or not such creeds were necessary, consider two heretical viewpoints of the early church. **Paul of Samosata, Bishop of Antioch**, who paid his 'supporters club' to applaud his sermons, asserted that Jesus was definitely not God, but only a divinely inspired man, whom God had adopted at a particular point of time. Such a heresy is called '**adoptionism**'.

Bishop Paul's view contrasted with **docetism**, which held that 'the flesh' is evil, so Jesus only appeared to be human, but was fully divine. **Docetists** maintained that Christ cast no shadow and only appeared to die on the cross. I think all of us would agree that, were that the case, God would have played the biggest trick in human history, but the God we worship is the Author of truth and would never stoop to deceive. We can see how heresies undermine faith and why the leading Bishops of the early Church met to devise a uniform Creed. Incidentally, during the **Council of Nicea in 325AD**, **St. Nicholas** is said to have struck **Arius the Heretic** on the jaw during a heated exchange, far from the image of a jolly Father Christmas!

One of the real tragedies in the World Church is the inability of many Christians to set aside differences of opinion and to work in unity. I am certain that St. Paul would feel the same frustration with the Church in the Twenty-First Century as he did with the Churches at Corinth, two thousand years ago. Divisions weaken us, so we need to work together and allow Christ Jesus to be our judge, bearing in mind **Frederick Faber's** verse, "**But we make God's love too narrow / By false limits of our own; / And we magnify his strictness / With a zeal he will not own**", in "**There's a wideness in God's mercy**". We should remember, too, that we are part of a world that challenges kingdom values and tries to lead us, the Church, away from being what we are called to be.

We need to be united in love and mission, for as John of Patmos wrote, believers are under attack by forces of evil. They may not be as obvious as a dragon with seven heads and ten horns, nor the beast from the sea, but they are just as dangerous as challengers of our faithfulness to Christ, possibly more so, because they often appear desirable, rather than terrifying. For example, we are all subject to the allure of advertising which can make us seek more than we need, making power, possessions and status more important than the needs of others, including our relationship with families, friends and the Lord. They sometimes tempt us to take shortcuts or to act unethically in order to gain what we desire. Many people are led astray by the cult of celebrity, where shallow lifestyles and twisted values are made to appear essential.

On-line social Media is often the opposite of what it was intended to be. I despair at the bullying, disinformation, misogyny and body or lifestyle-shaming that lead young people in particular to physical illness, self-harm or suicide. The same Media can generate propaganda to foster prejudices that result in social and economic injustice, dehumanising people on racial, religious, political or national grounds, or because of their gender, age, youth, disabilities, lifestyle-choices or appearance. It is too easy to seek the quiet life, to keep one's head below the parapet, but if we do, we hide the gospel light under a bushel and nothing will change. **Not only is indifference not an option, it is sinful.** A lukewarm Church is of no use to the kingdom of God. In 1961 President Kennedy attributed, "**The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing**", to **Edmund Burke**, but in fact its earliest form was by John Stuart Mill, who said in 1867: "**Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.**" I am pedantic, but, that said, both statements are true.

As we are called to live and work in the world, we need to stand firm in our faith and live as Jesus calls us to, maintaining our integrity and showing our love for the Lord by how we care for our neighbours, even the Victor Meldrews we meet on our way! We ought to encourage one another to be environmentally sensitive for the sake of future generations, for God honoured us by giving us stewardship of the world. If we fail to do that because we are distracted from mission by arguments or worldly desires, we will be dandelion and not the wheat we would like to be! Don't allow these evils to drive us apart, for only Satan benefits from division. **May our daily lives show that we belong to Jesus by our words and deeds of love and unity. Amen.**

We shall close our worship as we recognize that the light we longed for in our opening hymn is Christ Jesus. We shall sing hymn number 447, 'Jesus, be the centre'.

**Jesus, be the centre,
be my source, be my light,
Jesus.**

**Jesus, be the centre,
be my hope, be my song,
Jesus. (Chorus)**

*Be the fire in my heart,
be the wind in these sails;
be the reason that I live,
Jesus, Jesus.*

**Jesus, be my vision,
be my path, be my guide,
Jesus. (Chorus)**

*Be the fire in my heart,
be the wind in these sails;
be the reason that I live,
Jesus, Jesus.*

**Jesus, be the centre,
be my source, be my light,
Jesus.**

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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.