

A service for 23rd June, 2024 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 107 verses 31 & 32

Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for human beings. Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. Amen.

I doubt if many architects have written hymns, let alone the two thousand James Edmeston, the author of our first hymn produced. Most of his hymns were written at a rate of one a week for family devotions, so I suppose that it is not unexpected that only this one hymn has endured nearly two centuries. Having said this, “Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead us” is a superb hymn. Let us listen to hymn number 238, ‘Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us’

**1. Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but thee,
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.**

**2. Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
All our weakness thou dost know,
Thou didst tread this earth before us;
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Lone and dreary, faint and weary,
Through the desert thou didst go.**

**3. Spirit of our God, descending,
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending,
Pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided,
Nothing can our peace destroy.**

© James Edmeston {1791 – 1867}

Let us pray

Living God, who calls all things into being, you are the light of the minds that know you and so we have come to worship and adore you. You are the peace of the souls that trust you, the joy of the wills that serve you, the strength and stay of all who love you and so it is right that we have come to worship and adore you this afternoon.

Loving God, in Jesus you make all things new and through your Spirit you wash away our divisions. You call us to follow you, setting before us an example of how we should live, by loving and caring for our neighbour as ourselves, and worshipping you with joyful hearts.

Ever present God, we thank you for the life of Jesus; a life lived with integrity so that people could trust him. We thank you that he showed by his words and actions how we should love our neighbour as ourselves. Thank you, too, for all the blessings you have granted us, for all that you have given us, done for us and accomplished in us. Accept our praise and thanksgiving for people who bring or have brought light and joy into our lives,

for challenges and opportunities that have added to the quality of our lives and for your faithful love that will follow us for evermore.

God our maker, mysterious and unseen yet closer than breathing, the still and loving centre of our lives, forgive us if our hearts are not still enough to hear you, or our lives too busy to respond to your promptings. Help us to listen to your call. God our defender, you love us with a love that never fails. Forgive us when we have failed to share that love with others. You know how easily we slip into judging people by how they look, and how mean, self-centred and uncaring we can be. Speak to our hearts, so we can amend our ways.

God our friend, you seek out each one of us and offer your comfort. Forgive us when we have disappointed, criticised or undermined a loved one or friend or neighbour. You see the potential in each person, yet we limit others' gifts. Teach us to love our neighbours as Christ Jesus loves them.

Renewing God, you are in all our growing and offer the promise of forgiveness and new life. Help us to accept your love and to work with you to build your kingdom, in the beautiful name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. 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.

Our next hymn was written by William Whiting, a Master of Quiristers at Winchester College during the mid-19th Century. Although it is beloved by the Royal Navy and is nicknamed 'The Mariner's Hymn', he said that it was intended as a metaphor for baptism, with youngsters being launched into the tempestuous seas of life! Hymn number 517, 'Eternal Father, strong to save,'

**1. Eternal Father, strong to save,
Whose arm doth bind the restless wave,
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
Its own appointed limits keep: *Chorus:***

*O hear us when we cry to thee
For those in peril on the sea.*

**2. O Saviour, whose almighty word
The winds and waves submissive heard,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amid its rage didst sleep: *Chorus:***

**3. O sacred Spirit, who didst brood
Upon the chaos dark and rude,
Who badst its angry tumult cease,
And gavest light and life and peace: *Chorus:***

**4. O Trinity of love and power,
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them wheresoe'er they go; *Chorus:***

*And ever let there rise to thee
Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.*

© William Whiting (1825 – 1878)

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and its needs.

Almighty God, we believe that all things are possible for you, which is a great comfort to us in our discipleship, for we are very aware how limited our own powers are. Guide and empower us as we strive to answer our call from Christ Jesus, but when the best we can do is not enough, then reach out and move the hearts of people who are able to heal some of the world's brokenness to act instead.

Holy God, we ask your blessing, that we may a blessing to our neighbours and families, particularly as we move out of restrictions caused by COVID19. We pray for all churches in our city and for the World Church. Teach us to set aside our divisions and differences, so that we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission. Bless and use our love, gifts and graces to not only address the needs of our community, but to help bring people to accept Jesus as their Saviour and friend.

God of peace and unity, we bring to you our concerns about the number of conflicts we hear of in so many parts of the world and so we pray for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. Breathe your Spirit upon national leaders and us, too and guide us all along the paths of peace, mercy and justice. We pray in particular that the dispute in Ethiopia will not lead to another famine. like the one in 1984. We ask you to bless mediators who are trying to resolve the conflict.

Loving Lord, we pray that the whole world takes steps to keep this planet habitable for future generations. We pray for those who are campaigning for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, especially the distribution of coronavirus vaccines to the Developing World, acknowledging that we shall be safe until most people have been given doses of the vaccines available. Let your Spirit inspire countries that care able to offer both vaccines and practical support to do so swiftly.

Heavenly Father, we pray for people living with a dementia, whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Remember too, in your mercy, their families, friends and carers who are struggling to cope. May they all be given the support they need to cope.

We pray for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are experiencing loneliness, depression, need or trouble. We pray for everybody whose relationships have broken down, or who are victims of domestic violence, particularly during this pandemic and everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear. Lord, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but embrace them with your love, so they may be comforted and find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

We ask your blessing upon keyworkers who are working for our wellbeing, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and all involved in rolling out vaccinations. Keep them safe and grant them success in their endeavours.

Abba, Father God, bless Bridge Court, everybody who lives here, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and help us live Christ-centred lives as we share your abundant love with all-comers, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

There are several accounts of how our next hymn was written. One of them attributes its origin to the journey John and Charles Wesley made to America in 1735, when their ship was caught in a violent tempest and a terrified and exhausted

seagull plummeted from the sky, landed on Charles Wesley's lap and crawled between the folds of his coat. Hymn number 355, 'Jesus, lover of my soul,'

1. Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the gath'ring waters roll,
While the tempest still is high;
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last.

2. Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me.
All my trust on thee is stayed,
All my help from thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing.

3. Thou, O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick and lead the blind.
Just and holy is thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.

4. Plenteous grace with thee is found,
Grace to cleanse from ev'ry sin;
Let the healing streams abound;
Make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of thee;
Spring thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.

© Charles Wesley, (1707 – 1788)

The Gospel reading is Mark chapter 4 verses 35 to 41

That day when evening came, he said to his disciples,
“Let us go over to the other side.” Leaving the crowd behind, they took him along, just as he was, in the boat. There were also other boats with him. A furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped. Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him,
“Teacher, don't you care if we drown?” He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves,
“Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, “Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” They were terrified and asked each other,

“Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” Amen.

Address: “The calming of the storm”, Mark 4:35 – 4

As many of you know, my son, Andrew, lives in Lowestoft the most easterly town in the United Kingdom. As a West Midlander, used to canals, small lakes and who lives several miles from any large river, I find the North Sea enthralling in its sheer power. Even on a calm day, the sea doesn't so much as lap against the flood defences, but as give them a hard slap, leaving you in no doubt about its might – power that has brought down cliff fronts, flooded the town and sunk many fishing boats over the years. Therefore, I can sympathise with the disciples in our Bible reading, even though most of them were experienced fishermen, accustomed to the tumultuous storms that can spring up with great violence on the Sea of Galilee. The storm in question must have been exceptional to terrify such men.

The reading is centred upon trust – in particular trusting God. We can take our gospel reading at three levels, the first as Jesus' remarkable trust in God the Father as he slept in the stern of the frail fishing boat amid a storm that convinced experienced fishermen that their last hour had come, so although they had heard Jesus' teaching about faith during the same day, the disciples were not only terrified but angry as they saw their Master fast asleep in their storm-tossed boat. In sheer terror, they woke Jesus with the accusatory: **‘Teacher, don't you care if we drown?’** Evidently, they had not yet taken Christ's teaching to heart, though as a landlubber I doubt if I'd have been better!

The second level is God's power over the elements revealed through Jesus as, in Mark's words, **‘He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Quiet! Be still!” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.’** The disciples were amazed and terrified, for although they still did not recognize him as the Messiah at this stage in Mark's Gospel, this episode was another pointer to his divinity. After all, only God has power over nature. This was another sign of who Jesus is, for the first eight chapters of Mark is often called the Messianic Mystery, with the gospel presenting evidence for the reader to discover who Jesus is – God's anointed, God in man. Like a good teacher, Mark gives us the answer in chapter 8, when Simon Peter declared, **“You are the Christ.”** During the great storm the disciples were beginning to realize that here was more than a gifted rabbi and healer, for he could make the elements do his will.

The third element was for Mark's contemporaries as they faced persecution from both Jews and the Roman Empire, yet it speaks to us today as well. Just as the disciples were caught in a literal storm, we may face great difficulties and failures in our life as Christians, though, unlike early Christians, we are more likely to face indifference, or scorn in an increasingly secular society than beatings, imprisonment or execution. For many, if not most of us, the current pandemic has qualified as one of life's great storms, involving profound danger, a sense of being helpless, of life being out of control and certainly a deep fear. Nevertheless, Jesus calls us to trust in his saving grace, however stormy the seas of our life may be, for he is aware of our needs and is ever present – even when we question whether or not he cares about our plight. He cares enough to have died to redeem us!

Jesus calls us to live in the world, just as he did, remaining true to his call despite the opposition of the religious Establishment. The Father sent him into the world with neither power nor privilege, other than the power of love which was more than enough. As Charles Wesley wrote in **‘And can it be’**,

**'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!'**

The good news is that we are blessed with the Holy Spirit, who will give us the grace and courage to face both good and bad. Remember, whatever happens, God is still in control. Trust in God's redemptive grace through the love of Christ Jesus. The Father who gave his Only Son to save the world won't abandon us to our fate after such a sacrifice. No, as St. Paul wrote to the Romans, **'I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.'** Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by a Unitarian actress, Sarah Flower Adams. It is supposed to be the last piece of music played on "SS Titanic", just before it sank on its maiden voyage in April, 1912. Hymn number 451 ("Hymns & Psalms"), 'Nearer, my God, to thee,'

1. Nearer, my God, to thee, / Nearer to thee!

E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me:

Still all my song shall be,

'Nearer, my God, to thee, / Nearer to thee.'

2. Though, like the wanderer, / The sun gone down,

Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;

Yet in my dreams I'd be

Nearer, my God, to thee, / Nearer to thee!

3. There let the way appear, / Steps unto heav'n;

All that thou sendest me in mercy giv'n;

Angels to beckon me

Nearer, my God, to thee, / Nearer to thee!

4. Then, with my waking thoughts / Bright with thy praise,

Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;

So by my woes to be

Nearer, my God, to thee, / Nearer to thee!

5. Or if on joyful wing / Cleaving the sky,

Sun, moon and stars forgot, upwards I fly,

Still all my song shall be,

'Nearer, my God, to thee, / Nearer to thee.'

© Sarah Flower Adams {1805 – 1848}

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.