

A service for 24th July, 2022 (StF)
10.45 a.m. 24th July, 2022

Call to Worship: Psalm 138 verses 1 to 5

I thank you, LORD, with all my heart; I sing praise to you before the gods.
I face your holy Temple, bow down, and praise your name because of your constant love and faithfulness, because you have shown that your name and your commands are supreme. You answered me when I called to you; with your strength you strengthened me. All the kings in the world will praise you, LORD, because they have heard your promises. They will sing about what you have done and about your great glory. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Thomas Obediah Chisholm in 1923. He was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1903. Unfortunately, his health broke down within a year and he was forced to stand down, becoming an insurance salesman in later life. Although it became a favourite hymn in the Moody Bible Institute, this hymn remained largely unknown in the United Kingdom for four decades. Mind you, when it appeared in “The Baptist Hymnbook” of 1962, it deservedly became popular with every denomination. We shall sing hymn number 51, ‘Great is thy faithfulness’.

**1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been thou forever shall be: Chorus:
*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.
All I have needed thy hand has provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.***

**2. Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. Chorus:**

**3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Chorus: © Thomas O. Chisholm (1866 – 1960)**

Let us pray.

Loving God, help us to feel your holy presence amongst us, for you are faithful, holy, beautiful, majestic and mighty. You are the creator and redeemer of all and you alone are worthy of our adoration and worship as we come to celebrate your undying, faithful love for all. Help us to set aside all anxieties and distractions so we may honour and glorify you in our prayers, hymns and heartfelt-meditation, rejoicing you have called us here by your grace.

Father God, look upon us with compassion as we offer our thanks and praise, for we have received abundant blessings from you. Thank you, O Lord, for this beautiful world that you created for us, over which you have given us stewardship, even though we have not cared for the planet as you wish us to. Guide us to act more responsibly, so our

children's children may inherit a world fit to inhabit. Accept our thanks, too, for all the good things that we enjoy: our lives; our food; our families, our friends and our fellowship here. Above all else, thank you for your boundless, redeeming love, revealed wholly in our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who lived our life, died to break the power of sin and was raised to offer us eternal life.

Merciful God, although Jesus showed us the path to true life, we have fallen short of what we know we ought to be, for we have sinned against you in what we have thought, said and done and also in the good that we have failed to do. By so – doing, we have added to the brokenness of the world, as well as grieving you deeply. Gracious God, we are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong, asking you to forgive us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save repentant sinners, so we believe you have heard and answered our prayer, offering each of us a new start. Therefore, Loving Lord, fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit and grant that we may serve both you and our neighbours faithfully 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.

Our next hymn was written by Frederick William Faber, who like Cardinal Newman, was an Anglican priest who became a Roman Catholic priest. Both men founded oratories, Cardinal Newman in Edgbaston, Birmingham and Revd. Faber at Brompton, London. Sadly, the saintly Cardinal described Brompton as 'second-rate', which is a shame as the two priest had once been friends! We shall sing hymn number 410, 'There's a wideness in God's mercy,'

1. There's a wideness in God's mercy

Like the wideness of the sea;

There's a kindness in his justice,

Which is more than liberty.

2. There is plentiful redemption

In the blood that has been shed;

There is joy for all the members / In the sorrows of the Head.

3. There is grace enough for thousands

Of new worlds as great as this;

There is room for fresh creations

In that upper home of bliss.

4. For the love of God is broader

Than the measures of man's mind;

And the heart of the Eternal

Is most wonderfully kind.

5. But we make his love too narrow

By false limits of our own;

**And we magnify his strictness
With a zeal he will not own.**

**6. If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be illumined
By the presence of our Lord.**

© *Frederick William Faber {1814 – 63}*

We come now to our prayers of intercession, when we bring our concerns to the Lord. Let us pray.

Loving God, although the world in which we live is wonderful and self-sustaining, the news in our Media speaks of its brokenness and is often so gloomy it daunts our spirits.

Nevertheless, we believe that all things are possible for you, so whilst we offer ourselves to do what we can to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbours, we turn to you in situations that are beyond our power, asking that you will reach out in mercy to rectify the results of mankind's cruelty, folly, exploitation and indifference which result in so much suffering around the world.

Lord of peace, we grieve about the number of conflicts around the world, especially at present, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Teach the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, rather than resorting to war. Mould their hearts so they seek justice and mercy in their dealings so that lasting peace can be built on solid foundations.

In your mercy Lord, may a negotiated peace that enables Ukraine to continue as a sovereign democracy be established soon. Grant President Zelenskyy and his advisors, the armed forces and militia, the steadfast courage and equipment to resist Russia's might and frustrate the Kremlin's plans. Merciful God, hear our prayer for civilians, mainly women, children, the elderly and disabled, who are trapped in cities that are being bombarded by Russian forces. Enfold them in your care that they may be comforted and protected. Remember, too, Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. Grant then a warm welcome and hospitality that will ease their distress.

Generous God, we pray for organizations like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid that are working to provide desperately-needed aid to famine-stricken Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen. We ask that Governments who are opposed to the Taliban can nevertheless find it in their hearts to offer aid to ordinary Afghans. We pray, too, that the blockade of grain and oil in Ukraine will be lifted swiftly to ease their plight.

We remember people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels and we thank you for food banks and for other organisations which help the poor. May the Government, business leaders, charities and local councils find ways of helping all who are finding it difficult to manage.

Lord of healing and wellbeing, hear our prayer for neighbours who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are in any kind of need or trouble; neighbours who are living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear, particularly those who have been unable to mark their loved-one's passing because of restrictions at funerals and gatherings. Heavenly Father, in a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned.

..... Lord, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship,

but warm them with your love which offers comfort, healing, courage and peace that passes all understanding.

Holy God, we pray for our church, all churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church, as we emerge from the dark shadow of Coronavirus. Renew and invigorate our calling as we seek new ways to serve our communities. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission and may the Spirit of truth and love empower us to bear the gospel light to this suffering and sin-darkened world.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and help us to share the abundance of your love with our neighbours, so our lives bring you honour through Christ Jesus our Lord and friend. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 11 verses 1 to 13

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he had finished, one of his disciples said to him,

“Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” Jesus said to them, “When you pray, say this: ‘Father: May your holy name be honoured; may your Kingdom come. Give us day by day the food we need. Forgive us our sins, for we forgive everyone who does us wrong. And do not bring us to hard testing.’ ” And Jesus said to his disciples, “Suppose one of you should go to a friend’s house at midnight and say, ‘Friend, let me borrow three loaves of bread. A friend of mine who is on a journey has just come to my house, and I haven’t got any food for him!’ And suppose your friend should answer from inside, ‘Don’t bother me! The door is already locked, and my children and I are in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ Well, what then? I tell you that even if he will not get up and give you the bread because you are his friend, yet he will get up and give you everything you need because you are not ashamed to keep on asking.

And so I say to you: ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For all those who ask will receive, and those who seek will find, and the door will be opened to anyone who knocks. Would any of you who are fathers give your son a snake when he asks for fish? Or would you give him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? Bad as you are, you know how to give good things to your children. How much more, then, will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” Amen.

We continue our worship as we sing a hymn written in 1972 by an American, Karen Lafferty, during a personal financial crisis when she learned to trust in God’s gracious provision. Hymn number 254, ‘Seek ye first the kingdom of God’.

**1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;**

Allelu– , Alleluia: Chorus:

Alleluia, Alleluia,

Alleluia, Allelu–, Alleluia!

**2. Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;**

Allelu— , Alleluia: Chorus:

3. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;

Seek, and ye shall find;

Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;

Allelu— , Alleluia: Chorus:

© Karen Lafferty (born 1948)

Sermon: “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” Luke 11:1

One night in mid-September, 1743, a mob spent three hours dragging John Wesley from Wednesbury to Walsall, as the rioters tried to persuade local magistrates to indict him for opposing the church and the King. Needless to say, three justices of the peace refused to accede to their demands, especially when one of their charges was that John Wesley and his friends sang Psalms all day and made folk rise at four in the morning. At that point the mob decided to take the law into their own hands, so John Wesley was propelled to Walsall Bridge, where his opponents argued whether they ought to ‘knock his brains out’, or hurl him into the waters below.

An amazed quietness descended as the crowd saw the small figure before them quietly praying, then the very man who had led them, a former prize-fighter, George Clifton, nicknamed ‘John Munchin’, declared that he would die defending John Wesley, picked him up, placed him on his shoulders and pushed his way through the crowd to safety. Of course, we don’t know if John Wesley was praying to be saved, or was committing his soul to the Lord, as his father had done on John’s behalf some thirty-four years earlier when the boy had been trapped in the burning rectory at Epworth. Nevertheless, the act of praying galvanised a ruffian to show compassion, thereby saving his life.

Prayer is a fundamental part of most faiths, but our model for prayer distinguishes us from other religions. Only Christians dare begin a prayer with Abba, Aramaic for ‘daddy’, rather than ‘Adonai’ or ‘Elohim’, as used by Jews, or equally formal expressions for God by other faiths. This manner of address declares a special relationship between God and us, for as Paul wrote to the Romans, **‘The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory’.**

As children of a loving Father God, therefore, we can be bold in our petitions, for just as good parents seek only the best for their children, so God only desires our wellbeing. However, we do well to consider Jesus’ model for prayer: it begins by showing God due respect, by acknowledging that his values are true and enduring – before asking him for our essential needs. Do we always begin our prayers by acknowledging God’s sovereignty, his goodness, might and holiness? After all, he is the Lord of creation, the Sustainer of life and our Saviour. Give him his due honour, rather than treating him casually, even though we may call him ‘Abba’ through Christ Jesus. The prayer also seeks to set us in a right relationship, by asking forgiveness for our sins, acknowledging that we must forgive others in return, before asking his protection against future temptations to sin. The Lord’s Prayer reflects good family relationships: we honour our parents; we try to live according to their values and rely on them to protect us against the world; we make our peace with them if we have upset them – but must also forgive others if they have offended us; then we are free to ask favours.

It is interesting that Jesus went on to say that we should be persistent in our prayers, rather than asking once and grumbling if there is no immediate response. I am tempted to think that he was hinting that his disciples' prayer life was not all it ought to be. Do we turn to God only in times of trouble? Do we spend more time asking for our needs than in thanking God, in reinforcing our relationship with him? If our prayers are not answered as we expect, or immediately, do we turn away in bitter disappointment? Indeed, when we pray, do we really believe that God will listen to us, let alone answer us?

Do we pray for all the world, or are our prayers parochial and inward-looking? Are we comfortable when we pray for trade justice, if the results are likely to result in a relative reduction in our prosperity? When we pray for world peace, for example with the war between Ukraine and Russia, are we willing to pay the price of peace with price rises and Russia's threats to cut off gas and oil supplies? Do we pray in the expectation that God will do everything for us, rather than offering ourselves to be part of his answer, by acting as his earthly hands?

A devout man found that his house was inundated by a flood, so he climbed onto his roof and prayed, 'Lord, save me!' As the waters continued to rise, a man appeared in a rowing – boat. "Come on, mate, jump aboard," said the rower. "No," replied the man, "the Lord will save me."

The man sat on the peak of the roof as the floods lapped at his feet. A motorised lifeboat roared up. "Come on, chum, jump aboard," said the captain. "No," replied the man, "the Lord will save me." An hour later, as the man stood on the chimney to avoid the waters, a helicopter hovered overhead. The winchman was lowered and offered to lift the man to safety. "No, thank you," replied the man, "the Lord will save me."

Later, a very angry man arrived at heaven's gates. "Lord," he exclaimed, "I prayed to you, but you didn't save me!" God looked both hurt and surprised: "What do you mean? I sent a rowing-boat, a lifeboat and a helicopter, but you sent them away."

Several years ago, a retired local preacher confessed to me that he felt useless, because he thought he could no longer serve our Saviour. I pointed out that he still encouraged others at his church, he welcomed newcomers and, most importantly, his prayer life was exemplary. He looked surprised as I told him that he'd always excelled at intercessory prayers and, with the extra time he had been granted, he could concentrate on that aspect of his spiritual life. He went away, much happier, as I realised that my prayer life was not as good as it ought to be, precisely because I was too busy. Now I try to ensure that I make quality time for prayer, especially in the morning when I am fresh, so I can draw close to the Lord before I begin my chaplaincy duties.

Christ Jesus challenges us to make time to pray to the Father, to be assured that he listens to us and responds in his wisdom and love, but to be willing to be part of his answer, not a passive observer. Even when nothing seems to be happening, let us pray in faith, for the God who gave his Only Son to redeem sinners like us, who raised him to offer us eternal life and who sent us his Spirit will surely hear and answer what we ask – in his own time and manner. Let us then draw ourselves into an ever-closer relationship with the Lord, so that the Holy Spirit not only reveals God's will to us, but then empowers us to fulfil his purpose. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written in 1856 as a poem by Love Maria Willis, a doctor's wife from New Hampshire, U.S.A.. Mrs. Willis was a Unitarian whose hymns reflect the tension before the beginning of the American Civil War.

We shall sing hymn number 518, 'Father, hear the prayer we offer'.

1. Father, hear the prayer we offer:

**Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.**

2. Not for ever in green pastures

**Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.**

3. Not for ever by still waters

**Would we idly rest and stay;
But would smite the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.**

4. Be our strength in hours of weakness,

**In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.**

© *Love Maria Willis {1824 – 1908}*

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and forever more. Amen.