

A service for 24th October, 2021 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 104 verses 31 to 34

May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in his works—he who looks at the earth, and it trembles, who touches the mountains, and they smoke. I will sing to the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written in 1998 by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter, when he was only thirty-three years old. His earliest hymns were published when he was in his mid-twenties. Hymn number 24, 'Come, now is the time to worship'.

Come, now is the time to worship.

Come, now is the time to give your heart.

Come, just as you are to worship.

Come, just as you are before your God, come.

One day every tongue

Will confess you are God,

One day every knee will bow.

Still, the greatest treasure remains

For those who gladly choose You now.

Come, now is the time to worship

© Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

Let us pray.

Great Lord of Creation, your holy Word formed the universe from darkness and chaos; you breathe life into every living being and you sustain us by your constant love. Your power and wisdom are as unfathomable as the height, depth and breadth of your love, yet we know you care for sinful human beings so much you have tried to draw us close to you from our first days. You first taught us through the prophets and patriarchs, yet, when we did not listen and rebelled against you, instead of rejecting us, you came to us as Jesus Christ, emptied of his divine powers, except for love.

Jesus lived among us, revealed your nature in his words and deeds, then he died at Calvary to atone for the sins of the world. Through his resurrection, Jesus broke the power of death and offers us new life by faith in him, not by merit of our own, nor by our works, but through his grace. Therefore, Lord, we come to you with joyful hearts, asking you to take away all anxieties that may distract us from our worship.

Heavenly Father, we offer heartfelt thanks for the many blessings we receive from you: for the beauty and fruitfulness of autumn, for all the good things we enjoy; for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, but most of all that you love us despite our manifest failure to live as you call us to.

Merciful Lord, pardon us for our words and actions that have hurt others and for times when we have not responded to people we have seen in distress. Forgive us, too, for our failure to love and serve you wholeheartedly and when we don't commit ourselves to you and our call. Help us to change our ways, so that our lives are Christ-centred, not self-centred.

Gracious and faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and in boundless grace you have forgiven us. Therefore, Lord, let us follow you in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim and live out Good News in the blessed name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

We shall say the prayer Jesus 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 by Revd. Bryn Rees in 1974. He was the Minister at Tetherdown URC, Muswell Hill, London at the time and his organist, Gerald Barnes composed one of four melodies for it which, naturally, is called "Tetherdown"! Hymn number 255, 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy'.

**1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**

**2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**

**3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all! © Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}**

We come to our prayers of intercession.

Lord of all, we recognize your faithfulness in meeting our daily needs and for loving us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, to show us how to live as you want us to and to offer healing and hope to our sin-broken world, for we know many people are not as blessed as we are. Therefore, we pray for our neighbours, those near to us or far away: for people who face hardship and suffering, both here and abroad. Grant us the faith and compassion to act as your earthly hands, by helping us to reach out and offer practical support to neighbours who are in need or distress, but where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to intervene, for nothing is impossible to you.

Lord of all nations, bring forth leaders who have the wisdom and compassion to care for the well-being of the people they govern. May they seek justice and deal mercifully, for only when justice and mercy prevail can real peace exist. We pray for an end to conflicts that are causing not only injury death and destruction, but swell the number of refugees who are seeking to escape from terror and suffering. Lord, hear our prayer for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice across the world, especially at present in Afghanistan, where the Taliban is in power again. Help us to be instruments of your peace: offering love where there is hatred, forgiveness when we have been wronged, hope for despair and the gospel light of love to counteract the darkness of ignorance and bitterness.

Lord, recent terrible floods and wildfires on several continents, are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for all disaster- stricken people and pray for them to

receive swift, practical aid. Most of all, we pray that all humankind comes to recognize the need for change before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

God our Saviour, we ask your blessing upon people who have worked steadfastly to support us throughout this pandemic: the NHS, carers, scientists and key-workers throughout the country. May they be successful and safe in their endeavours, dear Lord.

Spirit of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, look with compassion on people who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, for neighbours bearing the burden of living with a dementia and others whose treatment has been delayed by the pandemic. May they 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. Remember in your mercy our neighbours who are lonely, afraid, unemployed, or overworked, besides all who feel undervalued and unloved and everyone who has lost loved ones, in particular people lost during this past-nineteen-months. In a time of silence, we remember them before your mercy seat.

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

Sovereign God, hear us as we pray for your Church, both here in the Vale of Stour and worldwide: unite us in love and outreach, so everybody may see that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. Lord, guide and encourage us when times are difficult, for vision and hope to enable us to take a risk for the sake of the gospel and courage to remain true to the teaching of Christ.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us share your abundant love with all-comers, thereby glorifying your name, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

The Gospel reading is Mark chapter 10 verses 35 to 45

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him.

“Teacher,” they said, “we want you to do for us whatever we ask.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

They replied,

“Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory.”

“You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said. “Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”

“We can,” they answered.

Jesus said to them,

“You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared.”

When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. Jesus called them together and said,

“You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Amen.

Graham Kendrick wrote our next hymn for the Spring Harvest of 1984 after much research into the concept of the God, who created and loves everything, taking human form, becoming the Suffering Servant. We shall sing hymn number 272, 'The Servant King'.

**1. From heaven You came,
Helpless babe, entered our world,
Your glory veiled; not to be served
But to serve and give Your life**

That we might live. Chorus:

*This is our God, the Servant King,
He calls us now to follow Him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering
Of worship to the Servant King.*

**2. There in the garden of tears,
My heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not My will but Yours,' He said. Chorus:**

**3. Come see His hands and His feet,
The scars that speak of sacrifice;
Hands that flung stars into space
To cruel nails surrendered. Chorus:**

**4. So let us learn how to serve,
And in our lives enthrone Him;
Each other's needs to prefer,
For it is Christ we're serving. Chorus:**

© Graham Kendrick (born 1950)

Sermon: *"Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* Mark 10:45

In this time of COVID19, shortages of HGV drivers, vets and butchers and escalating energy costs, who in his or her right mind would want to lead a political party, let alone become Prime Minister? Leaving aside the question of sanity, it appears that many, if not most, MPs harbour ambitions to become leaders. From the time Theresa May became leader of the Conservative Party several MPs, including Boris Johnson, were determined to remove her from power, ostensibly because they didn't like the Chequers terms for leaving the European Union, but more likely for less-principled reasons. I wonder whether or not the prestige of leadership is worth the soul-destroying intrigues that follow their election. Certainly, Westminster is a place where ambitious MPs plot against their leaders and cause strife within their parties as a result, but I don't know how comforting it is that Christ's disciples were also guilty of power-seeking.

Our Gospel reading relates how James and John approached Jesus to ask that, when he came into his glory, they could sit on either side of him, that is, they wanted the highest places in heaven to be theirs. Each wanted an exclusive relationship with Christ: don't forget that they had already tried to stop somebody from healing in Jesus' name because he was not one of them; now they wanted supremacy over Simon Peter and the others. Clearly, even after three years' sharing Christ's ministry, they had not understood a fundamental truth of God's kingdom: human values don't apply – indeed, they are often inverted! They could not grasp God's wisdom, but instead looked to what society deems important.

It would have been natural for Jesus to have reacted angrily, for he had only just been talking to them about his imminent passion and death, but he gently asked them, **“Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”** In other words, he asked them if they could accept the same degree of suffering as he would, indeed, if they would die for the kingdom? Undaunted, the brothers declared they could and although Jesus acknowledged that they would suffer greatly for him, he told them that, even so, the allocation of places of honour in heaven were God’s prerogative. It is unlikely that either James or John had any idea about the manner in which their Master would suffer and die. They probably still expected him to lead a glorious revolution that would drive out the Romans and re-establish Judah as a political and economic powerhouse. Inevitably, the ten other disciples heard and their indignation shows that they harboured similar ambitions, so Jesus addressed them all, to make his position clear. He told them that Gentile societies had a social hierarchy in which those who were in a position of leadership, lorded it over the ordinary masses and exploited them. The disciples would have been very aware of the way in which the Roman Empire was structured, with Caesar at the top of the social ladder, down to the ordinary legionaries, who occupied Judea. However, Jesus pointed out to them that in God’s kingdom anybody who wanted to be considered greatest must be as humble as a slave, in other words must forfeit their own rights to serve other people. Discipleship means serving our neighbours voluntarily, even sacrificially and putting our own interests aside. Here is an example to illustrate the point.

Douglas Downes was born in 1878, the son of a Nineteenth Century Methodist minister. He was ordained in the Church of England and began his ministry in Lambeth, one of the poorest parts of London. He found it impossible to reconcile the opulence of his vicarage with the poverty of his parish, so he moved into two empty rooms at the top of an old house, used painted orange boxes as furniture and shared all he had with his poor friends. He opened a Men’s Club and befriended tramps, beggars, drunkards and down-and-outs. He didn’t rate himself as a preacher, but showed the love of God in practical friendship. After the Great War, Douglas was offered work at Oxford University, but rejected it in favour of helping a monk, called Brother Giles, who worked among tramps on Flowers Farm at Cerne Abbas, Dorset. When Brother Giles fell ill, in 1922, Douglas took over, gave up the title Reverend and took the name Brother Douglas. He set to work gardening, bee-keeping, jam-making and doing crafts like carving and weaving, drawing the tramps to join in the work. The produce was sold at Dorchester Market. Brother Douglas called the house at Flowers Farm, ‘The Home of St. Francis’ and adopted a brown habit, like that worn by the Saint he admired. He called his tramps ‘way-faring folk’, but he expected them to help: those who wouldn’t were fed and sent on their way. Life at the Home was joyful, with a mixture of work and prayer, games, singing and dancing.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Brother Douglas spoke to the House of Commons about the plight of vagrants – which led to new laws being passed to protect them. He opened five new Homes in 1932, in which tramps learned trades that offered them the security of employment. Brother Douglas also founded “The Brotherhood of St. Francis” a group of dedicated men who ran the homes along the strict lines that Brother Douglas laid down. Brother Douglas passed away in 1957, aged seventy-nine, known by friends as “The Apostle of the Outcasts”.

Jesus is the supreme example of sacrificial love, for not only did he divest himself of the riches of heaven to live as a carpenter’s son, for the sake of sinners like us, but he died a terrible and cursed death to break us free of the power of sin and death. In

the hymn, "And can it be", Charles Wesley described Christ's ministry thus: '**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.**' Jesus displayed God's love for all people by becoming our true pattern for discipleship and also by showing the difference between kingdom values and the false values of our world.

What does this reading mean to us? To begin with, does the Church in general and ours in particular offer everybody equal opportunities to use his or her own gifts and graces in our church's mission? Are our goals set for our own prestige and prosperity, or for serving the kingdom as Christ calls us to? These considerations are important as we begin to emerge from the shadow of this pandemic and address the needs of communities broken by recent events. If we are to be part of the recovery and rebuilding processes, we must work as a church family, not for material gain nor individual prestige, but for the Lord. May the example of our loving Servant King guide our discipleship. Amen.

We shall close our worship with a hymn by Jacqui Jones, a South African Christian composer and singer, who now lives as a vicar's wife in New Zealand. 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.