

A service for 25th May, 2025 (StF) (Aldersgate)

Call to Worship: Psalm 47 verses 5 to 9

God has ascended amid shouts of joy, the LORD amid the sounding of trumpets. Sing praises to God, sing praises; sing praises to our King, sing praises. God is the King of all the earth; sing to him a psalm of praise. God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted. Amen.

We shall worship our risen Lord as we sing a hymn written by Noel and Tricia Richards in 1987. Noel Richards was inspired to become a hymn-writer when he was a teenager and saw 21-year-old Graham Kendrick perform at Colston Hall, Bristol. Hymn number 293, 'All heaven declares'

1. All heaven declares

The glory of the risen Lord.
Who can compare
With the beauty of the Lord?
Forever He will be
The Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee
And worship Him alone.

2. I will proclaim

The glory of the risen Lord,
Who once was slain
To reconcile man to God.
Forever You will be
The Lamb upon the throne.
I gladly bow the knee
And worship You alone.

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Let us pray.

Lord of all creation, your compassion maintains life throughout the universe, your wisdom and might are only equalled by the height, width and depth of your love. You entered our world as Christ Jesus, not only to share our lives and experiences, to bring Good News to all peoples in words and deeds of grace, but to die upon a cross to reconcile fallen humanity to you by breaking the power of sin. Through his resurrection, Jesus offers us everlasting life by his grace, not by anything we deserve, nor can earn. Therefore, we come to offer you all our praise, adoration and thanksgiving in our worship today.

Loving Lord, accept our wholehearted thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining world that you made for us, for all the blessings you bestow on us: for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, but most of all for persevering with us despite our failure to live as you call us to.

In shame we confess our failure to live as you want us to, for not always loving and serving you wholeheartedly. In a time of silent reflection we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, by acting and speaking in a way that shames us.

Merciful Lord, help us turn away from sin and back to the path you call us to tread. In your great goodness, bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness for the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow you. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives may provide evidence of our faith and be a beacon to draw others to know and love our risen Saviour. Amen.

We shall say the Lord's Prayer

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 second hymn was written by Colin Ferguson, a Scot who worked as a probation officer, then for family courts, contributing much to the establishment of mediation services and training for work as well as bereavement care.

He is an elder and licensed preacher in the United Reformed Church. Hymn number 629, 'God of my faith, I offer you my doubt'.

**1. God of my faith, I offer you my doubt,
For life at times seems far too dark for me,
And my belief becomes more insecure,
When worldly cares produce uncertainty.**

**2. God of my hope, I offer you my fear,
When I am scared by my anxiety,
When all I hear is suffering and woe,
In all my shadows you will walk with me.**

**3. God of my joy, I offer you my grief,
When I sink down in sadness or despair,
When in depression I cannot be touched,
I pray in all my depths to find you there.**

**4. God of my love, I offer you my pain,
When I'm alone and feel nobody cares,
In aching age or in rejected youth,
You bear my cross and dry my human tears.**

**5. God of my life, I offer you my dreams,
Light in the darkness where I hide from view,
Light in my faith, my hope, my joy and love,
Light in my life and all my life in you.**

© Colin Ferguson (born 1937)

We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away. Let us pray.

Loving God, Jesus' passion, death and resurrection remind us that you care for us with boundless, unconditional and redemptive love. Grant us faith, wisdom, compassion and steadfastness to serve you as you desire. Do not let us not close our eyes and hearts to injustice, prejudice or neglect, but instead bid us strive courageously for the wellbeing of everyone and to share your love with our neighbours, nearby and far away.

This month, we are commemorating the eightieth anniversary of VE Day, giving heartfelt thanks for everybody who contributed to defeating Nazism and fascism and earning us the freedom which we sometimes take lightly. Help us to recall the terrible cost of war, so we may strive for peace and justice. We grieve that wars are currently being waged in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Myanmar, Congo, Somalia and Sudan with all

the suffering, destruction, death and displacement that results from mankind's inability to co-exist with neighbours. We ask, too, that the fragile ceasefire in Kashmir will hold and that India and Pakistan ease current tensions. Teach the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise, rather than taking up arms when disputes arise. We pray for just and lasting settlements to the conflicts we have named and for your shalom to be bestowed on all nations.

Jesus is the source of healing and well-being, so we pray for people who are ill, for those brought low by loneliness, fear or need and for all who are experiencing the pain of bereavement. In a time of silence, we bring to mind friends and neighbours for whom we are especially concerned.....
Loving Lord, help us offer them practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be healed, encouraged and granted reassurance.

As Christian Aid Week comes to an end, we ask a blessing on its works throughout the world: for the provision of materials, crops, equipment and training that allow people in developing countries to make their own way forward in dignity, offering them hope of prospering. Thank you for those who lead the charity, those employed here and abroad. Grant them vision and courage to face the challenges of global warming and political instability and bless, too, everybody who contributes to its work with gifts and prayers.

Saviour God, hear our prayer for this church, churches in our Circuit and indeed the World Church. May the light of Jesus' love guide us through the darkness of this increasingly secular, materialist world and may we remain constant and true. Unite us in love and purpose and help us proclaim good news boldly to a world that needs good news so much.

Abba, Father God, may the risen Lord inspire us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to reveal the light of your love in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

The Epistle is Romans chapter 5 verses 1 to 11

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Amen.

Our next hymn is Charles Wesley's 'Give me the faith which can remove' which was written in 1749, when he was suffering with depression. Originally, it was a

lament, but his older brother struck out two verses to leave us with a classic Wesley hymn. We sing hymn number 661.

1. Give me the faith which can remove
And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the child-like praying love,
Which longs to build thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
And all my simple soul devour.

2. I would the precious time redeem,
And longer live for this alone;
To spend, and to be spent, for them
Who have not yet my Saviour known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe, to breathe thy love.

3. My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
Into thy blessed hands receive;
And let me live to preach thy word,
And let me to thy glory live;
My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinners' friend.

4. Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless charity divine;
So shall I all my strength exert,
And love them with a zeal like thine;
And lead them to thy open side,
The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

© Charles Wesley {1707 – 1788}

Address 1: *'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ' Rom 5:1*

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Church in Rome reveals the power of the Spirit who reminds us of the grace and peace we receive through our faith in Christ Jesus. I still grieve when somebody tells me he or she isn't worthy to come to church! All of us are sinners; all stand in need of God's grace; if we turn to the Lord, that grace is assured, however far we have fallen from what God wants us to be. Just as John Pounds had a notice over the entrance to his ragged school, **'Little vagabonds preferred'**, I wish that every church would have a sign on its doors, **'Sinners preferred'**! I wonder how many churchgoers would refuse to enter because they don't think themselves sinners!

On 24th May, 1738 a small, young man with shoulder-length hair sat alone at a house in Temple Bar, London, in total despair, because he doubted if he was even a Christian, although he had been an Anglican priest for thirteen years. That man, John Benjamin Wesley, was born into a God-fearing family: he and his younger brother, Charles, were good sons; they were honours students at Oxford University; they gave generously to charity – so much so that the young priest grew his hair long so that he could save the cost of buying a wig and £4 per annum, to give to the poor, instead; they regularly visited the sick and ministered at Newgate Prison, even comforting the condemned as they were on the scaffold. Despite these virtues, John Wesley declared that he **'was no better than the vilest offender in the kingdom'**, because of a great burden of unworthiness he carried.

Part of the reason for his sense of unworthiness was, in 1735, shortly after their father's death, the Wesleys had sailed for Georgia, America with high hopes to be great evangelists. However, their ministries were marked by a series of scandals and tactless enthusiasm that culminated with John summoning his flock to church by beating a drum loudly, early on the Sabbath. He grew so unpopular that someone fired a gun at him. The bullet missed its target, but the Governor told the brothers to return forthwith to England.

They reached home in February, 1738 with a profound sense of failure. Clearly, their efforts to gain salvation by works had not succeeded! On the evening of 24th May, three days after his younger brother, Charles, had declared himself saved, which probably added to John's misery, John Wesley went to a Moravian service @ Aldersgate Street, London, where in his own words:

"In the evening, I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, *even mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.'

The strange warming of his heart was the Holy Spirit taking charge. He brought about a remarkable transformation – the Wesleys felt freed from a sense of obligation to earn redemption for their sins and realised that forgiveness of sins and failure were God's free gift. That knowledge left them free to serve God's call as a loving response to his graciousness and led to one of the greatest spiritual and social revolutions in British history. Realising that Jesus wanted them to minister to the outcasts and marginalized of society in the early Industrial Revolution, the Wesleys and their followers brought Good News to parts of our industrial towns and villages that the established church daren't even enter! Methodism was as much a social movement as a worship movement, but it made a deep impression on British society as well as much further afield. Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn by the prolific Methodist Minister, Revd. Fred Prat Green. It was written in 1969, entitled "the Caring Church".

Hymn number 415, 'The Church of Christ, in every age,'

1. The Church of Christ, in every age,

Beset by change, but Spirit led,

Must claim and test its heritage / And keep on rising from the dead.

2. Across the world, across the street,

The victims of injustice cry

For shelter and for bread to eat,

And never live until they die.

3. Then let the servant Church arise,

A caring Church that longs to be

A partner in Christ's sacrifice,

And clothed in Christ's humanity.

4. For he alone, whose blood was shed,

Can cure the fever in our blood

And teach us how to share our bread

And feed the starving multitude.

5. We have no mission but to serve

In full obedience to our Lord:

To care for all, without reserve,

And spread his liberating Word.

© F. Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

The Gospel reading is Luke Chapter 10 verses 1 to 12 and 17 to 20

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them,

"The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If people of peace is there, your peace will rest on them; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Amen.

Address 2:

As Twenty-first Century disciples, the Lord challenges us to pick up the mantle passed from St. Peter to John Wesley: we are called to serve all-comers, not just fellow-Christians, just as Jesus reached out to Gentiles, outcasts and even Samaritans. No one is outside the scope of God's love – even people we find it hard to like. Whilst I am a committed Methodist – and I am sure there are many who say I ought to be committed – I recognise that we don't have all the answers in worship, or service, but having said that, Methodism has a proud tradition of outreach. The foundation of classes within Methodism played an important part in its development. Groups were formed within churches to support and encourage one another and to pray together. Bible-study, hymn-singing and outreach into the community helped members grow in faith and strong bonds formed with those classes. Importantly, classes encouraged Methodists to be outward-looking, rather than inward-looking, as is happening in some churches nowadays. We need to prayerfully consider the needs of our community and further afield, so we can channel our skills and resources effectively.

There is great value in the Churches Together Movement, where worshippers from different traditions meet to share ideas and serve their communities, but more can

be done: imagine sharing resources, or for organisations like Christian Aid, MRDF and Cafod working collaboratively on projects; imagine all church denominations developing the work of MHA, extending care for a rapidly ageing society. Think how much more work could be done for the Lord, if we could only set aside our differences and concentrate upon the Good News Jesus lived and died for. **We must let the light of God's love shine through our actions, for only when we live out our faith will others hear and respond to our message of salvation and turn to Christ. Amen.**

Let us conclude our worship as we sing number 345, 'And can it be', one of the great hymns of Charles Wesley, written in 1739. It is believed by some commentators to have been the Wesleys' Conversion hymn, rather than 'Where shall my wondering soul begin' and it was certainly a favourite of John Wesley. It is often referred to as 'The Methodist Anthem', but it has a less reverent nickname in Tipton, where it is called the 'Bicycle Hymn', because of the line, "my Chains fell off"! Hymn number 345.

1. And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

2. 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more.

3. 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!

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

5. No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own!

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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 evermore. Amen.