

A service for 25<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 (StF)

**Call to Worship: Psalm 145 verses 13 to 16**

The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.

You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing. Amen.

*Our first hymn was written in 1993 by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall listen to hymn number 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness,'*

**1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness,**

**Longing for truth, we turn to you.**

**Make us your own, your holy people,**

**Light for the world to see. *Chorus:***

*Christ, be our Light!*

*Shine in our hearts,*

*Shine through the darkness.*

*Christ be our Light!*

*Shine in your Church gathered today.*

**2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.**

**Longing for hope, many despair.**

**Your word alone has power to save us.**

**Make us your living voice. *Chorus:***

**3. Longing for food, many are hungry.**

**Longing for water, many still thirst.**

**Make us your bread, broken for others,**

**Shared until all are fed. *Chorus:***

**4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.**

**Longing for warmth, many are cold.**

**Make us your building, sheltering others,**

**Walls made of living stone. *Chorus:***

**5. Many the gifts, many the people,**

**Many the hearts that yearn to belong.**

**Let us be servants to one another,**

**Making your kingdom come. *Chorus:***

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***Let us pray***

Loving heavenly Father, all glory, honour, power and praise are yours alone, for your Word transformed darkness and chaos into this vast swirling universe of stars, planets and moons. Your power and wisdom not only created life but formed self-sustaining eco-systems which enable life to continue. In your love you reached out to humankind, offering guidance through the patriarchs and prophets by your holy word. Even when we rebelled against your teaching and set ourselves in opposition to you, your love for us is so great that you did not abandon us, but instead came as Christ Jesus.

Jesus came to show us how we should live through his words and actions, but he also came to bear the judgment for the sins of the world by becoming the one perfect sacrifice on a cross at Calvary. His death broke the power of sin, but when he was

raised, Jesus overcame death and offers us everlasting life as his great gift of grace, not something we can grasp by works, nor which we deserve. Lord, we come to worship you with joy and awe. Amen.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, 'Faithful Lord', please respond with, 'forgive us'.***

Lord, we have come to thank you for this beautiful world in which we live, for all the good things we enjoy, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, for rich, fulfilling experiences and for opportunities that have enhanced our days, but above all things, thank you for being our Good Shepherd, for even when we stray from you, when we are loveless and unlovable, we know you will seek us out and save us from our folly.

'Faithful Lord' ..... ***'forgive us'***.

Holy God, when we consider ourselves as straying sheep, we reflect upon our failures to love and serve you wholeheartedly and to love our neighbours as we know we should. .... For the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do, forgive us O Lord and bring us back to you in our deeds and words, so we may be your holy people.

'Faithful Lord' ..... ***'forgive us'***.

Merciful Lord, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have already pardoned us. Lord God, teach us to share your gift of love with all-comers, so we may honour you in the beautiful name of Jesus. 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.**

*We continue our worship with a hymn translated in 1940 from an Urdu lyric. The translator was Dermott Monahan, son of a Wesleyan Methodist missionary, who, like his father, served in Southern India, most of his life, though he was educated in England and was trained at Handsworth College, Birmingham. The melody is a Pakistani folk song. Hymn number 252, 'Jesus the Lord said: "I am the Bread,"'*

**1. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,**

**The Bread of Life for the world am I.**

**The Bread of Life for the world am I,**

**The Bread of Life for the world am I.'**

**Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,**

**The Bread of Life for the world am I'.**

**2. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Vine –**

**The true and fruitful Vine am I.' .....**

**3. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Way,**

**The true and living Way am I.' .....**

**4. Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the Light,**

**The one true Light of the world am I.' .....**

**5. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,**

**The Resurrection and the Life am I.'**

**The Resurrection and the Life am I,**

**The Resurrection and the Life am I.'**

**Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,**

***In our prayers of intercession we remember people near and far away.***

Heavenly Father, we offer praise and thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet which displays your power and glory. However, whenever we hear or read the news, we are reminded about the world's brokenness, much of which is the result of human failure, greed, cruelty, pride, foolishness and selfishness. Lord, we acknowledge that you have blessed us and as a result offer ourselves to serve as your earthly hands as we seek to help neighbours who are in trouble or in need. Grant us the patience, wisdom, courage and compassion to act as Jesus would act, but in situations where our best is not enough, we pray that you will reach out to others who can bring about healing and wholeness, for to you all things are possible.

Holy God, we ask you to revive our church and churches throughout the world, particularly as restrictions caused by COVID19 are eased, so that we may a blessing to our communities and to people further afield. Help us set aside our divisions and differences, so we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him as a united body of believers. Bless and use our love, gifts and graces to share Good News in our actions as well as our words, so our lives reveal the grace of Jesus.

Almighty God, events like the terrible floods in Germany and Belgium with mass destruction and the loss of many lives are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for people affected by the floods and for campaigners against pollution and irresponsible consumerism. May not only governments but most of the population recognize the need for change, so that future generations will inherit a habitable world.

God of shalom, of peace and harmony, we pray for peace in a world defiled with conflicts, persecution, terrorism, prejudice and sectarianism. We pray for national leaders to seek justice and mercy in their dealings, so peace may flow like a healing river and we pray for healing of the divisions we see in our own society. Let your peace begin our own dealings with our neighbours, so our lives reflect what we ask for the world.

Author of wellbeing, we pray for people who are ill in body or mind, whose lives are blighted with pain and anxiety especially those whose treatment has been held up because of the pandemic. May they receive treatment that will restore their health, or at least mitigate the results of neglect and delay. We pray for those whose mental and spiritual health have been adversely affected by lockdown restrictions, asking that that they will not only seek but will receive they support they need. Lord, remember people living with a dementia, their families, friends and carers whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Help them come safely through these testing times.

We offer our prayer for people who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear. 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 friendship and practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be comforted and healed. Bless them with courage, hope and enduring peace.

We pray for most people in the country to behave responsibly as legal COVID restrictions have been eased, so coronavirus can be kept in check and vulnerable people remain safe. Meanwhile, we continue to ask your blessing upon everybody who has been working for our wellbeing during this crisis, especially members of the NHS,

scientists, carers and key-workers. Bless all of them, grant them success in their work and keep them safe.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us be beacons of good news, day by day. May we learn to share the love you give us in such abundance with everybody we meet, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

*Our penultimate 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 the hymn which, naturally, is called "Tetherdown"! The alternative settings are 'Paderborn', 'Hanover' and 'Haughton'. 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}**

**The Gospel reading is John chapter 6 verses 1 to 21**

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the miraculous signs he had performed on the sick. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Feast was near.

When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." There was plenty of grass in that place, and the men sat down, about five thousand of them.

Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted." So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten.

After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world."

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself. When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them. A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough. When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified. But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid." Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading. Amen.

**Sermon: “*Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?*” John 6:5**

John's gospel is like a multi-faceted gem, for many stories reflect more than one truth, so it is a book I recommend you to explore in detail, not just at a basic level. For example, it would be easy to simply write-off Jesus feeding the five thousand and walking on water as two miracles without looking at the significance of each. I'm sure that all of us have faced challenges that have made us exclaim despairingly, "That's impossible!" A situation in the family, at work or in the church may have left us feeling wholly inadequate. However, what at face value seems impossible can happen: Messrs. Frederik de Klerk, Nelson Mandela and not least of all, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, steered South Africa from Apartheid to the Rainbow State, when many had expected the country to be torn apart by a terrible race war; or the powerful advocacy of Gordon Wilson that led to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and relative peace in Northern Ireland, even though Gordon had been a victim of the Enniskillen bombing of 1987 in which his daughter, Marie had perished. Who would have thought Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness would have been nicknamed "The Chuckle Brothers" at Stormont following decades of enmity? God can choose the most unexpected people to heal some of the world's brokenness, for to him nothing is impossible.

Nevertheless, I can well imagine Philip's feelings when Jesus asked him, "**Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?**" After all, a great crowd had followed Jesus and his disciples from the western shore of the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida, near where the River Jordan flows into the sea. Although Jesus and his friends had sought rest, the Lord was filled with compassion when the multitude appeared, seeking healing and teaching. There were more than five thousand people, for John recorded that there were five thousand men, they were in a remote place and, as the Passover Feast was imminent, it is likely that Bethsaida would not have had enough bread, even if the disciples had sufficient money to pay for it. Taking Jesus' question at face value, Philip replied that it would have cost two hundred denarii, nearly eight months' wages for a working man, and even that amount would barely provide a small helping for the multitude. I suspect Andrew felt sheepish as he brought a boy to Jesus, saying that he had (presumably) offered to share his five barley loaves and two fish, but wondering how that could help.

Jesus already knew what he was going to do, so he told his doubting followers to have the crowd sit, then he took the boy's small offering, blessed it and had the disciples distribute it. Not only was the crowd's hunger satisfied, but twelve baskets of leftovers is clear evidence of the abundance of God's provision for the helpless, hopeless Galileans. The first significant thing about this miracle is not so much the size of the crowd, nor the twelve baskets full of leftovers, but the way in which it mirrors God's gift of manna for the Israelites in the wilderness and how Jesus exceeded the great prophet Elisha's feeding of one hundred men with only twenty loaves. John is telling us that Jesus has the same power as God the Father and far more than the great prophets. In other words, Jesus is God in man, not just a prophet and healer. A second point is how God will use what little

we have to offer, in material or spiritual matters and expand it to fulfil his purposes. It is also significant inasmuch that it shows the compassion of God – through Jesus – for ordinary people. In Jesus God is seen as the Good Shepherd, who tends his flock – don't be misled into thinking that it means only the Church: God's care is for all his creation. Moreover, don't waste time speculating about how Jesus walked on water. If we can explain it, then it isn't a miracle. Its significance is that Christ demonstrated power over the elements, power reserved for God alone. Therefore, John provides his readers with another sign that Jesus is God in man, not just a prophet and healer. Don't forget arguments were raging amongst John's contemporaries about the nature and being of Christ – disputes that only ended with the Nicene Creed in the Fourth Century, so John was making his position clear for all.

Sadly, the Galileans were more concerned to declare Jesus King, as a source of easy food, rather than seeking the spiritual bread that satisfies the soul. While attending to material needs is important, if we neglect the spiritual side, well-being can quickly change to ill-being. By spiritual, I don't just mean religious: our spirituality is what makes us come alive, what makes us who we are. We can gain spiritual food when we go on holiday, or hear a piece of music that moves us, or read a poem that uplifts us, or do something we enjoy, or share the company of somebody we like. It can be a sunrise, or sunset, a striking panorama, even a wonderful meal. Most of all, our well-being is enhanced by knowing that we are valued and loved for who we are, warts and all.

I am sure that one of the reasons why numbers of young people are disaffected is because their spiritual needs are discounted as unimportant. I've known well-meaning parents lavish gifts and money on their children, yet fail to give them what they most need: shared time and activities. Then they wonder why they go off the rails in their teens. All of us are loved and deemed precious by God – precious enough for Jesus to have died to restore us to a right relationship with the Father – so let us seek the spiritual well-being of those around us, not only their physical and material needs.

The past eighteen months of the COVID19 pandemic have affected us all in a variety of ways. I hope that you have come to church today for spiritual food for our journey. I pray that you are receiving it in our worship and come away with more than a couple of chocolates! As a Church, we need spiritual refreshment, if we are going to address a world bruised and broken by coronavirus. Now is the time to think of how we as a body of believers can address some of the issues that face society: reaching out to the bereaved among us; supporting groups who are helping the vast numbers of people suffering with depression and anxiety brought on by the pandemic; working with groups who reach out to people in debt, or the unemployed, or those whose relationships have foundered or trying to ease the plight of those who have endured isolation and loneliness. And these issues are just scratching the surface of need around us.

Are you now feeling like the disciples at Bethsaida? If so, don't despair. We cannot do everything on our own and Jesus doesn't expect us to. However, we can address one or perhaps two issues, using the expertise and help of charities, or offering them a base at church. We can work as a group of churches, or as a Circuit, or, heaven help us, sharing the task with other denominations. Let us copy the boy by offering all we have and are – however inadequate we fear them to be – and let the Lord bless and use it. Our Church is built upon the foundations of God's amazing and unfathomable love, a love that took Jesus to Calvary, then raised him from the grave, finally coming to all who turn to Christ in faith as the Holy Spirit. Let us trust the redemptive love that founded the Church and use it to bring healing and hope in Jesus' name. Amen.

*Our closing hymn was written by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, a long-lived Methodist Minister. Hymn number 346, 'Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other.'*

**1. Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;  
Born in our darkness, he became our Brother.  
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:  
Glory to God on high.**

**2. Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and none other;  
No one can serve him and despise another.  
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?  
Glory to God on high.**

**3. Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other;  
Sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother –  
He, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:  
Glory to God on high.**

**4. Give God the glory, God and none other;  
Give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;  
Give God the glory, God in us, my Brother:  
Glory to God on high.**

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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 now and forevermore. Amen.**