

**A service for 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2022 (StF)**

**Call to Worship: Psalm 146 verses 1 and 2**

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, O my soul. I will praise the LORD all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live. Amen.

*Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light of God's love to guide our discipleship. It was written by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall sing 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.***

Heavenly Father, help us feel your presence among us as we come to worship and adore you this morning, for you are the Creator whose wisdom brought all life into being throughout our universe. Your compassion and power sustain life and we know you are gracious, faithful, true, majestic and holy. Your glory is clearly revealed in the vastness of space with its myriad suns, planets and moons, whilst the beauty and complexity of life on this planet fill us with awe. We are amazed all the more that you care for us so much that you sent your Son, Christ Jesus, to reveal your boundless love by his life, death and resurrection. Help us to pray to you in faith, sing our hymns joyfully and both understand

and respond to your holy word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many blessings we have received from you: for all the good things that we enjoy, for challenges that have tested us and shaped our character and for people who have cared for us, guided and inspired us. Above all else, thank you for Jesus, who broke the power of sin and death, and offers us new life at the end of our earthly days.

Merciful God, despite Jesus' example and teaching, we confess that we have sinned against you and other people by what we have said or done. Moreover, we don't always help neighbours who are in difficulty, or distress, yet we try to excuse our heartlessness, though our guilt is before us. Lord, we are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong, asking your forgiveness in Jesus' name.

God of grace, we believe you have heard and answered our prayer, pardoning us for our sins and offering us a fresh opportunity to renew our discipleship. Therefore, Lord, fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit, so hereafter we may serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully, in Jesus' beautiful name. 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 next hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed Kendrick's visit to India the previous year.*

*Hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'*

**1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,  
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.**

**Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,  
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!**

**2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,  
Work for all people, trade for their skills;  
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,**

**Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. *Chorus:***

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,*

*Give us compassion we pray:*

*Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;*

*Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

**3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,  
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.**

**Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,  
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain. *Chorus:***

**4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams  
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.**

**Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;**

**Make us content with the things that we need. *Chorus:***

**5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame  
Until your justice burns brightly again;  
Until the nations learn of your ways,  
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. *Chorus:***

© *Graham Kendrick (born 1950)*

***We shall now bring our concerns for other people, nearby and far away, to the Lord our God.***

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all you have given us and have done for us. You have given us a beautiful world on which to live, yet even though we rejoice in the beauty of nature in late summer, we are not blinded to the great suffering which goes on around us, much of which is through human failings and sinfulness. Lord, where we are able, enable us to act as your earthly hands, by reaching out to our neighbours in their need or distress. Grant us compassion, courage, steadfastness and empathy when we serve others in Jesus' name, but where the best we can do is not enough, reach out in mercy to inspire people who have the power, wisdom and influence to heal some of the brokenness around us, for everything is possible for you. We pray that the fullness of your shalom will be revealed in our world: peace, harmony, wholeness, prosperity, rest and blessing.

King of Kings, on this final day of Royal Mourning, hear our prayer for King Charles III, his family, our nation and Commonwealth. Receive our thanks for the steadfast, loving service of the late Queen Elizabeth and grant our new King the wisdom, grace and humble faithfulness to rule as well as our late Sovereign did for seven decades. May he, like his mother, be guided by deep faith in Christ's redemptive love.

Lord of Peace, we grieve about conflicts that are being waged around the world. We pray for an end to the unrest between Palestinians and Jews in Jerusalem and an end to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Bring peace and reconciliation to these countries and guide the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, rather than resorting to war. Warm and mould their hearts so they seek justice and mercy in their dealings so that lasting peace – your shalom – can be built on solid foundations.

Bountiful 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 countries Afghanistan and especially nations in the drought-stricken horn of Africa. May the Ukraine's ports remain open so the export of much-needed grain and oil to these countries will continue. We offer our prayer for victims of severe flooding in Pakistan, asking that the nation receives much needed help as soon as possible.

We remember, too, 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. Nevertheless, we pray the Government and other agencies, including the Church, find ways of helping all who are finding it difficult to manage.

God of healing and wellbeing, hear our prayer for neighbours who are ill, or who are in any kind of need or trouble. Hear our prayer for neighbours who are living with depression, or anxiety, or whose relationships have broken down. We remember all who mourn the loss of somebody dear, whose grief may have been deepened by this week's State Funeral. In a time of silent prayer, we offer names of people about whom we are particularly concerned, confident that you will know their needs fully and will reach out to them in compassion. .... Lord,

help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but enfold them in the warmth of your love which offers comfort, healing, hope, courage and a peace that passes all understanding.

Rock of Ages, we pray for our church, all churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church. Inspire and renew our calling as we seek new ways to serve our communities, at this time of emergence from the dark shadow of Coronavirus. Teach us to speak of the saving grace of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission, so we bear the gospel light to our suffering, sin-darkened world.

Abba, Father God, Bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and teach us to reveal the light of your love in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Saviour. Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 16 verses 19 to 31.**

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side.

The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered,

'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him,

'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'" Amen.

*Our next hymn is Sydney Carter's, 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?' which he wrote in 1965. You may not know that, during the 1950s and 60s, Sydney worked as a lyricist for Donald Swann in the famous revues of Flanders and Swann. Just think, we could be singing, 'mud, mud glorious mud'! Instead, let us stand and sing, hymn number 256, 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?'*

**1. When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?**

**When I needed a neighbour, were you there? Chorus:**

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,*

*Were you there?*

**2. I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?**

**I was hungry and thirsty, were you there? Chorus:**

**3. I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?**

I was cold, I was naked, were you there? *Chorus:*

4. When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a shelter, were you there? *Chorus:*

5. When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there? *Chorus:*

6. Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there,

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, *Chorus:*

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,*

*I'll be there.*

© Sydney Carter {1915 – 2004}

*Address: 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'* Luke 16:31

Jesus' parable about the rich man and **Lazarus** is not as much an attack on wealth, as it is on the misuse of resources and unconcern for the poor and vulnerable in society – both here and abroad. Sometimes the wealthy man is called **Dives** because that is Latin for 'rich'. His clothing was a sign of opulence, for he wore purple outer garments, which were very expensive to purchase and had fine linen undergarments, rather than scratchy woollen ones. Moreover, he enjoyed a life of luxury. The words, '**At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus**', tell us that he was so helpless that friends carried him to the rich man's house, hoping that the man would take pity on the beggar and feed him.

**Lazarus** can mean '**God is help**', or alternatively it is the Greek version of **Eliezer, the servant of Abraham**, but each form implies that he was righteous, though destitute, trusting in God for all he received. However, Lazarus was ignored by everyone, except the rich man's dogs which licked his ulcerated body! Interestingly, one commentary said that the dogs weren't tormenting the beggar, but their saliva acted as a healing balm – not that I would want to test this claim.

For the rich man to have shown compassion towards Lazarus would have cost him little, yet he was utterly indifferent to the beggar's suffering. Even in death, the two men differed, with the rich man being buried with exaggerated pomp, whilst Lazarus' passing went unnoticed. However, whilst the beggar went to **Abraham's side**, that is with the righteous in **Paradise**, the wealthy man found himself in **Hades**, the Greek equivalent of **Sheol**, the place of the unsaved dead. Though the distance between Hades and Paradise allowed the rich man to speak to Abraham, the chasm between the two places would not allow anyone to cross from one to the other, so Dives' request that Abraham should send Lazarus across to give him some water was met by Abraham's observation that the wealthy man had never taken an opportunity to help the poor one in his life, despite his opulence.

Dives then appealed for Abraham to return Lazarus to earth, in order that he could warn the rich man's brothers, so they could avoid his fate. Abraham told him, '**They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.**' In other words, they have Torah to guide them: that ought to be enough. Dives persisted, '**No, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.**' The reply from Abraham was stark: '**If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.**'

This was a clear dig at the Pharisees and Scribes, who kept demanding '**signs**' of Jesus before they would believe his divinity and who considered themselves 'righteous' in

God's sight for keeping the **613 rules of Righteousness**. At first glance, this parable simply speaks out against worldly wealth and promotes the righteous poor. However, it is much more than that, for in First Century Jewish culture, riches and success were looked upon as God's favour for the '**righteous**', whilst abject poverty reflected the Lord's judgement upon '**sinners**'. Therefore, it was a warning to the Pharisees in particular, but to everyone in general, that dependence upon material things rather than on kingdom values will lead to a broken relationship with God. Dives had relied upon his vast wealth, but had been unwilling to share it with those he looked down upon as 'undeserving', whilst Lazarus had no choice but to place his trust in the Lord, even though he received little material gain for doing so.

The current financial crisis in the UK and Europe, with rapidly growing fuel, energy and food prices is going to impact everybody this winter, not only people on benefits. People with good jobs, who are just about managing, but who face increases in mortgages, energy and food are likely to be plunged into food and fuel poverty, so there is going to be a great temptation to reduce our giving to support food banks and charities. No doubt some will say, '**Charity begins at home**', to justify not giving. Well, they are using the proverb wrongly: '**Charity**' comes from the Latin '**caritas**', which means '**loving-kindness**' and the proverb means that our children first learn loving-kindness in the home (by our examples). In fact, love starts in the heart of God. It is such love which led God to send his beloved Son, Jesus, to share our mortal frame, so he could teach us kingdom values in words and deeds. It is that love, not nails which held Christ Jesus on the cross to break the chains of sin which held us in thrall to Satan. It is such love which raised Jesus from death to offer us everlasting life. In the hymn, '**When I survey the wondrous cross,**' Isaac Watts tells us how we ought to respond to God's amazing loving-kindness: '**Were the whole realm of nature mine, / That were an offering far too small; / Love so amazing, so divine, / Demands my soul, my life, my all!**'

Although we, too, will be affected by spiralling inflation, we as Church can help people who are struggling by providing warm spaces, working with our circuit, or even across denominations. We can support food banks, or run holiday clubs to provide children on free school meals with lunch when otherwise they would go hungry, (Marcus Rashford raised this issue last year), or give space for debt counselling. As individuals our powers are limited, but as part of the body of Christ we are challenged to remain generous in all our dealings: in our giving of our money and time; in our care for other people, irrespective whether or not we like them – I'm sure there are times when I drive Jesus to despair by my perverse behaviour, times when he finds it difficult to even like me, yet through grace alone I know Christ loves and cares for me, as he cares for all of us. Don't let the gloom generated by the Media prevent us from reaching out to our local community and the wider world, too, for the God, who gave his all to redeem us, calls us to trust in him, so we can offer all we are able to bring practical good news to the helpless and needy. Amen.

*We close our worship with a hymn written in 1974 by Bryn Rees, a Congregational Minister who served mainly in Eastern and South Eastern England. It has four common settings, which makes it an organist's nightmare. However, the melody 'Tetherdown' was composed by Gerald Barnes, the organist at Tetherdown URC, in*

*Muswell Hill, London, when Revd. Rees was minister. We shall sing 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}*

***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.