

## A service for 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2025 (StF)

### **Call to worship: Psalm 51 verses 10 to 13**

Create a pure heart in me, O God, and put a new and loyal spirit in me. Do not banish me from your presence; do not take your holy spirit away from me. Give me again the joy that comes from your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. Then I will teach sinners your commands, and they will turn back to you. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by David Evans in 1985 and was his reaction to some contemporary worship songs which he felt were over-familiar to the Lord. We shall sing hymn number 20, 'Be still, for the presence of the Lord'*

**1. Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;**

**Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.**

**In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;**

**Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.**

**2. Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;**

**He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.**

**How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light;**

**Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.**

**3. Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;**

**He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.**

**No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;**

**Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.     © David J. Evans**

**Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.**

Almighty God all glory and praise are yours forever, for you are the Living Word who spoke our universe into being, who formed this world and all that live upon it. It is you who created mankind and entrusted the stewardship of the earth to our care. Faithful God, in your compassion you seek to sustain all life and provide our daily needs. You have granted us wisdom to make use of the resources this world offers and a conscience to discern between right and wrong. We thank you for the honour bestowed on us.

Gracious God, you know everything about us: our virtues and vices, our successes and our failures, our hopes and fears and yet you love us so much that you came to live among us as Christ Jesus, so by his life and teaching, we might understand how you want us live and through his death and resurrection, our Lord broke the power of sin and death and offers us everlasting life through faith in him.

Loving Heavenly Father, you call us to be your earthly sons and daughters, a holy priesthood in an everlasting covenant fulfilled by your Son, our Saviour. Therefore, as we come to worship you today, take away all anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in love, spirit and truth. Almighty God all glory and praise are yours forever. Amen.

**In our prayer of confession, when I say 'Lord, in your mercy', please respond with, 'Hear our prayer'.**

Heavenly Father, we offer heartfelt thanks for the many blessings we have received from you and, most of all for loving us even when we are disobedient, loveless and unlovable.

Lord, in your mercy, ..... **Hear our prayer.**

Lord, pardon us when we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves and do not love and serve you wholeheartedly, for sins we have committed and good we've failed to do. In Jesus' precious name, help us to lead Christ-centred, rather than self-centred lives and forgive us as we seek to amend our ways.

Lord, in your mercy, ..... **Hear our prayer.**

Loving Lord, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us but call us to follow you once again without the burden of guilt to hold us back. Help us serve you in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that, by caring for our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, we may honour you always, in Jesus' beautiful name. Amen.

***Let us say the prayer our Lord taught us:***

**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 will lead us to our prayers of intercession as we consider and pray for the needs of neighbours nearby and far away. It was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed his 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 to the Lord our God. I am basing the intercessions on a hymn written by Colin Fergusson.***

**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.**

Heavenly Father, your generous, constant love is evident in the wonders and beauty of this self-sustaining world, the blessings we receive day by day and knowing that you have redeemed us through Christ Jesus. We know we ought to be joyful, yet all too often our spirits are cast down by the brokenness we see and hear about so much in the news Media, much of which is the result of human greed, pride, foolishness and indifference. Where we are able, use us as your earthly hands. Grant us compassion, courage, wisdom and steadfastness when we serve others in Jesus' name, but where we can't make as much difference as we'd like, we ask you to do so, for all things are possible to you.

**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.**

Lord, our thoughts turn to Ukraine and Palestine, where fighting is causing unspeakable horror and suffering, particularly to civilians, young and old. We pray that the peace plan brokered by President Trump will be accepted by both Hamas and Israel, that hostages will be released, prisoners freed and Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank will experience an end to their suffering. Like prophets of old, we cry out for justice: for just, swift ends to the fighting, not only in Ukraine and the Holy Land, but also in Congo, Myanmar, Sudan and Somalia.

Lord of the nations, teach world leaders to negotiate and compromise in order to avoid taking up arms and help this country to listen to and discuss opinions that are challenging, rather than growing ever more polarized by shutting them off. Remind us of our common humanity and that Christ died to save everybody, not only people who share our viewpoint, but including people whose views offend us.

**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.**

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 the Developing World. May their work reduce the numbers of migrants who are fleeing from poverty as well as warfare.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to levels where some will need to choose between heating their homes and eating. We thank you for food banks and for other organisations which help the poor and pray that we may be able to offer support to our less fortunate neighbours.

**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.**

Lord of healing and wellbeing, hear our prayer for neighbours who are ill in body, mind or spirit, or people in any kind of need or trouble. Remember neighbours who living with anxiety or depression, or whose relationships have broken down and, particularly, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear. In a time of silence; we offer names of those for whom we are most concerned. .... Empower us to offer them practical support and friendship, by serving as your earthly hands, but where we can't do as much as we'd like, enfold them in your loving arms, comfort, encourage, strengthen and heal them.

**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.**

Holy God, hear our prayer for Dame Sarah Mullarly, the new Archbishop of Canterbury. Grant her wisdom, patience and grace to heal some of the Anglican church's divisions and be the good shepherd she aspires to be. We ask you to inspire this church, churches in our district and indeed throughout the World to serve you in love and unity, so we bear good news to a world that desperately needs it.

Abba, Father God, Bless us, our families and friends. Inspire us to keep Christ at the centre of our lives, so we share the abundance of your love with both friends and stranger, in the name of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

***Graham Kendrick is in many ways the Charles Wesley of the Twenty-first Century. He has written many hymns that show deep theological understanding and manages to make them particularly apt for contemporary issues. Graham was born in 1950, a son of a Baptist pastor, Graham has spent more or less all of his adult life working to promote the Christian faith, first as Musical Director of British Youth for Christ between 1976 and 1980, then in 1984 with the Ichthus Christian Fellowship. This hymn was written 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. 'The Servant King' captures the idea of Kenosis from Philippians chapter 2 even more graphically than Charles Wesley in the third verse of 'And can it be' : "He left His Father's throne above...". 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 (b. 1950)

**Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 18 verses 9 to 14**

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:

"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.'

But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'

I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Amen.

*Our next hymn was written by Robert Walmsley for Whitsuntide celebrations, just over a hundred years ago. Mr. Walmsley was a jeweller from Manchester, a member of a Congregational church and a long-serving Sunday School teacher. Hymn number 443, 'Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,'*

1. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,  
Tender and true;  
Out of the heart of the Father above,  
Streaming to me and to you;  
Wonderful love  
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2. Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,  
Joyfully came;  
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,  
Sharing their sorrow and shame;  
Seeking the lost,  
Saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

3. Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;  
Why do they roam?  
Love only waits to forgive and forget;  
Home, weary wanderer, home!  
Wonderful love  
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

4. Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,  
Come and abide,  
Lifting my life, till it rises above  
Envy and falsehood and pride,  
Seeking to be  
Lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

© Robert Walmsley {1831 – 1905}

**Sermon:** *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* Luke 18:14  
Two months ago tomorrow, my wife and I attended a talk by Pastor Janaki Menni about Faith in Action Ministries, a voluntary, non-denominational Christian organization in Andhra Pradesh, Southern India. In more than thirty years’ service, Janaki has built a team of more than a hundred co-workers, has planted 113 churches and 64 house churches, all of which are engaged in positive evangelism. She and her team are caring for, or as she puts it, ‘sharing God’s love’ with orphans, street children, the elderly without support, especially older widows and leprosy community groups. She is organizing vocational training courses for rural and tribal young girls and women, providing education for poor and slum children, supporting small business start-up co-operatives to help break chains of poverty, providing clean drinking water and conducting free medical camps in interior tribal villages. The work done by Janaki and FIAM is wonderful, yet it is opposed by the Hindu majority, simply because it is a Christian organization.

Janaki was born in a Hindu family which despised Christianity, mainly because Jesus ministered to and mixed with low caste people, untouchables or Dalits, so he was unacceptable because of his association with such outcast. However, at fifteen she became so seriously ill that, despite the best medical aid available, her condition worsened and her death seemed inevitable. One night, Janaki had a vision of Jesus, who stretched out his hands to her and said, “My daughter, I heal you. Come forward to my service’. Next morning, astonished doctors found that she was indeed well, so she was released next day. Janaki accepted Jesus as her Saviour, but her family rejected, ostracised and threw her out of her family home. Despite this, she answered Christ’s call and twenty-four years ago, when Janaki’s father fell ill with cancer and faced other challenges, Janaki prayed for healing and he not only recovered, but his prejudices against Christ were dispelled as he realised the power of Jesus. Since then he, Janaki’s mother and sister have become Christians – a major step in Hindu Andhra Pradesh, where, sadly, the caste system still operates.

Luke’s passage showed that the same malaise existed in Jesus ministry, for it began, **‘To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:’** His words were directed primarily at the Pharisees and Scribes, for although both groups tried their best to obey every one of the **613 rules connected to Torah** and therefore strove their uttermost to be holy, they looked down on other people as inferiors, unworthy and probably condemned by the Lord. Pharisees and Scribes believed that they would be saved by their works, that they could earn God’s favour by following every detail of Torah, but Jesus teaches us that all their efforts are in vain, for we are saved by God’s grace alone. **In simple terms, grace is the unmerited, unconditional love of God, for he loves us completely – as we are.** Nothing we can do will make him love us more or less than he already does, so we are free to serve him as a response to his loving-kindness, rather than having to do the equivalent of community service like a modern minor criminal. However, with this freedom

comes responsibility: we need to acknowledge our sinfulness and to turn away from wrongdoing, back towards God's path. After all, we cannot expect God's forgiveness if we simply say **'Sorry'**, but continue doing wrong.

In his parable, Jesus showed the smug Pharisee, convinced of his righteousness, thanking God that he was better than other people, for not only had he faithfully observed the Laws of Moses, he exceeded the requirements for fasting and tithing. The Torah requires only **one fast – on the Day of Atonement** – but this Pharisee fasted every **Monday and Thursday**, a practice of only the strictest Jews and he **tithed everything, including goods he had bought**, in case the vendors had not tithed. As a result, he approached God expecting congratulations, rather than acknowledging that, despite his outward appearances, he was a sinner in need of both forgiveness and spiritual refreshment. His pride took him away from God, for he looked down on people who were not as strict in their observance as he.

The tax collector, on the other hand, was painfully aware of his sinfulness and of the way in which fellow Jews reviled his kind as collaborators with the Roman State that occupied their land: worse still, they were hated as cheats, collecting in more revenue than Rome demanded and pocketing the difference. This man could not even look upwards when he addressed the Lord. Instead he beat his breast as a public sign of grief and said, **'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'**. Here was a man who knew that he needed to change his ways and asked God to help him do so. For that reason, Jesus declared that it was the tax collector who was made right with God, not the Pharisee – probably outraging the **'respectable'** Jews who heard the story. Jesus gave us the model for prayer: we honour God; we seek to do his will; we ask for our daily needs, spiritual as well as material; we ask his forgiveness as we acknowledge that we must forgive others in return and we ask for the strength to resist temptation to sin. Unlike the Pharisee, Jesus never praised himself, though of all people he had every justification to have done so.

Were I to be given £1 for every occasion that people have told me, **"I'm not good enough to go to church"**, I'd be a wealthy man. It may be strange in one way that anybody should feel unworthy to come into church, but I have a nagging fear that we Christians sometimes project the same kind of prickly rectitude as that Pharisee. Lord Revd. Dr. Leslie Griffiths of Burry Port, a Methodist theologian once, on "Thought for the Day", described the chapel-goers in the village where he lived as a boy as **'vinegar-faced'**. If people consider us so inflexible and unapproachably correct that they feel unwelcome in church what a disservice we do to Christ, for he not only mixed with the unclean, the sinful, despised outsiders of society, but ate with them, talked with them and offered them healing and hope. Jesus is the most inclusive person to have walked the earth, yet 2000 years later our society needs laws to stop us excluding others because of their gender, race, colour, creed, age and social status. Perhaps every church should have a notice by the entrance: **ONLY SINNERS ARE WELCOME HERE!** Jesus challenges us to be humble, to acknowledge our need for God's grace, to seek spiritual food through prayer and to regard our neighbours as he views them: individuals made in the Father's image, each precious enough not only to love with a passion, but to die for, as he did at Calvary. May we meet that challenge as individuals and as the Church. Amen.

***Our closing hymn 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 referred to as ‘The Bicycle Hymn’, because ‘My chains fell off’! We shall sing hymn number 345, ‘And can it be’*

**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!**

© Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

### ***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.**