

A service for 26th June, 2022

Peace Prayer

Lead us from death to life, from falsehood to truth. Lead us from despair to hope, from fear to trust. Lead us from hate to love, from war to peace. Let peace fill our hearts, our world, our universe. Let us dream together, pray together, work together, to build one world of peace and justice for all. Amen.

Call to worship: Psalm 25 verses 4 and 5

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. Amen.

Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light of God's love to guide us. 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.

Creator God, whose Word brought life to the universe and whose compassion sustains life, you bless us with your redemptive love for all peoples, a love we see revealed in the life, death and resurrection of your dear Son, Christ Jesus. Jesus shared our mortal form

and brought Good News to us in words and deeds. We rejoice that his death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death, reconciling fallen humankind to you, our heavenly Father. Jesus offers us everlasting life through his grace, not by anything we deserve, or can do to earn it.

Therefore, as we come to offer you all our praise, adoration and thanksgiving in our worship today, remove all distraction and anxieties, so we can meditate upon your holiness and glory

Loving Lord, accept our wholehearted thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet that you made for us, for all the good things that we enjoy: for opportunities to serve you and for people who have guided, inspired and loved us. Most of all we thank you for continuing to love us even at our worst, when we are faithless, loveless and disobedient. Amen.

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing and seeking forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.

Merciful God, we confess our failure to live as you want us to, for we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly and sometimes disregard your call to care for others in Jesus' name, although we often try to excuse our faithlessness and disobedience. In a time of reflection we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, of being self-centred, rather than Christ-centred.

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

Lord of righteousness, help us turn away from wrongdoing and back to you.

Warm and soften our hearts and guide us with your truth. Bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death, allowing us to play our part in building your kingdom here.

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

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow Christ Jesus as his disciples, without the burden of guilt. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives become a beacon to draw others to know, love and serve 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 next hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. John Bell is a frequent contributor to Radio 4's "Thought for Today" and believes in a social ministry. Their hymns are usually set to old Scots ballads, but this is sung to a French carol melody, 'Noel Nouvelet'. We sing hymn number 251, 'Jesus Christ is waiting'.

**1. Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,**

I am lonely, too:
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you.

2. Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.

Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry, too:
In the kingdom's causes,
Let me rage with you.

3. Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets,
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.

Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity, too:
Let my care be active,
Healing, just like you.

4. Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.

Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph, too:
Where good conquers evil,
Let me dance with you.

5. Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
'Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet.'

Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few:
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.

© John L. Bell (B 1949) & Graham Maule (B 1958)

We come now to our prayers of intercession. Let us pray.

Loving God, although the world in which we live is wonderful and self-sustaining, every day we hear news that speaks of its brokenness and daunts our spirits. Nevertheless, we believe that all things are possible for you, so whilst we offer ourselves to do what we can to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbours, we turn to you in situations that are beyond our power, asking that you will reach out in mercy to rectify the results of mankind's cruelty, folly, exploitation and indifference which result in so much suffering around the world.

We pray for our church, all churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church, as we emerge from the dark shadow of Coronavirus. Renew and invigorate our calling as we seek new ways to serve our communities. Teach us to speak of the grace

and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission and may the Spirit of truth and love empower us to bear the gospel light to this suffering and sin-darkened world.

God of Shalom, we pray for peace throughout the world, even though our attention is focussed at present upon the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Teach the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, rather than striking out in anger. Let them seek justice and mercy in their dealings so that peace can be built on solid foundations.

In your mercy Lord, bring about a negotiated peace that enables Ukraine to continue as a sovereign democracy and let peace be established soon. Reach out to the Ukrainian people, from President Zelenskyy and his advisors, the armed forces and militia, that they may remain steadfast, courageous and undaunted, so they will be able to resist Russia's might and frustrate the Kremlin's plans. We pray for the civilians, mainly women, children, the elderly and disabled, who are trapped in cities that are being bombarded by Russian forces. Hold them close in your care that they may be comforted and protected. We pray that friendly countries will continue to provide support not only during the war, but for the time it takes to rebuild Ukraine from the ashes of conflict. Remember, too, Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. Grant then a warm welcome and hospitality to ease their distress.

Lord, we pray for people who campaign for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including the distribution of vaccines to impoverished countries where COVID19 is rampant and may mutate into more serious forms that will return to trouble us. We pray for organizations like All We Can and Christian Aid that are working to provide desperately-needed aid to famine-stricken Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen that they receive the support they need. May the blockade of grain in Ukraine be lifted swiftly to ease their plight.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels. We thank you for those who supply and run food banks and for other organisations which help the poor. Guide the Government, business leaders, charities and local councils to find ways of helping the poor.

Loving Lord, we remember neighbours who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are in any kind of need or trouble; neighbours who are living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear, particularly those who have been unable to mark their loved-one's passing because of restrictions at funerals and gatherings. 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 practical support and friendship, but warm them with your love, so they may find comfort, healing, courage and enduring peace.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our friends and our families. Keep us safe in your care and help us to share the abundance of your love with our neighbours, so our lives bring you honour through Christ Jesus our Lord and friend. Amen.

We continue our worship with another hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. This hymn is one of those set to a Scots ballad tune, in this case "Kelvingrove". We shall sing number 673, 'Will you come and follow me'.

1. Will you come and follow me

If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you, and you in me?

2. Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare,
Will you let me answer prayer
In you, and you in me?

3. Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the pris'ners free,
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you, and you in me?

4. Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside,
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around
Thro' my sight & touch & sound
In you, & you in me?

5. Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you,
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow
In you, and you in me.

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The first reading is Galatians chapter 5 verses 1 to 13 & 25

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 9 verses 51 to 62

As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village.

As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.”

Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.”

But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.”

Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”

Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.”

Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” Amen.

Sermon: *‘The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbour as yourself”. Galatians 5:14*
The great Rabbi Hillel was born in AD75. When he was an old man, a Gentile approached him, demanding to be taught the whole Torah while he stood on one foot: as quick as a flash, Hillel replied, **‘What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah. The rest is commentary. Go and learn it.’** When Jesus was asked what the Greatest Commandment was, he replied, **“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’** The second is this: **‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’** There is no commandment greater than these.” You can see that, for a Jew in Jesus’ time wholehearted love of God was inextricably linked to loving your neighbour as yourself. Our reading from Luke considers both love for one’s

neighbours – indeed whom we ought to consider as our neighbours – and what wholehearted discipleship is all about.

It may have seemed that Jesus was having a hard day. Disciples, who had been sent ahead to find food and lodgings at a Samaritan town were rebuffed as soon as the locals discovered that they were travelling to Jerusalem. The Holy City was still a burning issue, since the Judeans who had returned from exile in Babylon had reclaimed the territory from the occupying Samaritans, then had refused to let them help rebuild the Temple because their religious practices were impure. Indeed, Jesus and his followers were lucky, for it was not unknown for Jews who travelled through Samaria towards Jerusalem to be attacked, or even killed.

Anyway, the Sons of Thunder, James and John asked Jesus to call down fire from heaven to destroy that unnamed town, both to pay them back and to intimidate other Samaritan towns into behaving more respectfully. Jesus rebuked them, no doubt observing that, before the time of the return from exile in Babylon with the reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra, the concept of neighbour included all people, not only Jews. Therefore, the commandment, **‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself’**, should be extended even to hate-filled Samaritans.

Jesus had just sorted out that problem when a man approached him, declaring, **“I will follow you wherever you go.”** He realized that the enthusiasm of the boast betrayed a lack of understanding about the cost of discipleship. The would-be disciple had not considered how much he would have to surrender to follow our Lord. When Jesus replied, **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head,”** he did not mean he had to sleep rough on his travels, for women like Susanna, Joanna and Mary Magdalene supported the disciples and would have found places to stay overnight. No, he meant that he had uprooted himself from family and neighbours in Galilee, sacrificing the security of regular work and possessions for his ministry. Jesus knew that the man would have fallen away as he realized what he would have to surrender to follow, so he set him straight about the real cost of discipleship.

Next, he called another to go with him, but the man pleaded to be allowed to bury his father. Jesus’ reply seemed at best hard-hearted, at worst, scandalous: **“Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.”** After all, the Torah commands us to honour our fathers and mothers, including arranging for their burial. However, what the man actually asked was to be allowed to wait **until** his father had died and been buried before he committed himself to answer Jesus’ call – that could be years hence. Jesus had no time for such a half – hearted person. You either follow wholeheartedly, or stay where you are and are lost.

Similarly, a second man tried to excuse himself from following at once, by asking to be allowed to bid his family goodbye. At first glance his request seems perfectly reasonable, as I expect that Peter and Andrew had made swift arrangements to ensure that their families did not go short when they left. Moreover, I can’t imagine James and John abandoning Zebedee without some provision being made to keep their fishing business afloat – so to speak. So why did Jesus reply, **“No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God”?**

The man wasn’t just going to return to say goodbye at all: he was going to open himself to arguments why he ought to stay with them a little longer, and then just a while more, until he lost what desire to follow Jesus at all. Of course Jesus doesn’t reject

anyone who wants to follow him. However, he does remind us the cost of discipleship. We are called to follow with whole-hearts, not half-heartedly, which means setting aside anything or anyone that will prevent us from giving ourselves entirely to our calling: ambitions; social status; possessions; where we live – even people. God's needs must come first.

Nor does it mean we should run away from our responsibilities – our duties to parents and neighbours are to be honoured – for love is the watchword of our call from Christ. We must not, however, use these duties as an excuse for not offering total commitment to our Lord's kingdom on earth. If we are going to be disciples, we must be resolute and committed, because we are putting ourselves at our Lord's disposal – remember our Covenant promise: **I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you or laid aside for you, exalted for you or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing; I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.**

This covenant must never be taken lightly, because God's commitment is indeed total: His Only Son, whom he loved dearly, was betrayed and deserted by friends, condemned for a crime he did not commit, savagely beaten, stripped naked to humiliate him, nailed to a cross and hung, mocked by his enemies, to die slowly and in agony – for us! What amazing, boundless love shown to sinners like us.

Such marvellous love requires a generous response from each of us. Jesus calls each of us to glorify God in his name, by sharing the love he gives with all others, for as Paul wrote, **'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.'** May our spiritual fruit be good and sweet, a worthy offering to God and our neighbours. Amen.

We conclude our worship with a hymn written in 2008 by Jacqueline Jones, a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, more recently from New Zealand and who was based in the UK for 5 years. She now lives in Christchurch, NZ and is enjoying the role of vicar's wife! 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 forevermore. Amen.