

A service for 27th June, 2021 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 30 verses 11 and 12

You turned my wailing into dancing; you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, that my heart may sing to you and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give you thanks forever. Amen.

Let us listen to hymn number 18, 'Be still and know that I am God'.

1. Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

Be still and know that I am God.

2. I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

I am the Lord who saves and heals.

3. In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

In you, O Lord, I put my trust.

Anonymous

Let us pray

Living God, who calls all things into being, you are the light of the minds that know you and so we have come to worship and adore you. You are the peace of the souls that trust you, the joy of the wills that serve you, the strength and stay of all who love you and so it is right that we have come to worship and adore you this afternoon.

Loving God, in Jesus you make all things new and, through your Spirit, you wash away our divisions. You call us to follow you, setting before us an example of how we should live by loving and caring for our neighbours as ourselves and worshipping you with joyful hearts.

Ever present God, we thank you for the life of Jesus; a life lived with integrity so that people could trust him. We thank you that he showed by his words and actions how we should serve our neighbours. Thank you, too, for all your blessings, for all that you have given us, done for us and accomplished in us. Accept our praise and thanksgiving for people who have brought light and joy into our lives and, most of all, for your boundless love.

God our maker, mysterious and unseen yet closer than breathing, the still and loving centre of our lives, forgive us if we fail to respond to your promptings. Help us to listen to your call.

God our defender, you love us with a love that never fails. Forgive us when we have failed to share that love with others. Prevent us from being judgemental, self-centred or uncaring. Speak to our hearts, so we can change our ways.

God our friend, you seek out each one of us and offer your comfort. Forgive us when we have disappointed, criticised or undermined a loved one or friend or neighbour. You see the potential in each person, yet we limit other people's gifts. Teach us to love our neighbours as Christ Jesus loves them.

Renewing God, you are in all our growing and offer the promise of forgiveness and new life. Help us to accept your love and to work with you to build your kingdom, in the beautiful name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. 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 with a hymn 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)

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and its needs.

Almighty God, we ask you to guide and empower us as we strive to answer our call from Christ Jesus, but when the best we can do is not enough, then reach out and move the hearts of people who are able to heal some of the world's brokenness to act instead.

Holy God, we ask that we may a blessing to our neighbours and families, particularly as we approach the end of restrictions caused by COVID19. We pray for all churches in our circuit and for the World Church. Let us to set aside our divisions and differences, so that 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 not only to address the needs of our community, but to bring Good News to our neighbours.

God of peace and unity, we pray for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice, asking that you will end their suffering and bring an end to mankind's

inhumanity to their brothers and sisters. Breathe your Spirit of Peace upon national leaders and us, too, and guide us all along the paths of mercy and justice.

Loving Lord, we pray that more nations will take steps to keep this planet habitable for future generations. We pray for those who are campaigning against pollution and for others who are calling for a fair and proper use of the world's resources. We pray that those nations that have vaccines to spare will come to the aid of countries in the Developing World where there are shortages, acknowledging that we shall not be safe until most people have been vaccinated

Heavenly Father, we pray for people living with a dementia, whose distress has been increased by the restrictions placed upon them during this pandemic. Remember too, in your mercy, their families, friends and carers who are struggling, too. May they all be given the support they need to cope.

We pray for neighbours, near and far, who are sick in body, mind or spirit; people who are experiencing loneliness, depression, need or trouble. We remember the heartache of everybody whose relationships have broken down, or who are victims of domestic violence, particularly during this pandemic and especially everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear. In a time of reflection we offer names of some people for who we are particularly concerned, confident you will not only understand their need, but will reach out to them in compassion. Faithful God, help us to offer them both practical support and friendship, but let your love bring them healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

We ask your blessing upon keyworkers who are working for our wellbeing, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and all involved in rolling out vaccinations. Keep them safe and grant them success in their endeavours.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us free from harm and inspire us to honour you through our words and actions, in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

“My talents, gifts and graces, Lord, / Into thy blessed hands receive”. Our closing hymn was written by Charles Wesley in 1749, one of a number hymns headed “Hymns for a Preacher of the Gospel”. I hope I fit into that category. Hymn number 661, ‘Give me the faith which can remove’.

**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}

Our Gospel reading is Mark chapter 5 verses 21 to 43

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there. Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, “My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.” So Jesus went with him.

A large crowd followed and pressed around him. And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked,

“Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’” But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her,

“Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler.

“Your daughter is dead,” they said. “Why bother the teacher anymore?” Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler,

“Don’t be afraid; just believe.” He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. He went in and said to them,

“Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep.” But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child’s father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. He took her by the hand and said to her,

“*Talitha koum!*” (which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”). Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat. Amen.

Sermon: *Jairus' daughter* Mark 5: 21 – 43

Our gospel reading deals with two acts of divine power by Jesus which were recorded by Mark to point to Jesus as the Messiah, God's anointed. If you remember, the first eight chapters are often called the Messianic Mystery, for we see Jesus' teaching, healing and miracles through the eyes of the disciples without Mark declaring the nature of Jesus. Readers are presented with the evidence that led Peter to declare, **'You are the Christ!'** Before I explain the significance of the events, let me explain the significance of the tallit, or prayer shawl used by Jews. There are tassels around the edges of the tallit and these are used to count off prayers. Touching a tassel is often considered an unspoken prayer. Tallits are sometimes worn throughout the day and it is almost certain that Jesus was wearing his when the events took place.

It was quite soon after Jesus had called his disciples, but his fame had already spread through the Decapolis – the ten towns around the Sea of Galilee. That same day Christ had cured a possessed man at Gerasa and two thousand pigs had drowned as a result. It wasn't a surprise that he and his followers were persuaded to leave, so they sailed across to the shore near Capernaum and there they were met by a large crowd. One man came forward and dropped onto his knees before Jesus. He was a Pharisee called Jairus, one of the synagogue rulers who was clearly agitated and in his desperation he humbled himself before Jesus, pleading with him to lay hands on his twelve year old daughter, who was at the point of death.

Clearly, Jairus believed that the Lord had the power to heal her – if he was inclined to do so. At once, Jesus began to walk with him, but as he did so, the crowd hemmed him in. Suddenly Jesus stopped and exclaimed, "Who touched my tallit?"

The disciples were incredulous – a crowd was milling around, yet the Lord asked who had touched him! There was an awkward silence before a terrified woman came forward and fell at his feet. You may be wondering why she was terrified, so let me explain: Jews have 613 rules of righteousness, based on the Torah, the Law given to Moses. The food and cleanliness laws are particularly important to Jews and the woman had broken one of them. You see, she had suffered heavy, continuous loss of menstrual blood for twelve years and Leviticus states that a woman is ceremonially unclean when she was in such a state. This means that anybody who touched her would become defiled in law; any cooking implements would also be considered unclean if she touched them, so that poor woman would have been a virtual outcast in her own home, unable to enjoy the intimacy of family life, or friendships outside it. No wonder she was desperate! She was so desperate that, having believing she would be cured if only she could touch Jesus, she reached out and touched one of the tassels of his tallit – a silent prayer – even though it meant making the Lord unclean. She hadn't expected him to notice, but he had felt healing power flow from him and demanded to know who had touched him. Now an orthodox Jew would have beaten a woman who had defiled him in such a manner, so you can understand her fear.

However, when she explained to Christ and the crowd, he helped her to her feet and declared, "Daughter, your faith has made you whole. Go in peace." There was no recrimination, no suggestion that he felt tainted by her, even though she had touched a garment regarded as holy, for CHESSED – compassion was more important to him than a sterile rule-book.

At that moment, some men arrived from Jairus' house bearing news that his daughter had died. They were blunt, indeed brutally frank, telling Jairus not to bother the Rabbi any more. The poor man didn't know what to do, or say: his beloved daughter had died on the brink of adulthood when Jesus was almost at his gate. Ignoring the messengers, Jesus told Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just have faith." He signalled Peter, James and John to follow, then led Jairus into his house, where, as was customary, a group of professional mourners was shrieking and wailing over the dead girl. Jesus rebuked them for making such a noise while the girl was sleeping, but they scoffed at him and were then told to go outside, which they did, though they continued to laugh as they left.

What Jesus did next broke cleanliness regulations, for if Jews touch a corpse, they become ceremonially unclean. That is why, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest passed by on the other side of the road, rather than helping the prostrate Jew, for, if the man had been dead rather than badly injured and if the priest had touched him, he would have been unable to perform his religious duties. It can be an inconvenient rule, because if Jews found a dead mouse in their house, what did they do? I'll tell you: they got the wife to remove it!

Jesus didn't hesitate. He took the dead girl's hand, said, "**Talitha kum**", which means '**maiden arise!**' and, to everybody's amazement and her parents' delight, the child stood up and began to walk around. To prove that she was completely recovered, Jesus told Jairus and his wife to give her something to eat, asked them not to tell anybody about this – even though there was a crowd outside the house, including some soon-to-be disappointed professional-mourners!

What do these episodes teach us about Christ? To begin with, man-made rules based on God's law must not take precedence over the command to love one's neighbour as oneself. The wellbeing of others is more important than any rule, for if we love others as we love ourselves, we are also honouring the commandment to love God wholeheartedly. More than that, Jesus showed us that he wants us to get our hands dirty, to get involved in kingdom work, not to remain aloof, afraid of being contaminated by the world. Jesus calls us to get involved in our church activities, in the community in whatever way we can, as pandemic restrictions are relaxed. Can we support community groups, or perhaps volunteer to help in local food-banks or charity shops, or serve at local schools as governors, reading mentors or fund-raisers? When the restrictions brought about because of COVID19 are lifted, can we befriend a lonely neighbour, or people at one of the local care homes, or find ways to help people affected materially, psychologically or spiritually by the pandemic? Do we have gifts and talents that we can use for the benefit of others? Never forget, Jesus loves us so much that he took the defilement of all sinners on his shoulders when he gave his life at Calvary. Can we – dare we – stand back and refuse to act as his earthly hands, by doing all we can to build his kingdom in Spirit, love and truth? Amen.

We shall close our worship with a hymn by Jacqui Jones, a South African Christian composer and singer, who now lives as a vicar's wife in New Zealand. 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 for evermore. Amen.