

A service for 30th June, 2024 (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.

Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light and truth of Christ to guide us. It was written in 1993 by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, 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:*

© Bernadette Farrell {1957---}

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 John Bell and the late Graham Maule of the Iona Community's Wildgoose Publications. Their hymns are often set to Scots ballads and this one is sung to 'Ye banks and braes 'o bonnie Doon'. Let us sing number 655, 'We cannot measure how you heal'.

1. We cannot measure how you heal

**Or answer every sufferer's prayer,
Yet we believe your grace responds
Where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
Survive to hold and heal and warn,
To carry all through death to life
And cradle children yet unborn.**

**2. The pain that will not go away,
The guilt that clings from things long past,
The fear of what the future holds,
Are present as if meant to last.
But present, too, is love which tends
The hurt we never hoped to find,
The private agonies inside,
The memories that haunt the mind.**

3. So some have come who need your help

**And some have come to make amends
As hands which shaped and saved the world
Are present in the touch of friends.**

**Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
To mend the body, mind and soul,
To disentangle peace from pain
And make your broken people whole.**

© John Bell (b. 1949) & Graham Maule (1958 – 2020)

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.

We pray for the churches in our Circuit and, indeed, the World Church. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity. May the Holy Spirit help us use our love, gifts and graces to guide our neighbours to accept Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Help us carry the gospel light to this strife-ridden and broken world by our words and actions.

Jesus declared, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God', so we ask your blessing on everyone who is working for peace. We pray for aid-workers and medics as well as negotiators that they enjoy success in their work. May fighting in Ukraine, in Gaza / Palestine, Haiti and Somalia come to an end and may the tension between Iran and Israel not escalate into open warfare. Teach national leaders to negotiate and compromise instead of resorting to force. Inspire them to govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of real peace. Lord, remember in your compassion, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression, granting all of them the courage and support they need to rebuild their lives. May find healing in body, mind and spirit.

Heavenly Father, as the country faces a general election, we pray for all who are standing as candidates, that you will grant them a desire to serve their constituents, rather than themselves. May they serve with integrity and compassion, tempering their ambitions with desire to meet the needs of people they represent. Help us to cast cynicism aside, so we play our part in the democratic process and guide us in our choices.

Lord of creation, we know that our lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of the ecosystem upon which we and all living beings depend. The effects of global warming are evident in the extreme weather that is affecting every continent, with floods and droughts, famines, wildfires, melting ice-caps and increasingly strong storms making life increasingly difficult. For the sake of life on this planet and for future generations, help us to live in a more sustainable way by becoming less wasteful and using only the resources we need.

We pray for people we know who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with dementia and their carers and, in particular, everybody who mourns 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 practical support and friendship, but embrace them with the warmth of your love, so they may be comforted and find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

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.

John and Charles Wesley met and befriended a group of Moravians on their way to Georgia in 1735. They were deeply impressed by the Germans' calm faith during a dreadful storm in the Atlantic and, indeed, it was at a Moravian chapel in Aldersgate that John felt his heart 'strangely warmed' on 24th May 1738. It was a remark by Peter Bohler, a Moravian friend who told John, 'Had I a thousand tongues I would praise him – Jesus – with them all', that inspired Charles to write our next hymn in 1740. We shall sing hymn number 364, 'O for a thousand tongue to sing' and be glad that we only have seven of the original eighteen verses!

1. O for a thousand tongues to sing

**My great Redeemer's praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of his grace.**

**2. My gracious Master and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the earth abroad
The honours of your name.**

**3. Jesus – the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease;
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life, and health, and peace.**

**4. He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.**

**5. He speaks; and listening to his voice,
New life the dead receive;
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
The humble poor believe.**

**6. See all your sins on Jesus laid:
The Lamb of God was slain;
His soul was once an offering made
That all may heaven gain.**

**7. In Christ, our Head, you then shall know,
Shall feel, your sins forgiven,
Anticipate your heaven below,
And own that love is heaven.**

© 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. Like the kippah, or prayer-cap and tefillin, or small boxes bearing scriptures that Jews bind to their foreheads and left arms – the tallit is used in worship, sometimes covering the head when somebody prays, or worn like a stole. There are tassels or tzitzits around the edges of the tallit and these are used to count off prayers, as rosary beads are used by Roman Catholics. 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. After such a loss, 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 this 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 during menstruation. 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 formed the belief that she would be cured if only she could touch Jesus, she reached out and touched one of the tassels of his tallit, tzitzit – 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 we regard as holy, for CHESED – 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 also 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 koum**", 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 tradition, 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. This is what made Methodism so revolutionary, for the Wesleys and their supporters ventured into parts of Eighteenth Century Britain that the Established Church considered irredeemable.

By their mission, they transformed communities with their words and deeds of love. Jesus calls us to get involved in our church activities, in the community in whatever way we can. For example, 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? Can we befriend a lonely neighbour, or people at one of the local care homes, or provide a venue for organizations such as CAB or Alcoholics Anonymous? Do we have gifts and talents that we can use for the benefit of others? Jesus came to redeem everybody, not just people we feel comfortable with or approve of. Our Methodist forebears offered love to all-comers. 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 conclude our worship with a hymn based on a prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. The hymn was written by Johann Sebastian Templehoff, a South African who became a Franciscan monk in Los Angeles. We shall sing hymn number 707, 'Make me a channel of your peace'.

1. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;

Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;

And where there's doubt, true faith in you.

2. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;

Where there is darkness, only light;

And where there's sadness, ever joy: Chorus:

O Master, grant that I may never seek

*So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

3. Make me a channel of your peace.

**It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving of ourselves that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.**

© Johann Sebastian Temple {1927 --1997)

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.