

Call to Worship: Psalm 111 verses 1 to 3

Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever. Amen.

Our opening hymn was published posthumously in 1946, seven years after the death of Rt. Revd. Timothy Rees, Bishop of Llandaff. Bishop Timothy had served as a Chaplain to the forces during the Great War and was awarded the Military Cross. After the War, he pursued a monastic vocation at the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield in Yorkshire and was there, in 1922, when he wrote this hymn. After he became Bishop of Llandaff in 1931, he devoted most of his time and energy supporting the unemployed of South Wales and their families during the Depression. We shall sing hymn number 36, 'God is Love: let heaven adore him;'

1. God is Love: let heaven adore him;
God is Love: let earth rejoice;
Let creation sing before him,
And exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
He who spread the heavens above,
He who breathes through all creation,
He is Love, eternal Love.

2. God is Love: and he enfoldeth
All the world in one embrace;
With unfailing grasp he holdeth
Every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find that selfsame aching
Deep within the heart of God.

3. God is Love: and though with blindness
Sin afflicts the souls of men,
God's eternal loving-kindness
Holds and guides them even then.
Sin and death and hell shall never
O'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love: so Love for ever
O'er the universe must reign.

© Timothy Rees (1874 – 1939)

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you are the King of creation, Lord of Glory, faithful and glorious, a God of wisdom, might and love, who despite our sinfulness, has striven to draw us close to you. At the right time you came as Jesus Christ to teach us how we should live through his words and actions of grace. His life, death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death, offering us eternal life through faith in him, not as something we

deserve or can earn. Amazing God, as we come before your throne of grace, take away all our anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Thank you, Lord, for this wonderful world on which we live, for the many blessings we receive from you, including our homes, food, family and friends. Above all these blessings, thank you for loving us even when we are unfaithful, disobedient, selfish, loveless and unlovable, for whilst you are holy, our lives are marred by our failure to live as you want us to.

Merciful Lord, we confess that, however hard we try, we still say and do things that upset and hurt our neighbours and fill you with grief. We don't always love and serve you wholeheartedly and we certainly don't always care for other people as we would like them to care for us. Help us to change our ways, to become more loving and faithful day by day and, in Jesus' lovely name pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have neglected to do.

Merciful heavenly Father, we believe that you hear our prayer and have breathed forgiveness upon us. Help us, Lord, to respond to your grace by loving and serving both you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, in Jesus' holy name. 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 Cecil Frances Alexander, the wife of a Nineteenth Century Irish bishop of Derry and Raphoe. She was a devoted Sunday School teacher and founded a school for deaf children. Hymn number 141, 'Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult'

1. Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

**Of our life's wild restless sea,
Day by day His clear voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow me."**

2. As of old apostles heard it

**By the Galilean lake
Turned from home and toil and kindred,
Leaving all for His dear sake.**

3. Jesus calls us from the worship

**Of the vain world's golden store:
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."**

4. In our joys and in our sorrows,

**Days of toil, and hours of ease,
Still He calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."**

5. Jesus calls us! By Thy mercies,

**Saviour, may we hear Thy call,
Give our hearts to Thine obedience,
Serve and love Thee best of all.**

***In our prayers of intercession we pray for the needs of ourselves and others.
When I say ‘Lord, in your mercy’, please respond with, ‘Hear our prayer’.***

Lord of all, thank you for this beautiful planet upon which we live, for it ought to allow all to live in the abundance of your creation. However, the earth has been abused by our foolishness, greed and indifference. The effects of climate change are abundantly clear, with the series of heatwaves and drought resulting in water-shortages, reduced crops, wildfires, here and abroad. We pray for our world, especially all places where extreme weather poses an ever-stronger threat. Encourage us to use resources thoughtfully and carefully, so we play our part in helping the world to recover for the damage we have done over several generations. May the pressure systems that have led to the heatwaves, shift their position, so we may be blessed with rain in this country, Europe, the USA and Canada.

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

God our Saviour, hear our prayer for the victims of earthquakes in Columbia, Venezuela and Japan. Bless and protect the rescuers, recovery teams and relief-workers. Bless, too, all who are fighting wildfires in extreme conditions and keep them safe. May you strengthen and comfort them.

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

Loving Lord, we ask you to inspire leaders of nations to turn away from violence when they can’t have their own way and seek justice and mercy for those they govern. We ask for swift and just conclusions to wars that are being waged at present, especially in the Holy Land, Ukraine and Iran and, at the same time, we remember victims of conflicts, discrimination, injustice and violence, asking that they may find peace, refuge and security.

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

Lord of shalom, of healing and wellbeing, we bring our concerns to you for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit, for all who are lonely, troubled and afraid, for those whose lives are coming to an end as well as all who are grieving the loss of loved-ones. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are especially concerned, confident that you already know their needs and will reach out to them.....

Help us to offer them practical support and friendship and enfold them into your merciful arms, that they may find healing, hope, comfort and enduring peace.

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

Almighty God, we pray for this church, churches in local Circuits and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth. Unite us in mission, so we help build up your kingdom with acts of grace and goodness.

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

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe and warm our hearts, so we may share your abundant love with friends and strangers, in Jesus’ wonderful name. Amen.

We shall continue our worship with a hymn written by Revd. John Newton, who led a dissolute life and was involved in the slave trade. On 10th March, 1748, the ship on which he was returning to England, “The Greyhound” was caught in a terrible storm, seemingly doomed to founder beneath huge waves, taking John to a watery grave. In terror, John picked up the first book he saw and read it in his cabin. That book was Thomas a Kempis’, “The Imitation of Christ”. By the end of

the storm, the ship was still afloat and John's heart had been changed. He left the sea, became an Anglican priest and joined William Wilberforce and John Wesley as they campaigned to end slavery in the British dominions. This hymn celebrates God's grace: amazing grace. Hymn number 215, 'Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)'

1. Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found -

Was blind, but now I see.

2. Through many dangers, toils and snares

I have already come;

God's grace has brought me safe thus far,

And grace will lead me home.

3. The Lord has promised good to me,

His word my hope secures;

He will my shield and portion be,

As long as life endures.

4. And when this heart and flesh shall fail

And mortal life shall cease,

I shall possess, within the veil

A life of joy and peace.

© John Newton (1725 – 1807) HP version

The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 16 verses 21 to 28

From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of humankind." Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone if they gain the whole world, yet forfeits their soul? Or what can a person give in exchange for their soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." Amen.

We shall sing hymn number 154, 'All for Jesus – all for Jesus'. This was written by William Sparrow-Simpson who wrote the libretto for John Stainer's cantata, 'The Crucifixion' and it occurs at the end of the magnificent work. It was first performed on Ash Wednesday, 1887 in Marylebone Parish Church.

1. All for Jesus – all for Jesus,

This our song shall ever be:

For we have no hope, nor Saviour,

If we have not hope in thee.

2. All for Jesus – thou wilt give us

Strength to serve thee, hour by hour;

None can move us from thy presence,
While we trust thy love and power.

3. All for Jesus – thou hast loved us;
All for Jesus – thou hast died;
All for Jesus – thou art with us;
All for Jesus crucified.

4. All for Jesus – all for Jesus –
This the church's song must be;
Till, at last, we all are gathered
One in love and one in thee.

© W.J. Sparrow-Simpson {1859 – 1952}

Address: *"If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"* Mt. 16:24

I like Simon Peter because he was both enthusiastic and fallible – certainly as prone to gaffes as any of us. His discipleship was a little like fishing on the Sea of Galilee. Let me explain. The Sea of Galilee lies nearly 700 feet below the Mediterranean and is subject to strong winds that are channelled through the surrounding hills. As a result, it is subjected to sudden fierce squalls that create waves five or six metres high. At the time of Jesus, fishermen would have been used to seas as flat as a mill-pond, yet within minutes a squall could arise with raging torrents that threatened to swamp their small boats. Peter's discipleship reflected this: one moment he was on the crest of a wave; the next he was in the trough! The incident in our reading was typical, for he'd earned Jesus' praise when he declared him Messiah, the Promised One of God. Such a declaration of faith wouldn't have been difficult for Peter, because he had heard his master's teaching, witnessed Jesus' grasp of the Scriptures, his healings and his miracles.

Yet, soon afterwards, Jesus told his disciples that he would go to Jerusalem only for the Sanhedrin, the religious Establishment, to reject him. Worse still, he declared that he would be killed, yet be raised on the third day. Such talk must have seemed ridiculous to his followers, especially to Peter. After all, at that time, Jews expected the Messiah to lead an uprising to sweep the Roman occupiers from the land, to restore the nation to the political and economic power enjoyed at the time of King David, before compelling the people to observe a new covenant with the Lord. Peter and his friends would have thought God's Son couldn't be killed by mortal men – besides, neither God nor his angels would allow such a thing to happen – and as usual Peter was the one who voiced their objections. **"Never Lord! This shall never happen to you!"**

Jesus turned and spoke sternly to Peter: **"Get behind me, Satan!"** he said. **"You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."** He didn't mean that Peter was the devil, but that his objections contradicted God's plan for the salvation of all people. It took the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost for them to truly understand that mankind's salvation needed Jesus to die – as the one perfect sacrifice whose blood washes away all sins. However, Peter and the disciples could not comprehend then, because they believed in strength of arms rather than the all-conquering power of **racham** or **agape** as Greeks call **boundless love**.

When Jesus continued, saying, **"If anyone would come after me, they must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me"** they would have been shaken, for the victim of crucifixion died under a **Deuteronomic** curse, **"Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."** Moreover, crucifixion is a terrible death – victims often hung for up to seventy-two hours in indescribable agony until dying from suffocation or exhaustion. For some of the disciples, the cost of discipleship was indeed

death, but Christ was not demanding that his followers – including us – must perish on a cross. Unlike the Islamic State, Christianity is not a death-cult. No, indeed, it is a LIFE-MOVEMENT. What Jesus asked of them and us is wholehearted commitment, whatever the cost – putting ourselves in God’s hands and trusting his redemptive love – rather like the Covenant Prayer used by Methodists: **‘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.’**

Christ Jesus calls us to follow him, abandoning things the world holds dear, (materialism, power, fame), trusting in God the Father as Jesus himself did when he became incarnate, in Charles Wesley’s words, **‘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.’** Remember that it required a tremendous act of will, for he had agonised over his fate in the Garden of Gethsemane only hours before. It was Christ’s love that held him on the cross, not the nails.

As individuals, we cannot end the wars in Ukraine, Iran or the Holy Land, nor resolve social and economic issues face by this country, but we can make a difference to our communities if we don’t allow ourselves from being pre-occupied with our own woes and open our eyes to possibilities to serve as Christ’s hands. Whilst it is true that many churches have lost members since the COVID19 pandemic, more Christians worship on Sunday than people attend professional football matches.

If we work collaboratively with other churches, denominations and community groups, we remain active disciples. If you think this nation’s problems, let alone world problems, are too big for us to handle, remember there is nothing impossible for God who walks by our side in our discipleship. Community support groups, Citizen’s Advice, dinner clubs, foodbanks, well-being and job-clubs can help people who are really struggling and churches can provide this kind of support, if not as individuals, by offering funds or practical support and by pooling what we have to offer with others to make a bigger impact. We cannot guarantee that all our efforts will be successful, but it is far better to try than to throw up our hands in despair and do nothing. If we freely offer all we have and are to the Lord, we honour our covenant.

I believe God is in control, even when our world is in chaos. I am convinced that love will overcome hatred and good will defeat evil as long as we remain faithful to God’s kingdom and its values! Will you take up your cross and play your part in God’s mission of love to our world? Amen.

We shall end our worship with a hymn by the prolific and long-lived Methodist Minister, Revd. Fred Prat Green. It was written in 1969, entitled “the Caring Church”. Hymn number 804, ‘The Church of Christ, in every age,’

**1. The Church of Christ, in every age,
Beset by change, but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.**

**2. Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.**

3. Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.

4. For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.

5. We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.

© *F. Pratt Green* {1903 – 2000}

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.