

A service for 31st July, 2022 (StF)

Call to worship: Matthew chapter 6 verses 19 to 21

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by George Rawson, a Leeds solicitor and Congregationalist who compiled “The Leeds Hymn Book” of 1853 with George Conder, but who also helped the Baptists produce “Psalms and Hymns for the use of the Baptist Denomination” in 1858. His nom de plume was ‘A Leeds Layman’. Hymn number 17, ‘With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing’.

**1. With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
Free hearts and free voices how blessed to bring;
The old, thankful story shall scale thine abode,
Thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.**

**2. Thy right would we give thee – true homage thy due,
And honour eternal, the universe through,
With all thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
In one acclamation we celebrate thee.**

**3. Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,
Thy children revere thee for all thou hast done.
O Father! Returning to love and to light,
Thy children are yearning to praise thee aright.**

**4. We join with the angels, and so there is given
From earth Alleluia, in answer to heaven.
Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,
Redeeming, victorious and infinite love.**

© George Rawson {1807 – 1889}

Let us pray.

Loving God, help us to feel your holy presence amongst us, for you are faithful, holy, beautiful, majestic and mighty. You are the creator and redeemer of all and you alone are worthy of our adoration and worship as we come to celebrate your undying, faithful love for all. Help us to set aside all anxieties and distractions so we may honour and glorify you in our prayers, hymns and heartfelt-meditation, rejoicing you have called us here by your grace.

Father God, look upon us with compassion as we offer our thanks and praise, for we have received abundant blessings from you. Thank you, O Lord, for this beautiful world that you created for us, over which you have given us stewardship, even though we have not cared for the planet as you wish us to. Guide us to act more responsibly, so our children’s children may inherit a world fit to inhabit. Accept our thanks, too, for all the good things that we enjoy: our lives; our food; our families, our friends and our fellowship here. Above all else, thank you for your boundless, redeeming love, revealed wholly in our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who lived our life, died to break the power of sin and was raised to offer us eternal life.

Merciful God, although Jesus showed us the path to true life, we have fallen short of what we know we ought to be, for we have sinned against you in what we have thought, said and done and also in the good that we have failed to do. By so – doing, we have added to the brokenness of the world, as well as grieving you deeply. Gracious

God, we are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong, asking you to forgive us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save repentant sinners, so we believe you have heard and answered our prayer, offering each of us a new start. Therefore, Loving Lord, fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit and grant that we may serve both you and our neighbours faithfully in Jesus' beautiful 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.

“Take my silver and my gold, / Not a mite would I withhold: / Take my intellect, and use / Every power as thou shalt choose.” Challenging words from Frances Ridley Havergal when she was on a five days' holiday in 1873. We sing hymn number 566, ‘Take my life, and let it be’.

- 1. Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.**
- 2. Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for thee.**
- 3. Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.**
- 4. Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as thou shalt choose.**
- 5. Take my will, and make it thine;
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart – it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.**
- 6. Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee.**

© Frances Ridley Havergal {1836 – 1879}

In our prayers of intercession, we bring our concerns to the Lord for people nearby and far away. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, at this time of year, it is easy to let the glorious and abundant beauty of our world blind us to the many problem that beset it. Whilst it is right we thank you for the loveliness of the earth, we know that a great deal of suffering goes on around us, so we bring our concerns about the world and ask you to repair some of its brokenness. Where we are able, help us to act as your earthly hands, by reaching out to our

neighbours in their trouble or distress. Grant us compassion, courage, steadfastness and empathy as we serve our neighbours in Jesus' name, but where the best we can do is inadequate, reach out in mercy, for nothing is impossible for you.

Lord of peace, we grieve about the number of conflicts around the world, especially at present, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Teach the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, rather than resorting to war. Mould their hearts so they seek justice and mercy in their dealings so that lasting peace can be built on solid foundations.

In your mercy Lord, may a negotiated peace that enables Ukraine to continue as a sovereign democracy be established soon. Grant President Zelenskyy and his advisors, the armed forces and militia, the steadfast courage and equipment to resist Russia's might and frustrate the Kremlin's plans. Merciful God, hear our prayer for civilians, mainly women, children, the elderly and disabled, who are trapped in cities that are being bombarded by Russian forces. Enfold them in your care that they may be comforted and protected. Remember, too, Ukrainian refugees, who are fleeing to friendly countries. Grant them a warm welcome and hospitality that will ease their distress.

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 famine-stricken Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Sudan and Yemen. We ask that Governments who are opposed to the Taliban can nevertheless find it in their hearts to offer aid to ordinary Afghans. We pray, too, that the blockade of grain and oil in Ukraine will be lifted swiftly to ease their plight.

We remember people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels and we thank you for food banks and for other organisations which help the poor. May the Government, business leaders, charities and local councils find ways of helping all who are finding it difficult to manage.

Lord of healing and wellbeing, hear our prayer for 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. Heavenly Father, 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 which offers comfort, healing, courage and peace that passes all understanding.

Holy God, 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.

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.

The Gospel reading is Luke chapter 12 verses 13 to 21

Someone in the crowd said to him,
"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me."
Jesus replied,

“Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?” Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” And he told them this parable:

“The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself,

“You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.”

But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’ This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” Amen.

Our next hymn was by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, a Methodist Minister who wrote most of his hymns after he had sat down, or retired. Hymn number 124, ‘For the fruits of all creation’.

**1. For the fruits of all creation,
Thanks be to God;
For his gifts to every nation,
Thanks be to God;
For the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
Silent growth while we are sleeping,
Future needs in earth’s safe-keeping,
Thanks be to God.**

**2. In the just reward of labour,
God’s will is done;
In the help we give our neighbour,
God’s will is done;
In our world-wide task of caring
For the hungry and despairing,
In the harvests we are sharing,
God’s will is done.**

**3. For the harvests of his Spirit,
Thanks be to God;
For the good we all inherit,
Thanks be to God;
For the wonders that astound us,
For the truths that still confound us,
Most of all, that love has found us,
Thanks be to God.**

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

Sermon: *‘A person’s life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions,’ Luke12:15*

Sermon: *‘A person’s life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions,’ Luke12:15*
A businessman was walking along the jetty of a holiday resort when he saw a fisherman reclining in a deckchair, reading a newspaper. **“What are you doing, just sitting there? Why don’t you go out to catch some more fish?”** asked the businessman. **“And why would I want to do that?”** replied the fisherman innocently. **“If you do, you could catch more fish, buy another boat, hire some more men and catch some more fish!”** exclaimed the businessman, secretly thinking the fisherman to be very dull-

witted. **“And why would I want to do that?”** retorted the fisherman. **‘Oh dear, what a fool this man is!’** thought the businessman. Patiently he explained, **“If you did as I suggest, you could buy even bigger boats, employ more men and catch huge amounts of fish.”** The fisherman looked even more confused: **“And why would I want to do that?”** he asked. The businessman sighed and explained, as if to a child, **“Well if you caught huge amounts of fish, you could afford to sell your business, put your feet up and relax!”** The fisherman grinned and replied, **“And what do you think I’m doing now?”**

The reading from **Luke** consider the foolishness of striving for material possessions at the cost of one’s relationship with God. Jesus responded to a demand from a man locked in a dispute over an inheritance, by telling a parable about a rich farmer. The complainant treated Jesus like a normal rabbi, who could be expected to arbitrate in civil matters, but Jesus recognised that the man was motivated not so much with a desire for justice as for coveting what his brother possessed. Jesus’ refusal to have anything to do with the case was followed with a warning against making material possessions your life’s aim. The reason why the farmer is described as ‘a fool’, is because, in another book of wisdom literature, Proverbs, the term fool is used for one who does not recognise God’s involvement in human life and who lives for himself or herself alone. Such people often make gaining wealth their goal in life, leaving no room for God and neighbour as a result.

The result of the farmer’s desire for earthly riches is a personal disaster: he dies before he can enjoy what he has striven for. Torah commanded Jews to share excess harvests with the poor, the orphaned and widows, but the foolish farmer wanted to keep everything for himself, forgetting that the harvest itself was God’s gift. He may have died wealthy in material terms, but his conversation was self – centred, all ‘I’ and ‘my’; no mention of other people or of God. What kind of relationship can he have had with family, friends – or, indeed, with God? It is easy to agree with Jesus in the case of the rich fool, but how would we stand if Jesus were to come to us now?

Whilst the Government has had to **borrow £453000000 to deal with the financial crisis** caused by the **COVID19 pandemic**, the United Kingdom’s total credit card debt has exceeded £1.3 trillion with an average debt of £20000 per man, woman and child for our plastic cards. Is it, therefore, a coincidence that we often hear news reports of youngsters running wild because their parents are too busy, or indifferent to care for them? Is it surprising that this country has record numbers of people with sexually-transmitted diseases and one marriage in three breaks down? Our society is paying a high price for making what we earn or own more important than the quality of relationships with our families, our neighbours and, most importantly, with God.

Worse still, if Jesus walked into church now, could we justify what is being done in our name? I’m not alluding to our role in political relationships with other nations, such as the EU or Russia and Ukraine, but to the grinding poverty endured by the Undeveloped and Developing Nations, largely because of the policies of the IMF, the World Bank and Western Governments that not only break G8 agreements, but maintain unfair trading rules that actively forge the chains of poverty. ***Despite the Millennium Pledge, most Third World children still receive little or no education; many begin work at five or six years of age; the sick can’t afford to see a doctor, let alone buy medicines and millions of the world’s poor don’t even have one meal a day. Many developing nations have yet to receive vaccines against COVID19 which will not only result in deaths there, but may result in a new strain coming to haunt us again!***

By his death at Calvary, Jesus broke the chains that kept us prisoners of sin, so we are called to make our own sacrifice to break the chains of poverty that enslave most of Developing World. Although the United Kingdom has begun to reduce some debt, there is still a long way to go. All faith groups, but especially **Christians**, need to campaign harder to shake this country from complacency and false values. If we don't then things won't improve, so we will fail both our Saviour and the world's poor.

The United Kingdom faces serious problems with spiralling inflation which urgently needs to be tackled but for those who argue that coming through the current inflation crisis must be our priority, rather than caring for world's poor, consider this: **19000 children from the Developing World die each week from starvation, or common illnesses that their weakened bodies can't fight. This means if I have preached for 15 minutes, thirty Third World children will have died. Christ set aside all self-interest to save helpless sinners like us. Dare we turn our back on the suffering of debtor nations, because we put self-interest ahead of our neighbours' needs, or shall we renew our efforts to seek justice for them? Amen.**

“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.’” We conclude our worship with a hymn by the wife of a Nineteenth Century Primate of all Ireland, the remarkable Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander. Cecil was a quaint Irish custom of naming a child after a family sponsor. Needless to say, she was called Fanny by family and friends! Hymn number 250, ‘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.**

© Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)

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.