

A service for 31st August, 2025 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 113 verses 1 to 3

Shout praises to the LORD! Everyone who serves him, come and praise his name. Let the name of the LORD be praised now and forever. From dawn until sunset the name of the LORD deserves to be praised. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Robert and Dawn Critchley in 1988, a short time after the death of their two-day-old son, Gideon. In the circumstances, this is a remarkable hymn, but it reflects the deep faith of the Critchleys. Robert is an associate minister of Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship where he continues to lead worship at conferences and renewal meetings. He and his wife Dawn were senior worship pastors on full-time staff in Toronto from 1996-2002. They live near Midland, Ontario with their children Bethany, Noah and Elijah. Robert wrote that 'the song reflects a revelation of the God Of All Comfort's faithfulness to us through a difficult time'.

We shall sing hymn number 58, 'Lord, I come before your throne of grace;'

1. Lord, I come before your throne of grace;

I find rest in your presence

And fullness of joy.

In worship and wonder

I behold your face,

Singing what a faithful God have I. *Chorus*

What a faithful God have I,

What a faithful God.

What a faithful God have I,

Faithful in every way.

2. Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry;

Through the storm, you're the beacon,

My song in the night.

In the shelter of your wings,

Hear my heart's reply,

Singing what a faithful God have I. *Chorus*

3. Lord all sovereign, granting peace from heaven,

Let me comfort those who suffer

With the comfort You have given.

I will tell of your great love for as long as I live,

Singing what a faithful God have I. *Chorus*

© Robert Critchley (Born 1959) & Dawn Critchley (Born 1965)

Let us pray.

Faithful God, we come to worship and adore you, for you not only brought the whole universe to life, but you love and sustain all living beings. You are truly amazing and loving in everything you do. As we look around us, we rejoice in the beauty our world and recognize your power and wisdom in the glory of your creation. Although we know how weak and unimportant we are, you love us so much that you came as Jesus to show us in words and acts of love how you want us to live. His death and resurrection have broken the power of sin and death, offering us new life through faith in him.

Lord, thank you for all you do for us, for all you give us and all you accomplish in us, for you are generous, holy and true, but we know that we let you down in what we think, say and do. We sometimes fail to help neighbours who are in need, in distress, or in trouble, even though we know we should. Forgive us and teach us to be as compassionate as Jesus was in his ministry.

Merciful God, we believe that you hear our prayers and have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow you once more. May we serve you and our neighbours with both joyful and faithful hearts in the precious name of Jesus, our friend and Saviour. Amen.

As Jesus taught his disciples, we pray:

Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your Name; your kingdom come; your will be done; on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen.

Rick Founds was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho and was interested in music from childhood. Indeed, when he was ten he wrote several tunes for his Sunday School. He graduated in media technology and music, lecturing at Saddleback College in California, where he is a worship leader and hymn-writer. We shall sing hymn number 332, 'Lord, I lift your name on high'.

**Lord, I lift Your name on high,
Lord, I love to sing Your praises;
I'm so glad you're in my life,
I'm so glad you came to save us.**

**You came from heaven to earth
To show the way,
From the earth to the cross
My debt to pay,
From the cross to the grave,
From the grave to the sky:
Lord, I lift your name on high.**

© Rick Founds (Born 1954)

We shall now bring our concerns for other people, nearby and far away, to the Lord our God.

Heavenly Father, in response to your loving-kindness to us, help us to serve as your earthly hands, feet, eyes, ears and voice as we reach out to people around us, especially those who need support and friendship. Help us serve you in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we exceed our expectations, but where we fall short, we pray that you will reach out in compassion, for we believe that nothing is beyond your powers.

Lord of all, hear our prayer for the leaders of the nations of the world. Warm their hearts and inspire them to govern with mercy and justice. Teach them to negotiate when disputes arise and to compromise in order to avoid warfare. It is heart-breaking to see reports about the injuries, deaths, deprivation and destruction in Ukraine and the Holy Land which falls very short of its title and we pray for a just ending to the fighting in those lands. We pray for an end to strife in other countries, too, including Congo, Sudan and Somalia. Lord, so much needs to be done, but let peace begin in our own hearts, in the way we treat our neighbours.

Heavenly Father, we pray for victims of global warming, where strong storms, floods, drought and wildfires are wreaking great destruction. Help all humankind to take greater care of this planet over which we have been made stewards. Let us waste less, recycle more, pollute less and use only the resources we need, so that future generations inherit a healthier planet.

Lord of shalom, we remember neighbours who are sick, in body, mind or spirit, for those who are in any kind of need, or trouble, for neighbours who are lonely or who have lost someone dear. In a time of silence, we name people about whom we are especially concerned, confident that you will understand their need and will reach out to them.

Heavenly Father, may we offer practical support wherever possible to those for whom we pray, but we ask that you will enfold them with your love, offering healing, hope, renewed strength, courage and, not least of all, lasting peace.

Holy God, we offer our prayer for our church here in Kinver, other churches in our Circuit and neighbouring Circuits and also the Church throughout the world. Unite us in Spirit, love and truth. Teach us to work together and give us the courage to bring good news to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world which desperately needs good news.

Abba, heavenly Father, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us lead Christ-centred lives by sharing the abundance of your love with both friend and stranger, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

Our next hymn was written in 1974 by Revd. Bryn Rees, a Congregationalist Minister at Tetherdown URC, in Muswell Hill, London. One of the melodies to which this hymn is set was written by Revd. Jones' organist, Gerald Barnes and is called "Tetherdown"! We shall sing number 255, 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy'.

**1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**

**2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**

**3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all!**

© Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}

The Old Testament reading is Proverbs chapter 25 verses 6 to 7

Don't try to seem important in the court of a ruler. It's better for the ruler to give you a high position than for you to be embarrassed in front of royal officials. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 14 verses 1 to 14

One Sabbath, Jesus was having dinner in the home of an important Pharisee, and everyone was carefully watching Jesus. All of a sudden a man with swollen legs stood up in front of him. Jesus turned and asked the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law of Moses,

“Is it right to heal on the Sabbath?” But they did not say a word. Jesus took hold of the man. Then he healed him and sent him away.

Afterwards, Jesus asked the people,

“If your son or ox falls into a well, wouldn’t you pull him out right away, even on the Sabbath?” There was nothing they could say.

Jesus saw how the guests had tried to take the best seats. So he told them:

“When you are invited to a wedding feast, don’t sit in the best place. Someone more important may have been invited. Then the one who invited you will come and say, “Give your place to this other guest!” You will be embarrassed and will have to sit in the worst place.

When you are invited to be a guest, go and sit in the worst place. Then the one who invited you may come and say, “My friend, take a better seat!” You will then be honoured in front of all the other guests. If you put yourself above others, you will be put down. But if you humble yourself, you will be honoured.

Then Jesus said to the man who had invited him:

“When you give a dinner or a banquet, don’t invite your friends and family and relatives and rich neighbours. If you do, they will invite you in return, and you will be paid back. When you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. They cannot pay you back. But God will bless you and reward you when his people rise from death.” Amen.

“For the love of God is broader / Than the measures of the mind; / And the heart of the Eternal / Is most wonderfully kind. // But we make his love to narrow / By false limits of our own; / And we magnify his strictness / With a zeal he will not own.” Frederick William Faber was an Anglican priest who followed John Henry Newman into the Church of Rome. Frederick Faber demonstrated his grasp of theology with the wonderful words for our next hymn. Number 683, ‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,’ Hymn number 416, ‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy’.

1. There’s a wideness in God’s mercy

**Like the wideness of the sea;
There’s a kindness in his justice,
Which is more than liberty.**

**2. There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members
In the sorrows of the Head.**

**3. There is grace enough for thousands
Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations
In that upper home of bliss.**

**4. For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of the mind;
And the heart of the Eternal**

Is most wonderfully kind.

5. But we make his love too narrow
By false limits of our own;
And we magnify his strictness
With a zeal he will not own.

6. If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be illumined
By the presence of our Lord.

© Frederick William Faber {1814 – 63}

Sermon: *“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”* Luke 14:11

In 1972, I was commissioned in the Air Training Corps and within a month found myself in charge of my Squadron at R.A.F. Machrihanish in the mountainous Mull of Kintyre. As an inexperienced Pilot Officer, I oughtn't to have been in charge, but my C.O. fell ill almost as soon as we arrived, so the responsibility was mine. Filled with naïve over-confidence, I set about organising my cadets, but was so preoccupied with giving instructions that I didn't look where I was going, missed a narrow bridge over a drainage channel and fell four feet into shallow, but malodorous water. As I clambered out, an adult warrant officer asked if I had hurt myself, at which point I became aware that my fall had been recorded on a Kodak 8mm cine-camera, so I replied that the only damage was to my pride. There was no time for me to change my clothes, so I led my cadets over a ten-mile hike in wet coveralls, the butt of their ribald Tiptonian humour.

Most of us will confess to a degree of pleasure when we see overbearing characters put down a peg or two: many comedy programmes use it as their source of humour; **Captain Mainwaring** in “**Dad's Army**”; **Mrs Bucket** in “**Keeping up Appearances**” and especially **Basil Fawlty** in “**Fawlty Towers**”. Even in real life, some people take delight when the famous, rich or powerful are exposed by the tabloid press – what Germans call **schadenfreude** - malicious joy when pomposity is pricked. Such feelings are not new, as our gospel reading illustrated.

The episode took place in the house of a leading Pharisee, who had invited Jesus and his disciples to a Sabbath meal, not as much an act of open hospitality, but to probe for faults that would lead to Christ being discredited, or even condemned – the passage says, **‘he was being carefully watched’**. At this point in Luke's gospel, the Sanhedrin, the religious Establishment of the Jews, was in a state of undeclared war against Jesus, whose teaching was seriously at odds with their interpretation of Torah, the Law of Moses. The Pharisees were convinced that Christ was a dangerous radical, so they were determined to bring him down before he undermined their traditions and practices.

In the light of such opposition, Christ was fearless, for upon seeing a man suffering from **oedema**, painful swelling caused by an excess of fluid, he was moved to heal him. Last week's lectionary showed Jesus also on a Sabbath at a synagogue, healing a lady bent double by **spondylitis** for eighteen years, much to the annoyance of the synagogue ruler, so the man with dropsy was not a guest, but had probably been directed to come by Pharisees keen to see whether or not the Lord would break their interpretation of Torah. No one was willing to answer Christ's enquiry whether or not it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath, so he healed the man and sent him on his way, before rounding on would-be critics, telling them that if they would rescue a drowning child or animal on a Sabbath, then there is all the more reason to save a sick human being from suffering. Two things ought to be noted at this point: the man who had been healed of

dropsy was sent home, because the Pharisees would have considered his condition as God's judgement for his sins – he would have been thought of as ceremonially unclean – unfit for both God's kingdom and their banquet. Secondly, by laying hands on the man, Jesus would also have been considered ceremonially unclean by law, yet he was tolerated as a guest.

Christ turned his attention to other guests, who were scrambling for places near their host, for places closest to the head of the table were positions of honour. He told a parable of how humiliated they would be if they took a place of honour at a wedding feast, only to be told to give it up for somebody more distinguished. It would be far better, he said, to take the lowest place, so that they would be exalted when the host called them to sit nearer him. Jesus revealed the inversion of human values in his Father's kingdom when he told the guests, **"Everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled, and those who humbles themselves will be exalted."** He went on to advocate to the host that, if he invited the poor, marginalised and outcast to his feasts in future, he would be offering hospitality for the Lord's sake, rather than for his own advantage, for his relatives and wealthy guests would repay him in kind, whereas the poor could not. By looking to the needs of the poor and lowly, we lay up treasures in heaven, become rich toward God, though perhaps at the cost of our personal prestige.

This reading is a challenge for us all to consider our attitude to other groups of people, especially to those on the margins of society. Do we fall into the trap of thinking we are better than we really are? Are we free from prejudice as individuals? Do we have rules that exclude others – think how the Established Church is divided over women bishops and gay bishops – Methodism is struggling with the issue of bishops, whether female or gay, so let us consider our own attitudes before we feel superior. If anybody came here with a major drugs or drink problem, or who was an illegal immigrant, a sex-worker, or fresh from prison, I'd love to think that we could welcome them with warm hearts and open arms, after following safeguarding protocols, but if we're honest, it would not be easy. However, if we don't open our hearts and minds to people on the fringes of society, how can we restore them to what Christ would have them be?

Christ Jesus displayed his Father's commitment to the hopeless and helpless, the loveless and unloved of society by dying for our sins and being raised. He established a new covenant, based upon faith and love, rather than on intricate laws. He calls us to treat others as our equals, to reach out to our neighbours in loving-kindness. Christ calls us to be just or even-handed in our dealings, to stand up for the rights of victims of injustice or prejudice. Think: had Revd. Trevor Huddleston not ignored Apartheid conventions, stepped off a pavement in Johannesburg and raised his hat to a black woman and her son; had he not visited the same boy when he was seriously ill in hospital, would that young man have found Jesus, become a priest, then the archbishop who helped bring a peaceful end to Apartheid and usher in the Rainbow State? That boy was Desmond Tutu. **Sometimes even a simple, inclusive, generous act can have profound consequences for good, so may even our small kindnesses be building-blocks in Christ's kingdom. Amen.**

We shall close our worship with a hymn written by Martin Leckebusch in 1998, as a response to Micah 6:8. Martin Leckebusch is an I.T. specialist, having worked for sixteen years as a computer systems programmer, a further five as a support specialist and is now working in the Technical Design Authority for the IBM mainframe platform within Lloyds TSB. He was a Methodist local preacher until

the Millennium, since when he has been a member of Kendal Road Baptist Church in Gloucester. Hymn number 713, 'Show me how to stand for justice'.

1. Show me how to stand for justice:

how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.

May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

2. Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –

for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:

let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

3. Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.

Make me conscious of your presence
every day in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

© *Martin E Leckebusch (born 1962)*

Benediction

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