

A service for 3rd July, 2022 (STF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 30 verses 4 and 5

Sing to the LORD, you saints of his; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favour lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. Amen.

Our opening hymn reminds us of our need for the light of God's love to guide our discipleship. It was written by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, a social activist from West Yorkshire, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and 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.

O LORD, our Lord, your majestic name fills the earth! Your glory is higher than the heavens You have taught young children to tell of your strength and glory, silencing your enemies and all who oppose you. When we look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you set in place, we are filled with awe.

When we look at the world around us, with the intricacy and wonders of nature, we are filled with awe, for you have made eco-systems to maintain life in all its fullness here on earth. As we consider how you ordained that we should be stewards of the planet, we are awed that you love us so much that you honour us so, despite our manifold failings.

As we come to worship you today, we remember that you are here with us, not

only now but at all times and have tried to draw us close to you from the beginning of our history. You love us so much that after both the Law and prophetic teachings failed to make us live as you want us to, you came into the world as Christ Jesus, to share our lives and experiences, to bring us Good News of Salvation, but also to suffer an awful death at Calvary to break Satan's hold over us. By raising him from the tomb, you opened heaven's gates and through his grace alone, we now have the free offer of eternal life.

Lord of all, our heavenly Father, we worship and adore your Holy Name. Hear us as we pray to you in faith, sing your praise with gratitude, and listen to your word with eagerness in the beautiful name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing and seeking forgiveness of our sins. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with 'Hear our prayer'.

Merciful God, we confess our failure to live as you want us to, for we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly and sometimes disregard your call to care for others in Jesus' name, although we often try to excuse our faithlessness and disobedience. In a time of reflection we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, when we have been self-centred, rather than Christ-centred.

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

Lord of righteousness, help us turn away from wrongdoing and back to you.

Warm and soften our hearts and guide us with your truth. Bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness, so our lives reflect the victory Jesus has won over sin and death, allowing us to play our part in building your kingdom here.

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

Gracious God, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. His gracious word declares that our sins are forgiven. Therefore, fit us to love and serve both you and our neighbours as you call us to, 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.

Our next hymn was written in 1974 by Bryn Rees, a Congregational Minister who served mainly in Eastern and South Eastern England. It has four common settings, which makes it an organist's nightmare. However, the melody 'Tetherdown' was composed by Gerald Barnes, the organist at Tetherdown URC, in Muswell Hill, London, when Revd. Rees was minister. We shall sing hymn 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}

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

Loving God, although the world in which we live is wonderful and self-sustaining, the news in our Media speaks of its brokenness and is often so gloomy it daunts our spirits. Nevertheless, we believe that all things are possible for you, so whilst we offer ourselves to do what we can to ensure the wellbeing of our neighbours, we turn to you in situations that are beyond our power, asking that you will reach out in mercy to rectify the results of mankind's cruelty, folly, exploitation and indifference which result in so much suffering around the world.

Adonai Shalom, 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 then a warm welcome and hospitality that will ease their distress.

Jehovah Jireh, Lord who provides, 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, in particular Afghanistan where an earthquake has caused devastation. 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.

JHWH Rapha, God of healing, 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.

Adonai, Great Lord, 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 10 verses 1 to 11 and 16 to 20

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.

When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.'

They who listen to you listen to me; those who reject you reject me; but they who reject me reject him who sent me."

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name."

He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. As frequently happens, this hymn is set to a Scots ballad tune, in this case "Kelvingrove". We shall sing number 673, 'Will you come and follow me'.

**1. Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you, and you in me?**

2. Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare,
Will you let me answer prayer
In you, and you in me?

3. Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the pris'ners free,
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you, and you in me?

4. Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside,
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you, and you in me?

5. Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you,
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow
In you, and you in me.

© John Bell & Graham Maule WGRG Ioana Community (1987)

Sermon: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" Luke 10:18

Nowadays, if a school, uniformed organisation or even care homes like Bridge Court organise events, especially outings, Health and Safety Rules are a prerequisite. Risk assessments must be made for each individual; all precautions must be taken; provisions and plans must be checked meticulously and emergency procedures put in place. This is not the beginning of a diatribe against Health and Safety, because the wellbeing of everybody ought to be our priority. The only reason Health and Safety falls into disrepute is when jobsworths or knaves use exaggerated rules to prevent an activity from going ahead out of bloody-mindedness. However, when we look at the passage from Luke, it appears at first glance that when Jesus sent out seventy-two followers – seventy in some translations – his planning was negligible. I know, too that Health and Safety hadn't been added to the 613 Rules of Righteousness in First Century Judea. The number is significant: seventy would be a parallel of the number of helpers appointed for Moses in the wilderness; seventy-two the number of nations of the world in Genesis 10. He told the disciples, **"Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone**

on the road. When you enter a house, first say, ‘Peace to this house.’ If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house.”

The followers’ mission was to go to the towns Jesus intended to visit to prepare them for his teaching. He warned them that it was dangerous and urgent work: there was no time to waste in idle chatter on their way. Like harvesters, they had to complete their work as quickly as possible – and pray that others would support their mission. However, when Christ told them not to take money, extra clothing or spare sandals, he was telling them to trust in God’s provision, rather than in their own resources and strength – an important lesson for us all, because we should never forget that we must rely on God’s grace, not our own ability and possessions when we seek to serve him. In effect, the seventy were being told to work outside their **‘comfort zone’**, where faith would uphold them in their real vulnerability and where the people they met would have an opportunity to be generous in their hospitality. Moreover, they were to accept the first offer of shelter and not seek a better billet, if they see one during their stay.

Luke’s message to his contemporaries and us is this: if we want to serve Christ Jesus, we must not waste time; we must pray for and engage others, if possible, to help our mission; we must learn to depend on one another and on God’s grace, rather than on our own skills and resources; we should be willing to travel light, to rid ourselves of anything that is an encumbrance and, most of all, to be willing to leave our comfort zones, to take risks for the Lord. Don’t forget that the Wesleys, George Whitefield and other early Methodists left the security and respectability of church buildings to preach in the open to crowds of unruly roughs, some of whom hurled stones or vegetables at the preacher, or indulged in ‘rolling preachers in the mud’ – apparently a most popular sport in Northern England. John Wesley was nearly thrown from a bridge in Walsall during the Wednesbury Riots of 1743 – he was only saved by an ex-prize fighter who carried him to safety on his shoulders. He wrote this of crowds at Cradley and Stourbridge: **“Many of my hearers were wild as colts untamed, but the bridle was in their mouths.” No comfort zones there, then.**

It is very easy for churches to become inward-looking as numbers decline and survival seems the most important issue. We must be visible bearers of good news. For several years my wife and I admired the tenacity and dedication of an eighty-year-old Salvationist who collected at the Kings Square in West Bromwich – we got our “War Cry” from him – he was a witness for Christ in that town. There are risks, but unless we make ourselves vulnerable, we won’t make a difference. If you wonder why we should make ourselves vulnerable, remember that Christ made himself vulnerable in order to show his Father’s true nature; he made himself wholly vulnerable when he died on a cross for all our sins. You ask how much God loves us: as much as this...! (extend arms). All we need is faith!

We are emerging from the grim shadow of the Coronavirus pandemic and only need to look around to see its effects on society. Loneliness, anxiety, depression, fear, unemployment, debt, long-COVID, loss of mobility, broken relationships, bereavement and worsening health conditions as a result of lack of treatment are part of the unwanted consequences of the pandemic. There is so much to be done, more than individuals, or even individual churches can hope to address in full, but Jesus calls us to work in the fields of brokenness to offer healing and hope. We need to look for ways to serve the greater community, by co-operating with other churches that will work with us or community groups, even in small ways. In **“The Catholic Spirit”**, the thirty-fourth of

his “**Sermons on Several Occasions**”, John Wesley declared that we don’t need complete agreement with co-workers and quoted from **2 Kings 10:15**: ‘**After he left there, he came upon Jehonadab son of Recab, who was on his way to meet him. Jehu greeted him and said, "Are you in accord with me, as I am with you?" "I am," Jehonadab answered. "If so," said Jehu, "give me your hand."**’ Although their personalities and religious practices differed markedly, they worked together for the Lord’s sake. We, too, need the same all-embracing attitude, so we don’t allow differences to hinder Christ’s mission.

What more can the Church do to help communities to recover from the damage caused by the pandemic? Can they host a lunch club for older people, or single parents, or work with established community group? Music is a healer of the soul. Should churches encourage a choir to meet there – possibly a community choir, or a dementia choir? If not, could they support other churches with such activities?

I don’t have answers, but I hope Christians like us will be willing to step out of their comfort zone, just like the seventy-two; may it help us to see our neighbours as individuals with needs, irrespective of their faith, colour, gender, or politics, just as Jesus saw the needs of everybody he met. Lord, grant us the faith to show our neighbours the same kind of love, for if they can see Jesus’ grace shining through our words and deeds, trust can be cemented, new relationships formed and God glorified. Amen.

Our concluding hymn was written by Marty Haugen, a liturgical composer and musical performer from Minnesota. He is composer-in-residence at Mayflower Community Congregational Church in Minneapolis. The house in this hymn is Mother Church, a community, rather than a building. Hymn number 409, ‘Let us build a house where love can dwell,’

1. Let us build a house where love can dwell

And all can safely live,

A place where saints and children tell

How hearts learn to forgive.

Built of hopes and dreams and visions,

Rock of faith and vault of grace;

Here the love of Christ shall end divisions: *Chorus*

All are welcome,

All are welcome,

All are welcome in this place.

2. Let us build a house where prophets speak,

And words are strong and true,

Where all God’s children dare to seek

To dream God’s reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness

And of symbol of God’s grace;

Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus: *Chorus*

3. Let us build a house where love is found

In water, wine and wheat:

A banquet hall on holy ground

Where peace and justice meet.

Here the love of God, through Jesus,

Is revealed in time and space;

As we share in Christ the feast that frees us: *Chorus*

4. Let us build a house where hands will reach

Beyond the wood and stone

To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,

And live the Word they've known.

Here the outcast and the stranger

Bear the image of God's face;

Let us bring an end to fear and danger: *Chorus*

5. Let us build a house where all are named,

Their songs and visions heard

And loved and treasured, taught and claimed

As words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,

Prayers of faith and songs of grace,

Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter: *Chorus* © *Marty Haugen (born 1950)*

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 forevermore. Amen.