

A service for 4th August, 2024 (StF)

Call to Worship: Isaiah chapter 55 verses 1 and 2

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written in 1998 by Brian Doerksen, a Canadian singer-songwriter, when he was only thirty-three years old. His earliest hymns were published when he was in his mid-twenties. Hymn number 24, ‘Come, now is the time to worship’.

Come, now is the time to worship.

Come, now is the time to give your heart.

Come, just as you are to worship.

Come, just as you are before your God, come.

One day every tongue

Will confess you are God,

One day every knee will bow.

Still, the greatest treasure remains

For those who gladly choose You now.

Come, now is the time to worship

© Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

Let us pray

Eternal God, Source and maintainer of all life throughout the universe, all honour, glory, power and praise are yours, now and always, so we come into your presence to offer our best in worship and adoration. We recognize your awesome wisdom and creative might as we consider the beauty and complexity of our world and the countless stars, planets and moons in the universe. We are astonished that you should have time for such flawed and feeble beings like us, let alone honouring us by seeking to draw us close to you in a relationship when we may call you “Abba”, ‘Daddy’.

Although you sought to make us your earthly children through the Patriarchs and prophets, we insisted on going our own way, rebelling against you and turning away from you. However, instead of punishing us as we deserved, you took on our mortal form and lived amongst us as Christ Jesus. He not only came to show us how we ought to live, but die on a cross at Calvary to atone for the sins of the whole world. By dying, Jesus broke the hold of Satan and, when he was, he ensured death does not have the final word by offering us everlasting life. That is truly amazing grace, O Lord! Take away all anxieties and distractions, so we may place you at the heart of our worship. Amen.

We come now to our prayers of thanksgiving and confession. When I say, ‘Lord, in your mercy’, please respond with, ‘hear our prayer’. Let us pray.

Almighty God, we offer our heartfelt thanks for this lovely, self-sustaining planet upon which we live. Thank you for all the good things we enjoy; for opportunities and experiences that have delighted and fulfilled us; for people who guide, love and inspire us, but most of all for your undying love which we can see in the life, death and resurrection of your dear Son, Jesus. Thank you for loving us even at our worst when we are cold-hearted and hateful.

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

Merciful Lord, forgive us when we are unfaithful, self-righteous and judgmental in our dealings with our neighbours; when we are not as generous with our possessions and

our time as we ought to be and when our love for you and our neighbours is limited by our self-interest. We acknowledge that we are slow to answer your call and take a chance for your kingdom's sake. Help us to change our ways, forgive us and restore us to righteousness.

'Lord, in your mercy' **'hear our prayer'**.

Merciful Lord, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have not only pardoned us, but are calling us to follow you without the burden of our sins. Lord God, fill us with your Spirit, teach us to serve our neighbours cheerfully and faithfully, so we may honour you in the beautiful name of Jesus. 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 by Karen Lafferty at a point in her life when money was tight after she had given up a successful singing career in order to serve as a missionary to drug addicts and prostitutes in Amsterdam. She lived out the words of the hymn we are about to sing. Hymn number 254, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,'

**1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;**

Allelu- , Alleluia: *Chorus:*

*Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia, Allelu-, Alleluia!*

**2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;**

Allelu- , Alleluia: *Chorus:*

*Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia, Allelu-, Alleluia!*

**3. Man shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;**

Allelu- , Alleluia: *Chorus:*

*Alleluia, Alleluia,
Alleluia, Allelu-, Alleluia!*

© Karen Lafferty (born 1948)

In our prayers of intercession we remember people near and far away.

Creator God, we acknowledge the wonders and beauty of the world, but we are also aware of how broken it is, often by human greed, spite, pride, foolishness and indifference. In Jesus' name we ask you to guide and empower us as we seek to serve our neighbours, but we recognize that we can't make as many changes we would like to see on our own. Nevertheless, help us serve conscientiously, but when the best we can do is not enough, then reach out and inspire people who have greater power and influence to act as well.

We pray for our church, the churches in our Circuit, in neighbouring circuits and, indeed, the World Church. Teach us to speak of the love and beauty of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission. May the Holy Spirit help us employ our faith, love, gifts and graces to proclaim Jesus as the Saviour of the world and may our words and deeds of love bravely carry the gospel light to this strife-ridden and broken world.

Jesus declared, peacemakers to be children of God, so at a time when they are desperately-needed, we ask you to bless everyone who is working for peace: for negotiators, aid-workers and medics, particularly those who are serving on the front line. May they enjoy success in their endeavours and remain safe. We pray for a just and swift end to fighting in Ukraine, in Gaza and Somalia and for gang warfare in Haiti to cease, so the people can enjoy the fruits of peace. Lord, may the tensions between Iran and Israel, especially with Hezbollah in Lebanon, not escalate into open warfare that may have global consequences. Inspire national leaders to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, instead of resorting to force. Teach them to govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of lasting peace. And Lord, remember in your mercy, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression, that they may receive the courage and support they need to rebuild their lives and find healing in body, mind and spirit.

Lord of creation, the breakdown of the ecosystem upon which we and all living beings depend is evident in the extreme weather that is affecting every continent, as highlighted by the super-hurricane Beryl which has caused serious damage and loss of life in the Caribbean, Mexico and the southern states of America. For the sake of life on this planet and for future generations, help us to live in a more sustainable way by being less wasteful, reducing pollution and using only the resources we need.

We remember people we know who are ill in body, mind or spirit; those who are lonely, afraid, or in any kind of need or trouble and, in particular, everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear and is finding bereavement unbearable. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned. Lord, while we ask you to help us provide them with both practical support and friendship, enfold them in the warmth of your love, so they may be comforted, find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

Abba, eternal Source of love, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us free from harm and inspire us to share the abundance of the love you bestow upon us with both friends and strangers, so our lives glorify you in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is John chapter 6 verses 24 to 35

So when the crowd saw that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

Jesus answered them,

"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal." Then they said to him,

"What must we do to perform the works of God?"

Jesus answered them,

"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

So they said to him,

“What sign are you going to give us then, so that we may see it and believe you? What work are you performing? Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

They said to him,
“Sir, give us this bread always.”

Jesus said to them,
“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn translated in 1940 from an Urdu lyric. The translator was Dermott Monahan, son of a Wesleyan Methodist missionary, who, like his father, served in Southern India, most of his life, though he was educated in England and was trained at Handsworth College, Birmingham. The melody is a Pakistani folk song. Hymn number 252, ‘Jesus the Lord said: “I am the Bread,”’

**1. Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Bread,
The Bread of Life for the world am I.
The Bread of Life for the world am I,
The Bread of Life for the world am I.’
Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Bread,
The Bread of Life for the world am I’.**

**2. Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Vine –
The true and fruitful Vine am I.’**

**3. Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Way,
The true and living Way am I.’**

**4. Jesus the Lord said, ‘I am the Light,
The one true Light of the world am I.’**

**5. Jesus the Lord said: ‘I am the Life,
The Resurrection and the Life am I.’** © tr. Dermott Monahan (1906 – 57) *Singing the Faith* version

Sermon: ‘Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life’: John 6:27
Last week’s Gospel reading told how Jesus fed a crowd of more than five thousand with five loaves and two fish, mirroring God’s provision of manna to the Israelites in the wilderness and thereby pointing that he is the Messiah. However, the crowd wanted to seize him and make him King, not as God’s anointed, but as a source of easy food. They were motivated by material desires, not spiritual ones.

Some people confuse spirituality with religiousness, so let me clarify what I mean. our spirituality is what makes us come alive, what makes us who we are and experience wellbeing. We can gain spiritual food when we go on holiday, or hear a piece of music that moves us, or read a poem that uplifts us, or do something we enjoy, or share the company of somebody we like. It can be a sunrise, or sunset, a striking panorama, even a wonderful meal. Spirituality is often gained through worship, but most of all, our well-being is enhanced by knowing that we are valued and loved for who we are, warts and all.

The day after Jesus fed the five thousand, they found him on the other side of the lake. He told the multitude, **“I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not**

work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.” They responded by asking for him to perform a miracle by which they might have faith in him as the Messiah. Jesus replied, that it was God, not Moses, who had sent manna for the Israelites, while he was the bread, the source of life lived fully, not only for the Jews, but for the whole world. The crowd demanded this bread that he offered, but many lacked both understanding and faith to receive it. Faith in Jesus is the key to salvation, because it doesn't only satisfy our physical hunger, but our spiritual needs, too.

We should not set our sights on material things alone, for our spiritual health is vital to our general well-being. Consider how, even in our materialistic society, people still seek answers to the meaning of life, even though many no longer attend church. Some dabble in New Age practices, or turn to spiritualism; others, like Madonna, have turned to Kabbalah, a form of Medieval Jewish mysticism. I think they're hopelessly misguided, but their striving for answers shows that they have a spiritual hunger which the Christian Church should be fulfilling.

In our Gospel reading Jesus was inviting the crowd to see the possibilities for the world if only they would believe in him. If only we can hold onto Kingdom values and trust God to work through us, we can make a difference. Here is how a crippled shoemaker transformed the lives of thousands of poor children in the Nineteenth Century. John Pounds was born in Portsmouth in 1766 and became a rough cobbler in his late teens after he fell from a ship in dry dock at the Royal Dockyards when serving an apprenticeship. In 1803, he bought a small, wooden shop with a living room above the workshop and made a good living. When John's brother, a sailor, was unable to look after his crippled son, John took him in. He made special boots for the boy that – in time – cured his condition. However, John also taught him the trade and made him a partner.

John became concerned about the street urchins who begged and stole in Portsmouth's streets. He realised that they needed more than food and shelter if they were to have worthwhile lives, so he enticed them into his workshop with the promise of a baked apple or a baked potato, so that he could teach them. Despite the size of his shop, John taught up to forty of these rough children at a time, without recourse to corporal punishment, yet no child was said to have left unable to read, write, or do simple sums. In addition, he taught them nature study, history and the Scriptures. He nursed them when they were ill and begged respectable clothes, so that some could accompany him to church. He put a sign above the shop door, '**Little vagabonds preferred**' and accepted only children whose parents could not afford to pay for their education.

John Pounds not only provided the young vagabonds material needs, he fed them spiritually too, not just educating them but making them feel valued and loved, warts and all. His legacy was the founding of The Ragged School Union, so by the mid-1800s there were more than six hundred Ragged Schools in England and Wales and they served children of the poor until universal education became law in 1871.

The bread Jesus offers us is God's salvation – a vision of a just world where not only are physical and material hungers fed, but the deep spiritual needs of people are fulfilled. It is a vision of a world where people are not judged by race, colour, creed, gender, wealth or status, but are valued as beings made in the image of God and loved so much by the Lord that his Only Son died for them. What can we do to turn that vision into practice?

As we approach the start of a new church year, it is a good time to think of how we as a body of believers can address some of the issues that face society at large:

supporting people suffering with depression and anxiety; burdened by unemployment, or debt, or others who are lonely. And these are just scratching the surface of need around us. Then, of course, we consider the needs of the wider world. There is so much needed to make this world a better place.

However, don't despair: Christ does not expect us to try to address every issue on our own, but we can address one or perhaps two issues, using the expertise and help of charities, possibly offering them a base at church. We can work as a group of churches, or as a Circuit, or sharing the task with other denominations and charities. **Our Church is built upon the foundations of God's amazing, redemptive love, a love that lives in us as the Holy Spirit. Let us use our love to bring healing and hope in Jesus' name. Amen.**

We conclude our worship with a hymn written by the Welsh equivalent of Charles Wesley. William Williams of Pantycelyn, nicknamed "The sweet singer of Wales", who wrote eight hundred hymns, all in Welsh. This one was translated by Peter Williams – no relation of William – and set to John Hughes' tune, "Cwm Rhondda", in 1905. Hymn number 465, 'Guide me, O thou great Jehovah'.

**1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.**

**2. Open now the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.**

**3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.**

© William Williams (1717 – 1791) trans. by P. Williams (1722 – 1796)

Benediction

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