

A service for 4th July, 2021 (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 123

LORD, I look up to you, up to heaven, where you rule. As a servant depends on his master, as a maid depends on her mistress, so we will keep looking to you, O LORD our God, until you have mercy on us. Be merciful to us, LORD, be merciful; we have been treated with so much contempt. We have been mocked too long by the rich and scorned by proud oppressors. Amen.

Our first hymn first appeared in the appendix of 'Hymns Ancient & Modern' in 1868. The author of the hymn was the chairman of the hymnal's compilers, but the hymn appeared by merit alone. Sir Henry Williams Baker was the eldest son of Vice Admiral Sir Henry Loraine Baker and succeeded to the baronetcy in 1859. This hymn is a version of the 23rd Psalm and is a favourite of my wife. Hymn number 479, 'The King of love my Shepherd is'.

1. The King of love my shepherd is,
Whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
And he is mine for ever.
2. Where streams of living water flow,
My ransomed soul he leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow
With food celestial feedeth.
3. Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
But yet in love he sought me,
And on his shoulder gently laid,
And home, rejoicing, brought me.
4. In death's dark vale I fear no ill
With thee, dear Lord, beside me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still,
Thy cross before to guide me.
5. Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
Thy unction grace bestoweth;
And O what transport of delight
From thy pure chalice floweth!
6. And so through all the length of days
Thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
Within thy house for ever.

© Henry Williams Baker {1821 – 1877}

Let us pray

Living God, Word of all life throughout the universe, our Sustainer and Saviour, all honour, power, glory and praise are yours, now and always. We are here to offer our best in worship and adoration, for in the beauty of our world we experience your wisdom and creative might. We are astonished that you have honoured us by seeking to draw us close to in a relationship when we may call you "Abba", 'Father'.

Despite your Law and the efforts of the 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 our flesh and lived amongst us as Christ Jesus, your Son.

Jesus not only showed us how we ought to live, but died like a common criminal at Calvary to redeem the debt of the whole world's sin. For our sakes, he broke the hold of Satan and, when he was raised from death, he ensured that death does not have the final word by offering us everlasting life. Amazing grace, indeed, O Lord! Living God, Word of all life throughout the universe, our Sustainer and Saviour, all honour, power, glory and praise are you, now and always. Amen.

In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, 'Merciful Lord', please respond with, 'forgive us'.

Almighty God, we offer heartfelt thanks for all the good things we enjoy; for everyone who guides, loves and inspires us, for other blessings we receive from you, but most of all for your undying love which we see in the life, death and resurrection of your dear Son, Jesus. Forgive us when we are unfaithful, self-righteous and judgmental in our dealings with our neighbours.

'Merciful Lord' ***'forgive us'***.

Lord, we acknowledge that we are slow to answer your call to serve others in your name, that we are not as generous with our possessions and our time as we ought to be and that our love for you and others is not what it ought to be. Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sinfulness, restore us to righteousness, and breathe new life into the embers of our faith, so we may play our part in building your kingdom here.

'Merciful Lord' ***'forgive us'***.

Heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have already graciously pardoned us. Lord God, teach us to share your gift of love with all-comers, 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.

"Be our strength in hours of weakness, / In our wanderings be our guide; / Through endeavour, failure, danger, / Father, be thou at our side." We shall Listen to a hymn that was written in 1856 as a poem by Unitarian, Maria Love Willis, wife of an American doctor. It was much altered by Samuel Longfellow and others before becoming a mainstream hymn at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Hymn number 518, 'Father, hear the prayer we offer,'

1. Father, hear the prayer we offer:

**Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.**

2. Not for ever in green pastures

**Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.**

3. Not for ever by still waters

**Would we idly rest and stay;
But would smite the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.**

**4. Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.**

© Love Maria Willis {1824 – 1908}

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

Almighty God, we have no doubt that all things are possible for you which is a great to us in our discipleship, for although we strive to meet our neighbours' needs, we are aware how limited our own powers are. Grant us the strength and power we need to answer Christ's call and, when the best we can do is not enough, then we pray that you will reach out and move people who can heal some of the world's brokenness to act instead.

Holy God, we ask you to revitalise our church and all churches, particularly as we approach the end of restrictions caused by COVID19, so that we may a blessing to our communities and to people further afield. Help us set aside our divisions and differences, so that we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him as a united body of believers. Bless and use our love, gifts and graces not only to address the needs of our community, but to honour your holy name and bring others to know, love and serve Christ.

God of peace and unity, we know of so many parts of the world where wars are being fought, where persecution, sectarianism, prejudice, terrorism blight both communities and individuals, so as we pray for the victims of man's inhumanity to man, we ask you to guide the leaders of the nations of the world along the paths of mercy and justice from which peace flows like a holy river. Guide us in our relationships with others, so our lives reflect what we ask for the world

Loving Lord, we pray for people who are campaigning against pollution and irresponsible consumerism, so this beautiful planet will remain habitable for future generations. We bring to you people who campaign for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including the distribution of coronavirus vaccines to less fortunate countries where there are insufficient supplies. May your Spirit inspire governments that can offer practical support to do so swiftly, for we shall not be safe until most people have been vaccinated.

Heavenly Father, we pray for people who are suffering from ill-health in body, mind or spirit, hold before you those whose treatment has been held up because of the pandemic, besides all whose mental and spiritual health have been adversely affected by lockdown restrictions. Reach out to people living with a dementia, their families, carers and friends whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Grant them all the support and resolve they need to manage throughout these testing times.

We remember before you people who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, everybody who mourns the loss of somebody dear. 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 friendship and practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be comforted and find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

We ask your blessing upon everybody who is working for our wellbeing during this crisis, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and key-workers. Bless them and grant them success in their endeavours.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us walk the narrow path of righteousness. May we learn to share the

love you give us in such abundance with everybody we meet, in Jesus' holy name.
Amen.

In 1745 John Wesley published a pamphlet, "A further Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion", in response to a number of vitriolic attacks on his preaching in the open air and also against his teachings, to which was added this hymn by younger brother, Charles. It is set to a melody from 'The Magic Flute' by Mozart. That surely is a winning combination: Charles Wesley and Mozart! Hymn number 546, 'Behold the servant of the Lord!'

1. Behold the servant of the Lord!

I wait thy guiding eye to feel,
To hear and keep thy every word,
To prove and do thy perfect will,
Joyful from my own works to cease,
Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

**2. Me, if thy grace vouchsafe to use,
Meanest of all thy creatures, me,
The deed, the time, the manner choose;
Let all my fruit be found of thee;
Let all my works in thee be wrought,
By thee to full perfection brought.**

**3. My every weak, though good design
O'errule, or change, as seems thee meet;
Jesus, let all my work be thine!
Thy work, O Lord, is all complete,
And pleasing in thy Father's sight;
Thou only hast done all things right.**

**4. Here then to thee thine own I leave;
Mould as thou will thy passive clay;
But let me all thy stamp receive,
But let me all thy words obey,
Serve with a single heart and eye,
And to thy glory live and die.**

© Charles Wesley {1707 – 1788}

Our Gospel reading is Mark chapter 6 verses 1 to 13

He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying,

"Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands! Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him. And Jesus said to them,

"A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.

And he called to him the twelve, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He charged them to take nothing for their

journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. And he said to them, “Where you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. And if any place will not receive you and they refuse to hear you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet for a testimony against them.” So they went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them. Amen.

Sermon: ‘And he was amazed at their lack of faith.’ Mark 6:6

Like Mark, it is easy to condemn the villagers for rejecting Jesus when he preached in their synagogue, but I wonder whether we might have fallen into the same trap in their position. Jesus had lived among them for thirty years, apparently without performing miracles or displaying any sign of being different from other villagers – except for leading a blameless existence! Suddenly, Nazarenes heard he’d been performing miracles in neighbouring towns and villages, so he was invited to read from the scriptures in the synagogue. However, Jesus’ passage from Isaiah was the last straw as far as the villagers were concerned, for it pointed to him being the Messiah, a claim they couldn’t accept. After all, they’d known Jesus and his family for many years; in their eyes he was only a carpenter, an ordinary man, **‘son of Mary & brother of James & Joses & Judas & Simon,’ not even Joseph’s son, for his paternity was questioned.** Thus most Nazarenes rejected him as the Messiah. For the first time in his ministry, Jesus tasted the bitter gall of failure. He could do little for those Nazarenes because of their lack of faith in him.

Nevertheless, Jesus didn’t abandon his work. He knew that many, if not most of them would not, could not see beyond his physical being and to concentrate on his teaching, but rather than just give up on them, he extended his mission as he commissioned the disciples to go in pairs to preach repentance and to drive out demons, to authenticate their message. Perhaps then they might listen to the message from the disciples without the impediment of unbelief in Jesus as the Messiah. By repentance, Jesus meant **SHUB** – turning from evil and returning to covenant living, a challenging call to a people used to going their own way. Moreover, he told the disciples to travel light, relying upon God to provide their food and shelter. In other words, Jesus required total faith from the twelve – in contrast to the faithlessness they’d witnessed in Nazareth. Mark simply reported, ‘they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them’. Notice the significance of Mark’s brief report of the disciples’ success, for his gospel is usually critical of Christ’s followers’ failure to grasp and follow his teaching, so their success demonstrates Jesus was working through them and empowering them before the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost.

Our readings warn that Good News won’t be accepted universally, so our faith must be strong enough to accept times of failure, and rejection, so we’ll be prepared to try again – often in a new place or in a new way. May I caution you to share Good News optimistically: please don’t allow fear of being rejected be your opening thought, for if it is, it may well be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Don’t forget the Wesley Brothers’ failure in Georgia between 1735 and 37. They returned from America with a profound sense of failure when they arrived home in February, 1738. Fortunately, on 24th May John’s heart was strangely warmed at Aldersgate Street, once he learned didn’t need to earn Lord’s favour through mighty works, but to trust he’d been saved already by grace. As a result, John and his friends began a movement that effected great spiritual and social change.

I'll finish with the story of a local nurse who outfaced rejection and won the heart of thousands in Walsall.

Dorothy Pattison, a daughter of the Vicar of Hawkeswell, Yorks. was also rejected. In 1862 she trained as a nurse with the Anglican Sisterhood of the Good Samaritans. Her first posting was to the Cottage Hospital, Walsall, where the town's medical provision was so poor that injured people were usually taken to Birmingham by horse ambulance. Dorothy's reception was very unfriendly: she was often insulted in the street – even pelted with mud and stones by locals, because her uniform was mistaken for a nun's habit when Irish Catholics were treated as badly here as in Ulster during the 'Troubles between the 1970s and 1990s.

Dorothy wasn't intimidated by her reception. Instead she devoted self to her duties, working almost unaided in an isolation ward during a major smallpox epidemic shortly after her arrival – ignoring the danger of contracting the disease. Having been taught surgical skills by admiring doctors, Dorothy totally won Walsallians' hearts in Oct 1875, after a severe explosion at Walsall Ironworks Company which killed four workers immediately and left twelve so critically burnt that all were expected to die. Dorothy stayed on duty almost for almost ten days, despite the stench of burnt, infected flesh which caused some doctors to faint. Amazingly, two of the dozen men not only survived but both were back at work within a year of the disaster. When Dorothy died from cancer aged only forty-six, in December 1878, thirty thousand people attended her funeral and a statue was erected in her memory – only two other nurses have statues in their honour: Florence Nightingale and Edith Cavell. Nowadays, Walsall's main hospital bears the name by which Dorothy was best known: Sister Dora.

X Jesus calls us to remain steadfast when we face rejection and failure, for our increasingly secular society is just as judgemental as Jesus' Nazarenes. However, if our words and deeds reflect Christ's love for all, people will see value in the Good News we bring and will turn to our Lord! Like the Twelve, we need faith to sustain us, but we don't work in own strength, but in the Holy Spirit's power, through whom Jesus' parting words are honoured: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." *Friends, if Christ is with us, what more can we ask? Amen.*

Our closing hymn is number 673, 'Will you come and follow me', which was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. It is set to "Kelvingrove", adapted from the old Scots ballad, called unsurprisingly, '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.

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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 for evermore. Amen.