

Call to Worship: Psalm 145 verses 8 to 14

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that everybody may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.

The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving towards all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by Thomas Obediah Chisholm in 1923. He was ordained as a Methodist minister in 1903. Unfortunately, his health broke down within a year and he was forced to stand down, becoming an insurance salesman in later life. Although it became a favourite hymn in the Moody Bible Institute, this hymn remained largely unknown in the United Kingdom for four decades. Mind you, when it appeared in “The Baptist Hymnbook” of 1962, it deservedly became popular with every denomination. We shall sing hymn number 51, “Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,”

**1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been thou forever shall be: Chorus:**

***Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.***

All I have needed thy hand has provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

**2. Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. Chorus:**

**3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! Chorus:**

© Thomas O. Chisholm (1866 – 1960)

Let us pray.

Lord God, Creator of life throughout the universe, you first revealed yourself to human beings through your Commandments given to Moses and through the prophets, in order that we might know, love and serve you. However, we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, but instead of destroying us, you displayed amazing grace by taking human form as Jesus Christ and living with us, not only to bring Good News in words and deeds, revealing your true nature, but to give his life at Calvary for the sins of the world. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus broke the power of sin and death no longer has the final word, for he offers us eternal life through faith in him.

Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of blessings that we receive from you: for people who have cared for, guided and inspired us. Most of all, thank you for Jesus Christ, without whom we are helpless and hopeless.

Merciful God, we confess that whilst you are holy and loving, our own lives are spoilt by our failure to live as you call us to. We know that we say and do things that cause pain and offence; we spurn chances to help neighbours who are in need or trouble and frequently set our own wants before the needs of others. We find it easier to condemn others than it is to forgive. We ask you to please help us change our ways, so that Christ is at the heart of all we do and say and, as we repent, we ask you to pardon us.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and we are confident that you have forgiven us. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you desire us to and use our gifts of the Spirit for the good of the Church and our neighbours, in Jesus' holy 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.

Sydney Carter was born in London during the First World War and studied at Oxford University where he took great interest in poetry and music. He was a convinced pacifist and was intrigued by the Shaker movement, founded by Quakers in America during 1774. This hymn, "Lord of the Dance" is, in fact, set to a Shaker's hymn melody, "Simple gifts" by Joseph Brackett and it tells a version of Jesus' life through the medium of dance. Hymn number 247, 'Lord of the dance'

**1. I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth –**

At Bethlehem I had my birth. Chorus:

'Dance, then, wherever you may be;

I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he.

'And I'll lead you all wherever you may be,

And I'll lead you all in the dance,' said he.

**2. I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,
But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.**

I danced for the fishermen, for James and John –

They came with me and the dance went on. Chorus:

3. I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame;

The holy people said it was a shame.

They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,

And they left me there on a cross to die. Chorus:

4. I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black –

It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.

They buried my body and they thought I'd gone,
But I am the dance and I still go on. *Chorus:*

5. They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die:
I'll live in you if you'll live in me –

'I am the Lord of the Dance,' said he. *Chorus:*

© Sydney Carter {1915 – 2004}

In our prayers of intercession, when we remember the needs of people nearby and far afield, I shall leave pauses in each section, so you can offer your own concerns. When I say, 'Lord in your mercy' please answer 'Hear our prayer'.

El Shaddai, omnipotent and holy, we pray for the world and all places where there is war, conflict, prejudice, division and fear, that leaders of nations will turn away from violence and seek justice and mercy for those they govern. We pray for just conclusions to wars that are being waged at present and we remember people who are victims of our failure to love one another.

Silence

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

Jehovah Rohi, faithful Shepherd, we pray for victims of disasters, refugees, the starving, overlooked and homeless and for all who seek to help them.

Silence

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

Jehovah Rapha, Lord of healing, we pray for people who are lonely, needy, anxious and afraid.

Silence

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

Jehovah Shalom, Lord of peace, we bring to you people who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those living with a dementia and all who care for them; for those whose lives are coming to an end.

Silence

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

El Elyon, God Most High, we pray for our leaders, both local and national, that you grant them wisdom and integrity in their service.

Silence

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

Adoni Elohim, Lord Almighty, we pray for this church and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth.

Silence

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

Abba, heavenly Father, please accept and answer our prayers. Bless us, our family and friends. Keep us safe and free from sin. Help us to share your overflowing love with friends and strangers, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

We shall continue with a hymn written by John Bell and the Late Graham Bell of the Iona Community. Although their hymns are usually set to old Scots ballads, this is sung to a French carol melody, 'Noel Nouvelet'. We shall sing hymn number 251, 'Jesus Christ is waiting'.

**1. Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely, too:
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you.**

**1. Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry, too:
In the kingdom's causes,
Let me rage with you.**

**2. Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets,
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity, too:
Let my care be active,
Healing, just like you.**

**3. Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph, too:
Where good conquers evil,
Let me dance with you.**

**4. Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
'Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet.'
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few:
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.**

© John L. Bell (B 1949) & Graham Maule (1958 – 2019)

Our Gospel reading is St. Matthew chapter 11 vs. 16 to 19 & 25 to 30

Jesus said,

"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a

dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners".' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

At that time Jesus said,
"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Amen.

We continue with a hymn written by Horatius Bonar, who was born in Edinburgh in 1808 and ultimately became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, the highest position one could attain. We shall sing Hymn number 248, 'I heard the voice of Jesus say:'

1. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast.'

I came to Jesus as I was,
So weary, worn and sad;
I found in him a resting-place
And he has made me glad.

2. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one;
Stoop down and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.

3. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
'I am this dark world's light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus and I found
In him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till trav'ling days are done.

© Horatius Bonar {1808 – 1889}

Sermon: *"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."* Matthew 11:30

When I was a schoolmaster, there was one particular group of pupils that nearly drove me to distraction. It wasn't those who struggled with literacy, for I'd try my hardest to encourage

them to keep trying and we celebrated each small sign of progress. It wasn't the disengaged or disruptive, for I quite enjoyed the challenge of motivating them. No, the group I found it difficult to like was those pupils who clearly possessed talents, but who simply refused to co-operate whatever I tried. Warnings went unheeded and they fell far short of their potential. It wasn't that they couldn't learn, but they wouldn't learn – they simply didn't care and they wouldn't change.

In the reading from Matthew, Jesus upbraided the Jewish religious establishment for its blind refusal to accept either his teaching, or that of John the Baptist. He compared the Baptist's aesthetic call to repentance with children playing funerals and his own Good News with other children playing at weddings. The Pharisees were like awkward children who would neither mourn, nor celebrate: they rejected John as demon-possessed because of his austere lifestyle as much as his message, whilst they condemned Jesus as a glutton, a drunkard and an associate of the dregs of society, because he sought out sinners more than the self-righteous. He observed that the religious scholars were too proud to accept the Good News, which Jesus brought, but, instead the humble poor were open to God's salvation. He also warned that he is the One through whom we may come to know God the Father.

Jesus was not saying that the Law of Moses should be rejected, but the petty man-made rules that had been derived from them had become an intolerable burden to ordinary people and they often made life miserable, whereas Jesus was offering life lived to the full. Meticulous observance of rules can leave little time or opportunity to love. Paul understood what Jesus meant, for he wrote this to the Romans: **'Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for those who love their fellowman have fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law.'** Therefore, he called on the humble poor, burdened by Pharisaic demands of 613 rules for righteous living, to turn to him, for he, too, was **'gentle and humble in heart'** and in him they **'would find rest for their souls. For his yoke is easy and his burden is light.'**

Discipleship does mean accepting the yoke offered by Jesus, but instead of trying to observe hundreds of rules, Jesus has gone to the heart of what God wants. When he was asked what the Greatest Commandment was, our Lord replied, **"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'** The second is this: **'Love your neighbour as yourself.'** There is no commandment greater than these." You can see that, for a Jew in Jesus' time wholehearted love of God was inextricably linked to loving your neighbour as yourself: the same rule applies today.

We live in a polarized society in a broken world in which we are tempted to close our eyes to injustice and keep our heads down, rather than risk the wrath of loudmouths and bullies, who seek to sow division and conflict, instead of harmonious co-existence. I don't just mean the issue of asylum-seekers, which is likely to remain a political football for the foreseeable future, but Jews and Moslems in this country, whose synagogues, mosques and associated buildings have been attacked, not because of things they have done, but because of what is happening in the Middle East: I was going to say, 'The Holy Land' but there is little going on there that is holy! May the Lord give us grace to support our

neighbours with small acts of kindness, to stand firm and frustrate the demagogues and disruptors by the way we care for all-comers. May Jesus make us channels of his peace. Amen.

Our closing hymn is Sebastian Temple's version of a prayer by St. Francis of Assisi. Johann Sebastian Templehoff was born in South Africa, spent time on London and India before settling in Los Angeles where he became a Franciscan friar. The hymn was written in 1967. We shall sing hymn number 707, 'Make me a channel of your peace'.

1. Make me a channel of your peace.

**Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;
And where there's doubt, true faith in you.**

2. Make me a channel of your peace.

**Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light;
And where there's sadness, ever joy: Chorus:**

***O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.***

3. Make me a channel of your peace.

**It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving of ourselves that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.**

© Johann Sebastian Temple {1927 --1997}

Benediction

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