

## A service for 6<sup>th</sup> June, 2021 (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 130 verses 5 to 8

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins. Amen.

*Our first hymn was written in 1993 by Bernadette Farrell, a gifted Roman Catholic hymn-writer, who was the first Deputy Director of Citizens UK and whose hymns span all denominations. We shall listen to 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:***

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***Let us pray.***

Heavenly Father, your Word created our universe and all that lives within it. Your wisdom and power are far beyond our understanding and so we have come to worship you today with reverence and joy, for you are our God and Saviour. From the beginning of our history, you have striven to draw us close to you, firstly through the Patriarchs and Prophets, but when we still rebelled against you, you came to share our humanity through your only Son, Jesus Christ. He not only taught us in his words and example how to live life to the full, but he died on a cross at Calvary to atone for the sins of the world. By raising Jesus from the tomb, you offer us life beyond our earthly span.

After he ascended into heaven, Jesus sent your Holy Spirit to guide, comfort and empower us in our discipleship. Therefore, almighty Lord, we ask you to accept and

bless our worship, for all honour, glory, power and praise shall be yours 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 you shower upon us, but most of all for your undying love. 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 our love for you and others is not what it ought to be. Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our sins, 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, our risen Lord. 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.**

***‘Praise to the Holiest in the height’ was one of two poems from John Henry Newman’s great work, “The Dream of Gerontius”, which was published in “The Month” magazine during May or June 1865. Like ‘Firmly I believe and truly’, ‘Praise to the Holiest in the height’ was part of Newman’s story of the journey of Gerontius’ soul after death and it might simply have passed into obscurity when its author threw “The Dream of Gerontius” into a waste basket, feeling it was inadequate. It was only through a friend who retrieved it and passed it on to the magazine that “The Dream” survived. We shall continue our worship as we listen to hymn number 334, ‘Praise to the Holiest in the height,’***

**1. Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
and in the depth be praise:  
in all his words most wonderful,  
most sure in all his ways.**

**2. O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
a second Adam to the fight  
and to the rescue came.**

**3. O wisest love! that flesh and blood,  
which did in Adam fail,  
should strive afresh against the foe,  
should strive and should prevail;**

**4. And that a higher gift than grace  
should flesh and blood refine,  
God's presence and his very self,  
and essence all-divine.**

**5. O generous love! that he, who came  
as man to smite the foe,  
the double agony for us  
as man should undergo;**

**6. And in the garden secretly,  
and on the cross on high,  
should teach his followers, and inspire  
to suffer and to die.**

**7. Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
and in the depth be praise:  
in all his words most wonderful,  
most sure in all his ways.**

© *John Henry Newman (1801 – 1890)*

***In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others.***

Almighty God, we have no doubt that all things are possible for you and this is a great comfort to us in our discipleship, for we are aware how limited our own powers are. Guide and empower us as we strive to answer our call to serve Christ Jesus, but when the best we can do is not enough, then reach out and move people who can heal some of the world's brokenness to act instead.

Holy God, we ask you to revitalize the World Church. Teach us to set aside our divisions and differences, so that we learn to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission. We ask a blessing on our church, that we may a blessing to our community, particularly as we move out of restrictions caused by COVID19. Use our love, gifts and graces to not only address the needs of our community, but to help the uncommitted accept Jesus as the friend, Lord and Saviour of the world.

God of shalom, of peace and unity, we grieve about the brokenness of national and sectarian relationships in so many parts of the world and so we pray for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice. Breathe your Spirit upon national leaders; warm their hearts and guide them along the paths of peace, mercy and justice. We pray in particular that the end of hostilities in the Holy Land will continue to hold. May we see the start of meaningful negotiations that will enable Jews and Arabs to co-exist peacefully.

Loving Lord, inspire and guide people who are campaigning against pollution and irresponsible consumerism to keep this planet habitable for future generations. We pray, too, for people who campaign for a fair and proper use of the world's resources, including the distribution of coronavirus vaccines to countries like India and Brazil, where many people are suffering with and dying from coronavirus, but where there are insufficient supplies. May your Spirit inspire countries that can offer practical support to do so swiftly.

Heavenly Father, we pray for people living with a dementia, whose memories and faculties are diminishing and whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Remember, in your mercy, their families, friends and carers who are struggling to cope, too. Grant them all the support they need to keep going.

We pray for people we know who are sick in body, mind or spirit; those 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 practical support and friendship, 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, especially members of the NHS, scientists who are developing vaccines and cures, not only for COVID19, but other diseases, too. We ask you to bless carers and key-workers, as they try to bring us through these days of anguish. Keep them safe and grant them success in their endeavours.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us live righteous lives by sharing your abundant love with all-comers and living our Good News in words and deeds, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*Our two closing hymns are by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. Many of their hymns are set to old ballad melodies, especially old Scots tunes. The first of them is set to “Ae fond kiss and then we sever”. I hope you like it! Of course, if you don’t know Scots ballads, you won’t recognize it, but we only have to listen to it at present. Hymn number 290, ‘Who would ever have believed it?’*

**1. Who would ever have believed it?**

**Who could ever have conceived it?**

**Who dared trace God’s hand behind it**

**When a servant came among us?**

**2. Like a sapling in dry soil,**

**He was rooted in our presence;**

**Lacking beauty, grace and splendour,**

**No one felt attracted to him.**

**3. We despised him, we disowned him,**

**Though he clearly hurt and suffered:**

**We, believing he was worthless,**

**Never turned our eyes towards him.**

**4. Yet it was the pain and torment**

**We deserved which he accepted,**

**While we reckoned his afflictions**

**Must have come by heaven’s instruction.**

**5. Though our sins let him be wounded,**

**Though our cruelty left him beaten,**

**Yet, through how and why he suffered,**

**God revealed our hope of healing.**

**6. We, like sheep, despite our wisdom,**

**All had wandered from God’s purpose;**

**And our due in pain and anger**

**God let fall on one among us.**

**7. Who would ever have believed it?**

**Who could ever have conceived it?**

**Who dared trace God's hand behind it**

**When a servant came among us?**

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**Our Gospel reading is Mark chapter 3 verses 20 to 35**

Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said,

"He is out of his mind." And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said,

"He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons." So Jesus called them and spoke to them in parables:

"How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. In fact, no-one can enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man. Then he can rob his house. I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin." He said this because they were saying, "He has an evil spirit."

Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."

"Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Amen.

**Sermon: 'Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.' Mark 3:35**

In our Bible reading we see how, in the early days of his ministry, Jesus faced opposition from not only Scribes and Pharisees, but from his own family. Shortly before our reading began, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand in the synagogue at Capernaum. Instead of rejoicing that the man had been healed, the Pharisees were outraged, for the healing had been done on the Sabbath. Jesus sensed their hostility and asked,

**"Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?"**

Of course, the Pharisees wouldn't, couldn't answer, but met with Sadducees to see how they could get rid of Jesus. If you wonder why, consider the situation through their eyes. It is true that they had heard about and perhaps witnessed Christ's miracles and healings, clear signs of God's power and of Jesus being favoured by the Lord. However, Christ's teaching was very radical and challenged many of their attitudes and practices. The governing body of the faith, the Sanhedrin, firmly believed they were God's elect and their teaching and way of life fulfilled God's will, but Jesus criticized them publicly, often calling them hypocrites, so these men felt threatened and undermined by one they considered a Galilean upstart. The Sanhedrin believed that Christ was speaking against the Torah, the Law God gave to Moses, but in fact Jesus was opposing their interpretation of the law and he had come to perfect our understanding of the Commandments. In basic terms, Jesus called for Torah to be tempered with mercy, rather than a list of inflexible regulations. The Pharisees and Sadducees were joined by Scribes in their opposition to Jesus and it was Scribes who

accused Jesus of being in league with Beelzebub, prince of demons, healing in his name, a dreadful, foolish calumny that Jesus answered with the truth that, **'If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand'**. In other words, his healings were God's work, not Beelzebub's. Christ demolished their claim by pointing out that a divided kingdom cannot stand and would be fatally damaged, tantamount to the suicide of Satan.

Jews, knew the consequences of the division of the Israelite kingdom after Solomon's reign: the northern kingdom of Samaria had fallen to the Assyrians in 721 BC, while Judah had been defeated and exiled by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BC. The truth of the parable was self-evident. Recently, both the Government and main opposition party are involved in wars within: the Conservatives following the accusations made by Dominic Cummings and labour divide over policies of Sir Kier Starmer and Jeremy Corbyn. We all know that, if we are spending time and energy on in-fighting, we are distracted from more important matters, such as COVID19 and the economy.

Why then did Jesus' family try to take him home? Perhaps they had heard people – possibly local Pharisees – say he was deranged, but more likely that they had heard how popular he was, how many people strove to see him, as they had with John the Baptist and they feared he might put himself in harm's way by continuing his ministry. Certainly, they would have been afraid of not just the Romans, but the Sanhedrin and shadowy, powerful Sadducees. Jesus made it clear that he was not going to be swayed by family demands. However, he was not rejecting his family in itself, but was making the point that doing his Father's will is more important than family ties – with the implication that obeying God's will transcends not only familial links, but national and racial ones, too, opening God's kingdom to all-comers, if they have faith in him and obey his teaching.

This passage from Mark invites us to consider our traditions, our prejudices, our feelings towards others and sometimes this is difficult. None of us like to accept that what we have always thought and done is not in accordance with God's will, so it is easier for us to condemn anybody who challenges our attitudes, by saying they are mad, or revolutionaries, just as Jesus' family and the Scribes and Pharisees did in our reading. My heart always sinks when I hear church councils opine, **'We've always done it this way'**, for unless we as church are willing to reflect upon what we are doing – and are willing to adapt, our inflexibility will prevent us developing as Christ calls us to.

As his followers, we are challenged to speak up for people in our community who are marginalised or despised, because of race, colour, creed, gender, age or sexual orientation, because our Saviour doesn't categorize us by human standards. Instead, he sees us as individuals, made in his Father's image and loved to the uttermost by him. Christ didn't die for a select few, he died for the sins of the whole world and his Spirit is available for everyone who believes in him. That same Spirit will guide our discipleship, show us how and where God wants us to serve him and he will give us the love and wisdom to answer our call. However, we must not allow disagreement within churches to develop into active disputes, for **if a church is divided against itself, that church cannot stand**. May the Spirit of the living God strangely warm our hearts, as he did with John Wesley, so we can unite to take the Gospel Light into our sin-darkened world, whatever people choose to say about us. 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, '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 now and forevermore. Amen.**