

A Service for 7th August, 2022 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 33 verses 2 to 5

Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy. For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The LORD loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community and is set to a Gaelic melody, like many of their hymns. We sing the first three verses of hymn number 28, 'Jesus calls us here to meet him'.

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him

As, through word and song and prayer,
We affirm God's promised presence
Where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise;
Praise the Son who calls us friends;
Praise the Spirit who, among us,
To our hopes and fears attends.

2. Jesus calls us to confess him

Word of life and Lord of all,
Sharer of our flesh and frailness,
Saving all who fail or fall,
Tell his holy human story;
Tell his tales that all may hear;
Tell the world that Christ in glory
Came to earth to meet us here.

3, Jesus calls us to each other,
Vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender
Neither limit nor debar.

Join the hand of friend and stranger;
Join the hands of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter
In their common search for truth.

© John L. Bell (born 1949) & Graham Maule (born 1958)

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 second hymn was written in 1850 by Anita Laetitia Waring, who was born in Neath, Glamorgan in 1823 and raised as a Quaker. However, she became a member of the Anglican Church and was active in the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society, besides serving as a prison visitor during a period in which prison life was grim indeed. We are fortunate she joined the Established Church, as Quakers generally don't sing hymns! Hymn number 736, 'In heavenly love abiding'.

**1. In Heavenly love abiding,
No change my heart shall fear,
And safe is such confiding,
For nothing changes here:
The storm may roar without me,
My heart may low be laid;
But God is round about me,
And can I be dismayed?**

**2. Wherever he may guide me,
No want shall turn me back;
My Shepherd is beside me,
And nothing can I lack.**

**His wisdom ever waketh,
His sight is never dim;
He knows the way he taketh,
And I will walk with him.**

**3. Green pastures are before me,
Which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me,
Where darkest clouds have been;
My hope I cannot measure,
My path to life is free;
My Saviour has my treasure,
And he will walk with me.**

© Anita Laetitia Waring (1823 – 1910)

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.

God, the Author 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.

Lord the provider of our needs, 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.

God of healing and wellbeing, 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.

Holy 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.

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 12 verses 32 to 40

Jesus said,

“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes.

I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.” Amen.

“Jesus calls us from the worship / Of the vain world’s golden store, / From each idol that would keep us, / Saying: ‘Christian, love me more.’” We continue our worship with a hymn by the wife of a Nineteenth Century Primate of all Ireland, the remarkable Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander. Cecil was a quaint Irish custom of naming a child after a family sponsor. Needless to say, she was called Fanny by family and friends! Hymn number 250, ‘Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult’.

1. Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult

**Of our life’s wild restless sea,
Day by day his clear voice soundeth,
Saying, “Christian, follow me.”**

2. As of old apostles heard it

**By the Galilean lake
Turned from home and toil and kindred,
Leaving all for his dear sake.**

3. Jesus calls us from the worship

**Of the vain world's golden store:
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying, "Christian, love me more."**

**4. In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil, and hours of ease,
Still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."**

**5. Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Saviour, may we hear thy call,
Give our hearts to thine obedience,
Serve and love thee best of all.**

© Cecil Frances Alexander (1818 – 1895)

Sermon: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Luke 12:34

In our Gospel reading, Jesus directed his followers to sell their possessions so they might distribute the money raised amongst the poor. **'Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.'** This was to be their response to the generosity of God the Father, who had given them his kingdom, that is, had redeemed them through faith in Christ. When St. Luke wrote his gospel, most Christians believed the Second Coming was imminent, that within a matter of days or weeks, Jesus would return in glory to judge the world, so wealth and material possessions were useless and best shared with the needy. Two thousand years later, such an approach to personal wealth may seem impractical at best – perhaps naive to outsiders. After all, it is easy to argue that Christ's return is a long way off, probably not in our lifetime, so we can afford to acquire as much as we can for our retirement. However, isn't that what the parable of the foolish farmer is all about?

Moreover, not all worldly treasures are material; other things can divert us from kingdom values. Here is what Martin Luther said: **"What a man loves, that is his God. For he carries it in his heart, he goes about with it night and day, he sleeps and wakes with it; be it what it may—wealth or possessions, pleasure or renown."**

Pleasure or fame are very attractive, which is why shows like **'X Factor'**, or **'Strictly Come Ballroom'**, **'I'm a Celebrity – Get me out of here'**, or even **'Love Island'** are so popular. The problem with the pursuit of pleasure or fame, as with wealth, or possessions, is they can become serious distractions from living as God wants us to. If we become so single-minded in our attempts to become rich, or famous, or hedonistic, our relationships with other people, especially our families – and with God – may be jeopardised, because our striving for success will leave no time for anything, or anybody else.

This begs the question what constitutes purses that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven? Serving God's will, answering his call as we do kingdom work is what really counts. Moreover, it is serving God diligently, now, not sometime more convenient to us, for we could argue that we could seek fame and fortune first, then answer our call when time allows. None of us know when Christ will return, so we ought to be prepared for him at any time, just as Jesus' parable about servants waiting for their master's return warned his disciples to be vigilant however long the wait for their master.

In Jesus' day, a Jewish wedding feast could last for a week, so the servants would have no real idea when their master would come back home. Instead, they were to be ready to greet him, whatever the time of his return, be it the second watch from 9

p.m. to midnight, or the third watch from midnight till 3 a.m.. Their lamps should be lit to guide him to the door, for when he discovered their faithfulness to him and their diligence in their duties, he would reverse the master-servant roles and would serve them instead – just as Jesus demonstrated by washing the disciples' feet at the Last Supper. At the time Luke wrote his gospel, such role reversal would have been considered scandalous in the Roman World, yet Christ repeatedly dignifies serving others.

If you are wondering what meaning this reading has for us, ask yourself what you would do if Jesus appeared now in this church. Would any of us be ready for his judgement? Are any of our lives all we know they ought to be? Are there things we have done that need setting right? Are there old, unresolved conflicts with other people? Do we need to seek forgiveness and to forgive? Is our church actively living out the Good News, actively building God's kingdom, or is it coasting along, waiting for God to do all the work? Are our church's eyes turning inwards, preoccupied about finances and congregation size, or are they looking at ways of serving the community?

Many years ago, a monastery fell on hard times: nobody offered himself as a novice, so it looked as though the community would become extinct. The abbot visited the local bishop and discussed the situation with him. On his return to the monastery, the abbot was asked what the bishop had said. The abbot looked gravely at them and said, **"Remember, the Messiah is among you!"**

Gradually, the monks began to treat one another more carefully, just in case one of them was the Messiah and so a remarkable change occurred within the community. Outsiders began to visit the monastery once more, to worship and trade. Before long, new novices presented themselves, because they saw value, kingdom value, in what the community was working for. Old squabbles, power struggles, self-interest had been replaced by peace, reconciliation and mutual concern for one another's well-being.

If we adopt the same approach – **remembering that the Messiah is among us** – our attitudes will become more Christ-like: we will make sure we answer our calling promptly – not like me, for it took nearly a decade for me to apply for a note to preach; we will work actively for social justice, here and abroad, just as earlier generations of Methodists did – think of Lord Soper, who campaigned on many social issues, including unpopular causes that alienated many in authority. Ought more of our churches to be opened to the community on weekdays and not just to raise funds for the church?

Local churches run pensioners' lunch clubs, knit and natter groups or cafes, craft classes, mother and toddler groups or after school clubs, many run by non-church members. **If you are worried about vandalism, remember this, if others see value in the church's role, there less chance of it being vandalised, because all will look out for it.** Let's prayerfully seek **Christ's** guidance how we can meet some of our community's needs, as individuals, or as church, or in collaboration with other groups. As we emerge from the Pandemic, there are many needs and many opportunities to grasp. **As soon as we know Jesus' will, let's do it, for he's our real treasure and our hearts should be with him as we serve him, now, not @ some remote point in future. Amen.**

We close our worship with another hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. The authors frequently set their hymns to old Scots ballad tunes and this is true for our final hymn, which is sung to "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.

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Benediction

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