

A service for 7th July, 2024

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. We shall sing 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, glory, power and praise are yours, now and evermore. We are here to offer our best in worship and adoration, for we see in the beauty of our world 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 teaching 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. He not only

showed us how we ought to live, but died like a criminal at Calvary to atone for the sins of the whole world. For our sakes, he broke the hold of sin and, when he was raised from the tomb, he ensured death does not have the final word by offering us everlasting life. That is truly amazing grace, O Lord! Living God, Word of all life throughout the universe, our sustainer and Saviour, all honour, glory, power and praise are yours, now and evermore. 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 the good things we enjoy; for people who guide, love and inspire us, for many more blessings we receive from you, but most of all for your undying love which we can 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 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 our neighbours is often lukewarm. Help us to change our ways as we acknowledge our failings; restore us to righteousness, and breathe new life into the embers of our faith.

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

Merciful Lord, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and have already 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.

Our next hymn 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.

We shall sing 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 pray for our world and its needs.

Almighty God, we ask you to guide and empower us as we strive to answer our call from Christ Jesus, but when the best we can do is not enough, then reach out and move the hearts of people who are able to heal some of the world's brokenness to act instead.

We pray for the churches in our Circuit and, indeed, the World Church. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity. May the Holy Spirit help us use our love, gifts and graces to guide our neighbours to know Jesus as the Saviour of the world. Help our words and actions of love carry the gospel light to this strife-ridden and broken world.

Jesus declared, 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God', so we ask your blessing on everyone who is working for peace. We pray for aid-workers and medics as well as negotiators that they enjoy success and remain safe in their work. May fighting in Ukraine, in Gaza / Palestine, Haiti and Somalia come to an end and may the tension between Iran and Israel not escalate into open warfare. Lord, teach national leaders to negotiate and compromise instead of resorting to force. Inspire them to govern with mercy and justice which are the foundations of real peace. Lord, remember in your compassion, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression, granting all of them the courage and support they need to rebuild their lives. May they find healing in body, mind and spirit.

Lord of creation, we know that our lifestyles are contributing to the breakdown of the ecosystem upon which we and all living beings depend. The effects of global warming are evident in the extreme weather that is affecting every continent, with floods and droughts, famines, wildfires, melting ice-caps and increasingly strong storms making life increasingly difficult. For the sake of life on this planet and for future generations, help us to live in a more sustainable way by becoming less wasteful and using only the resources we need.

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 dementia and their carers 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 the warmth of your love, so they may be comforted and find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us free from harm and inspire us to honour you through our words and actions, in Jesus' precious 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 or not we might have fallen into the same trap in their position. After all, 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 and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon,' not even Joseph's son, for his paternity was questioned. Thus most Nazarenes rejected him as the Messiah and 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 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 used the Hebrew **SHUB** – turning from evil and condemnation, returning to covenant living and salvation, 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 filled them at Pentecost.

Our reading warns that Good News won't be accepted universally, so our faith must be strong enough to accept times of failure, and rejection, in order that 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 in the United Kingdom and throughout the world, especially among people deemed hopeless cases by the Established Church. 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, Yorkshire, 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 and often died in transit. Instead of being warmly welcomed, 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 1970 and the 1990s.

Dorothy wasn't intimidated by her experiences. Instead she devoted herself 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 October 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 in December 1878, aged only forty-six, thirty thousand people attended her funeral and a statue was erected in her memory. Only three other nurses have statues in their honour: Florence Nightingale, Mart Seacole and Edith Cavell. Walsall's main hospital bears the name by which Dorothy was best known: Sister Dora.

Christ Jesus calls us to remain steadfast when we face rejection and failure, for our increasingly secular society is just as judgemental as Jesus' Nazarenes were. 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 remember, we don't work in our 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, with Christ alongside 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 the late 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. *Copyright John Bell & Graham Maule WGRG Ioana Community (1987)*

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.