

## A service for 7<sup>th</sup> June, 2026 (StF)

### **Call to Worship: Psalm 116 verses 12 to 14**

How can I repay the LORD for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will fulfil my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. Amen.

*There is no record of who wrote our first hymn, but it surfaced in the early 1980s. As it is a quiet reflection, we shall remain seated as we sing hymn number 18, 'Be still and know that I am God.'*

**1. Be still and know that I am God,  
Be still and know that I am God,  
Be still and know that I am God.**

**2. I am the Lord who saves and heals,  
I am the Lord who saves and heals,  
I am the Lord who saves and heals.**

**3. In you, O Lord, I put my trust,  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust,  
In you, O Lord, I put my trust.**

### ***Let us pray.***

Almighty God, your Word created our universe and all life throughout it. You revealed yourself to human beings through the Law and prophets, so that we might know, love and serve you, but when we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies, you displayed your boundless love and grace in your Son. Jesus Christ, came not only to bring Good News in words and deeds, but gave his life at Calvary to break the power of Satan by atoning for the sins of the world. When Christ was raised from tomb, he broke the power of death and offers us eternal life through faith in him.

Lord, your wisdom and power are far beyond our understanding, but we offer our humble thanks for your boundless care and everlasting love. Thank you for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of blessings you offer us. As we look around on this Summer's day, we thank you for this beautiful world and for your enduring love, for even when we stray from you, we know that in love you seek us out and welcome us home.

Merciful God, we confess that sometimes we do not appreciate all the blessings you bestow upon us. Sometimes we spurn your gifts because they require us to use them for the well-being of other people, rather than our own prestige or benefit. At other times we abuse your gifts, or simply ignore them because of our laziness, fear, or sense of unworthiness. Often, we let you down because we try to act in our own strength, rather than calling on the Holy Spirit to empower, guide and encourage us. O Lord, in Jesus' lovely name pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, you hear and answer our prayers and we are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you. From now on, may the Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you want us to and use our gifts and graces 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.

*We continue our worship with a 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 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.**

© John Bell (1949) & Graham Maule (1958 – 2020)

***We come to our prayers for people nearby and far away. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy,' please respond with, 'Hear our prayer'. Let us pray***

Almighty God, like the first apostles, we hear your call to be bearers of good news to this beautiful but broken world. Grant us the might of your Holy Spirit, so we may serve you as you want us to by helping our neighbours and acting as your earthly hands, offering comfort, friendship and hope in Jesus' name. Keep us active and diligent in our service, even if this means we are led from our comfort zone. Lord, we know that some situations are beyond our scope, but nothing is impossible for you, so we pray that you will heal our wounded world as we acknowledge that human failure to live as you call us to is responsible for a great deal of its suffering.

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

Lord of all, may the leaders of nations govern with justice and mercy, so their peoples may live in peace. Teach them about the need to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, to avoid them from escalating into warfare. We pray for swift and just resolutions to conflicts in Ukraine, Palestine, the West Bank and Gaza, in Lebanon and Iran, besides other countries where fighting still rages. We pray too for victims not only of wars, but of terrorism, discrimination and persecution, remembering Jewish and Moslem communities under attack here in the United Kingdom. Help us speak out against violence, injustice and prejudice, to help build up our communities, rather than damaging them. Grant victims of hatred and intolerance the courage and support they need to find security and rebuild their lives.

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

Hear our prayer for people we know who are ill in body, mind, or spirit, recovering from injuries or operations, who are troubled, anxious or lonely, people who live with a dementia and everybody bearing the pain of bereavement. In a period of silence, we pray for everyone we know who needs your help at this time ..... Help us to reach out to them, Lord, offering friendship and practical support wherever possible, but we ask you to enfold them in the warmth of your redemptive grace, so they may regain their health, find courage, hope and experience an enduring peace.

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

Lord God, we pray for our church, churches in our local Circuits and the World Church. May the Holy Spirit end our divisions and unite us in love and mission to bear good news to a world that dearly needs it. May the Christ light shine brightly through our words and actions as we seek to do his will.

Abba, Father, bless us our families and our friends as we answer our call to serve you. May our joy of knowing how dearly you love us inspire us, in the Spirit's power, to share the abundance of your love with both friends and strangers, so we honour you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

***Frederick William Faber was an Anglican priest who followed John Henry Newman into the Church of Rome. John Newman founded The Oratory at Edgbaston, whilst Revd. Faber founded Brompton Oratory, described by Cardinal Newman as 'second-rate'! However, Frederick Faber demonstrated his grasp of theology with the wonderful words for our next hymn. Hymn number 416, 'There's a wideness in God's mercy'.***

**1. There's a wideness in God's mercy**

**Like the wideness of the sea;**

**There's a kindness in his justice,**

**Which is more than liberty.**

**2. There is plentiful redemption  
In the blood that has been shed;  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.**

**3. There is grace enough for thousands  
Of new worlds as great as this;  
There is room for fresh creations  
In that upper home of bliss.**

**4. For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of the mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.**

**5. But we make his love too narrow  
By false limits of our own;  
And we magnify his strictness  
With a zeal he will not own.**

**6. If our love were but more simple,  
We should take him at his word;  
And our lives would be illumined  
By the presence of our Lord.**

© *Frederick William Faber {1814 – 63}*

**The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 9 verses 9 to 13 & 18 to 26**

As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth.

"Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?"

On hearing this, Jesus said,

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

While he was saying this, a ruler came and knelt before him and said, "My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live." Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples. Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself,

"If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." Jesus turned and saw her.

"Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.

When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, he said,

"Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep." But they laughed at him. After the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took the girl by the hand, and she got up. News of this spread through all that region. Amen.

*We shall sing a hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community.  
Many of their hymns are set to Scots ballad melodies and this is no exception, for it*

*is sung to 'Ye banks and braes o' bonny Doon'. Hymn number 655, 'We cannot measure how you heal'.*

1. We cannot measure how you heal  
Or answer every sufferer's prayer,  
Yet we believe your grace responds  
Where faith and doubt unite to care.  
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,  
Survive to hold and heal and warn,  
To carry all through death to life  
And cradle children yet unborn.
2. The pain that will not go away,  
The guilt that clings from things long past,  
The fear of what the future holds,  
Are present as if meant to last.  
But present, too, is love which tends  
The hurt we never hoped to find,  
The private agonies inside,  
The memories that haunt the mind.
3. So some have come who need your help  
And some have come to make amends  
As hands which shaped and saved the world  
Are present in the touch of friends.  
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here  
To mend the body, mind and soul,  
To disentangle peace from pain  
And make your broken people whole.

© John Bell (b. 1949) & Graham Maule (1958- 2019)

**Sermon: "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." Matthew 9:13**

Jesus' ministry challenged the status quo, particularly in the eyes of many Pharisees. He mixed with and ate with 'the wrong kind of people', he would not observe long-established traditions that had almost been given the importance of the Commandments and he certainly did not treat them with the deference they thought he owed them. They considered their traditions or Rules of Righteousness to be the only way to win God's favour – and there were 613 rules in all! Fellow Jews who fell short of the standards were called sinners and considered irredeemably lost, worthy of their contempt.

Matthew, or Levi as he is called in Mark and Luke, was a tax collector in Capernaum. Although commentaries say that he was probably a customs official charging tolls from merchants coming into Galilee from Philip's tetrarchy across the Jordan, so he probably worked for Herod Antipas, rather than the Roman occupiers, but would have been considered a collaborator with Rome and a thief, for tax-collectors usually demanded more than they were entitled to and kept the difference. In the eyes of the Pharisees, Matthew was a **telones**, a **publican**, no better than men who raised money for Rome. Nevertheless, Jesus called him to be a disciple and the reading implies that Matthew left his booth without hesitation, showing the faith needed to set aside the security of his past life.

Of course, in the eyes of the Pharisees, he was still a collaborator and sinner, so when Jesus and his disciples ate with him – and were joined by other tax collectors, they were appalled. They demanded of the disciples why Jesus ate 'with tax collectors and 'sinners', common Jews who could not observe the rules of righteousness and were

outcast. Jesus' reply was cutting: **'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick'**. Pharisees considered themselves God's elect, so they felt they did not need Jesus to draw them to God, yet the very people they despised would be receptive to good news and be saved. Jesus quoted Hosea 6:6, **'For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings'**. Rituals and trappings of piety are not wanted by God, but mercy – **Chesed** – or loving-kindness is. In his book, "Christian Doctrine", Mike Highton describes sin as a refusal to love or be loved, not only of God but our neighbours, too. Pharisees showed their devotion through ritual and tradition, but signally failed to show compassion toward people who fell short of what they considered righteousness. Jesus ended by saying that he had not come for the 'righteous', rather the self-righteous, who were too stiff-necked to see the plank in their eyes, whilst they were criticising the speck in neighbours' eyes. The sinners were only too well aware of their failings and were fertile ground for the seeds of faith to grow in.

The second part of our reading is dealt with in greater detail in Mark chapter 5 and Luke chapter 8. The ruler was **Jairus**, the elder of a synagogue. His daughter had just died, but he implored Jesus to lay his hands upon her, so she might be returned to life. His plea demonstrated real faith, for he was acknowledging Jesus as great a prophet as Elijah, who raised a widow's son at **Zarephath**, though not as the Messiah. However, he was asking for Jesus to become ceremonially defiled by touching the girl.

As in the account of Luke and Mark, Jesus was touched by a woman who had lived with continual menstrual bleeding for twelve years. Unlike Mark, Matthew did not elaborate, for his Jewish converts to Christ would have appreciated that the poor woman would have been deemed unclean and anything or anybody she touched would be defiled. Like Jairus, she believed Jesus could heal her, so she touched a zit-zit, or tassel on his prayer shawl. Touching a tassel, or zit-zit, represented an unspoken prayer and, being human and divine, Jesus knew her need and assured her that her faith had cured her – and she was healed. Jesus accepted his ceremonial defilement and instead restored the woman to family and friends to live as fully as she had before her sickness. Finally, Jesus dismissed the scoffing professional mourners and took the girl's hand, restoring her to life to the amazement of all in that district.

The reading is important, for it shows how the faith of three 'outsiders' led to their salvation and restoration. We don't know whether or not Jairus or the woman became followers, though we know that Matthew or Levi was a disciple. We saw Jesus defying traditional practices through compassion – chesed – not cussedness. He saw the individual and his or her need and reached out to them, literally or figuratively whatever his critics may have felt or said.

We live in a world where it is too easy to refuse love to people whose race, colour, creed, politics, gender or lifestyles we dislike, or differ from ours. Social Media has become a channel for people to vent their prejudices, demonize all asylum-seekers, rather than those who are trying to exploit our country; to ferment both antisemitism and islamophobia. I fear for our international footballers as the World Cup begins, for we have seen how some of the Lionesses were trolled in their last competition. On a news report from Golders Green this week, a Jewish doctor said that some of his colleagues had declared they would not treat patients because of their views, or ethnicity. You don't have to be Mike Highton to recognize such attitudes as sinful!

God loves all of us boundlessly, even though he may disapprove of things we say and do. He wants everyone to turn back to him, change their lives and find peace, but for that to happen, we need to roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty, literally or metaphorically, rather than standing on the side-lines, criticizing and grumbling. **May**

**God grant us the faith, not only to accept his abundant love, but to follow the example of his Son, our Saviour and share that love with all-comers. Amen.**

*We shall end with a hymn written by Revd. Bryn Rees in 1974. He was the Minister at Tetherdown URC, Muswell Hill, London at the time and his organist, Gerald Barnes composed one of four melodies for the hymn which, naturally, is called “Tetherdown”! Hymn number 255, ‘The kingdom of God is justice and joy’.*

**1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy,  
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;  
God’s power and glory in Jesus we know,  
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.**

**2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,  
The lepers are cleansed, the sinners find place,  
The outcast are welcomed God’s banquet to share,  
And hope is awakened in place of despair.**

**3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,  
Believe the Good News, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,  
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.**

**4. The kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,  
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;  
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,  
And all things cry glory to God all in all!      © Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}**

***Benediction***

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