

**A service for 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2021 (StF)**

**Call to worship: Psalm 86 verses 11 & 12**

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name for ever. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by Revd. John Monsell and published in the mid Nineteenth Century. In his preface to “Hymns of Love and Praise for the Church’s Year” Rev. Monsell wrote, ‘Most of us are too distant and reserved’ ... ‘we sing not as if our hearts were on fire with the divine flame of love and joy as we should hymn Him who is chief in the courts of heaven and altogether lovely’ ... ‘We sing, not as we should sing to He who is Chief among the ten thousand, the Altogether Lovely.’ Let’s try to prove him wrong! Hymn number 34, ‘O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’*

**1. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,  
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,  
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.**

**2. Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,  
High on his heart he will bear it for you,  
Comfort your sorrows, and answer your prayerfulness,  
Showing the pathway your feet should pursue.**

**3. Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness  
Of the poor wealth you would count as your own;  
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,  
These are the offerings to bring to his throne.**

**4. These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,  
He will accept for the name that is dear;  
Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,  
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.**

**5. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,  
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,  
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.**

© John Samuel Bewley Monsell {1811 – 1875}

***Let us turn to the Lord in prayer.***

Almighty and Everlasting God, whose Word created the universe from darkness and chaos; you breathed life into every living being and you provide the needs of your creation by your constant love. Your power and wisdom are as unfathomable as the height, depth and breadth of your love, yet we know you care for sinful human beings so much you have tried to draw us close to you from the beginning of time. Although you spoke to us through the prophets and patriarchs, we did not listen and rebelled against you. However, instead of rejecting, or punishing us, you took our mortal form and came to us as Jesus Christ.

Jesus lived among us to reveal your true nature in his teaching and healing, but he died at Calvary to atone for the sins of the world. By his resurrection, Jesus broke the power of death and he offers us new life through faith in him, not by any merit of our own, nor by our works, but through his grace. Therefore, Lord, we come to you with

joyful hearts, asking you to take away all anxieties that may distract us from worship, in the name of Christ, our Saviour. Amen.

***Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession to the Lord.***

Heavenly Father, we offer thanks for the many blessings we receive from you, day by day: for the beautiful, self-sustaining world on which we live; for the many good things we enjoy; for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, but most of all that you love us even when we are loveless and unlovable.

Merciful Lord, pardon us when we don't love our neighbours as we know we ought, for our words and actions that have hurt others and grieved you and for times when we have not helped neighbours in need or distress. Forgive us, too, when we fail to love and serve you wholeheartedly, for our failure commit ourselves to you and our call to serve. Help us to change our ways, so that our lives become Christ-centred, not self-centred.

Gracious and faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and in boundless grace have not only forgiven us, but call us to follow once more. Therefore, Lord, as you offer us a fresh start, fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in the blessed name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend. 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 written ten years ago by Marjorie Dobson, a Methodist local preacher from County Durham. Hymn number 243, 'A rich young man came seeking'.*

**1. A rich young man came seeking –**

**God's kingdom was his aim.**

**The law had been his guidebook.**

**His life was free from blame.**

**But Jesus asked the courage**

**To give his wealth away.**

**The young man turned in sorrow,**

**That price he would not pay.**

**2. The rich men's gifts were lavish**

**And made for public show.**

**The widow's gift was humble**

**And only God would know,**

**In giving to the Temple,**

**Although her coins were small,**

**Her gift had so much meaning**

**Because she gave her all.**

**3. One boy brought loaves and fishes,**

**No other food was there,**

**But Jesus fed the thousands**

**And still had bread to spare.**

**The miracle of plenty  
Soon spread beyond that place.  
That simple gift was offered,  
Then multiplied by grace.**

**4. Lord, keep our care for money  
From turning into greed.  
Help us to use it wisely  
To meet each other's need.  
For whether poor or wealthy,  
We have so much to share  
And open-hearted giving  
Will show your loving care.**

© Marjorie Dobson (Born 1940)

***In our prayer of Intercession, we pray for neighbours nearby and far away. Let us pray.***

Lord of all, we recognize your faithfulness in meeting our daily needs and for loving us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, to show us how to live as you want us to and to offer healing and hope to our sin-broken world, for we know many people are not as blessed as we are. Therefore, we pray for our neighbours, those near to us and far away: for people who face hardship and suffering, both here and abroad. Grant us the faith and compassion to act as your earthly hands, by helping us reach out to offer practical support to neighbours who are in need or distress, but where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to intervene, for nothing is impossible to you.

Heavenly King, give the rulers of the world's nations both wisdom and compassion to care for the well-being of the people they govern. Teach them to seek justice and to deal mercifully, for only when justice and mercy prevail can there be real peace. We pray for an end to conflicts and wars around the world which don't only cause injury, death and destruction, but swell the number of refugees who are seeking to escape from terror and suffering. Hear our prayer for the victims of warfare, terrorism, persecution and prejudice across the world, especially at present in Afghanistan, now controlled by the Taliban and facing heart-breaking problems.

God of creation, as COP 26 continues, we are aware of recent terrible floods and wildfires on several continents which are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We pray that the delegates at the conference won't just use it as a talking-shop, but will take practical steps to begin the necessary changes to our lifestyles before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

Lord of health and wellbeing, hear our prayer for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit. Grant them healing, renewed strength and hope, not only as a result of the professional care and support they receive, but by experiencing your presence in their time need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them and for whom the past year and a half has been incredibly difficult. Reassure all of them in their confusion, comfort them in their distress and let them feel loved and valued even in the midst of their brokenness. Remember, too, our neighbours who, as a result of the pandemic, are lonely, afraid, unemployed, or feel abandoned and unloved and everyone who has lost loved ones, in particular people lost during this pandemic. In a time of silence, we shall bring to you the names of people for whom we are concerned .....

Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but hold everybody for whom we pray in the warm embrace of your love, in which they may find healing, courage, comfort and peace.

God our Saviour, we ask your blessing upon people who have worked steadfastly to support us throughout this pandemic: the NHS, carers, scientists and key-workers throughout the country. May they be successful and safe in their endeavours, dear Lord.

Sovereign God, help us to find new ways to serve our community as we begin to emerge from the pandemic. We pray for our church, our Circuit and for the worldwide Church: unite us in love and outreach, so our words and actions bring good news to our neighbours and reveal that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of the world.

We pray for ourselves: where we are weak in body, give us delight in the strengths we possess; where we have abundant energy, help us use it wisely and well; where we feel downcast and lost, grant us faith to light our way to where we should be. Loving Lord, we don't know what others will ask of us, so we pray for the Spirit to guide and encourage us when times are difficult, for vision and hope to enable us to take a risk for the sake of the gospel and courage to remain true to the teaching of Christ.

Abba, Father God, we ask you to bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe from harm and help us not only to lead good lives but to boldly take the light of the gospel to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn by Matt Redman, who was converted to Christianity at the age of 10 and attended the Anglican church of St Andrew's Chorleywood, in Hertfordshire. It was there he learned to play guitar, and at the age of 20, he began leading worship services and released his first album. Hymn number 446, 'I will offer up my life in spirit and truth'.*

**I will offer up my life in spirit and truth,**

**Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to you.**

**In surrender I must give my every part;**

**Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart. *Chorus:***

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring*

*To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?*

*Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung*

*As a praise of your name for the things You have done?*

*O my words could not tell, not even in part,*

*Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.*

**You deserve my every breath for you've paid the great cost;**

**Giving up your life to death, even death on a cross.**

**You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin,**

**Opened up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in.**

© Matt Redman (Born 1974)

**Our Gospel reading is Mark chapter 12 verses 38 to 44**

As he taught, Jesus said,

"Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market-places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." Amen.

### **Sermon: *Hypocrisy and Commitment.* Mark 12:38 – 44**

Our reading refers to Jesus in the Temple in the week leading to his crucifixion. Mark had related how the Lord entered Jerusalem in triumph, then caused consternation by overturning the tables of traders in the temple courts. From that point, Sadducees, Scribes and Pharisees asked loaded questions to try to discredit Jesus, or even to lay himself open to charges of blasphemy. Naturally, the Lord turned the tables on his adversaries, but Jesus was clearly angered by their deviousness, so he criticised them publicly. Interestingly, Matthew devoted almost a chapter to this condemnation, but Mark's remarks, though short, deliver a hard blow, nevertheless. Nevertheless, I am going to broaden some of Mark's comments with references to Matthew's, so we can reach the heart of what Christ was saying, for this was the point at which he finally broke with the Jewish religious establishment.

He began by warning his listeners about teachers of law who sought the praise of men and abused their privileges. Clearly, not all Scribes and Pharisees did so, though a large number did. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus told the crowd to obey what the teachers of law said, but not to copy what they did. In other words, while their knowledge of the Scriptures, the **Midrash**, or book that clarifies gaps or inconsistencies in Bible stories, and the **Talmud**, or book of religious customs and legal code was sound, they failed to practise what they preached. For example, they liked to wear long, flowing robes like priests, or, in Matthew, they wore a tallit, or prayer shawl with extra-long fringes, and over-size phylacteries, (boxes containing scrolls of scripture which are worn by Jews on their left arm and forehead), so they appeared holier than others.

These teachers of law expected to be greeted with titles such as Rabbi, Master or father by ordinary people, to have places of honour in the synagogue and at banquets. It ought to be remembered that teachers of law were not paid for their services, so they relied upon the hospitality of devout Jews. Unfortunately, those against whom Jesus spoke exploited the generosity offered them by people of limited means, especially widows. Worse still, they often appropriated widows' property, either by charging extortionate rates for giving financial advice, or turning the property to their own use. Last but not least, they tried to impress the people of their piety by offering lengthy prayers, not to honour God, but to boost their public image.

Jesus did not deny that these teachers of law knew all about religious matters, but he condemned them all the more for their blatant hypocrisy and abuse of the very people God commands us to care for: the poor, vulnerable and weak. He declared that such renegades would face severe punishment at God's final judgment. In effect Christ was telling us that service for him was more important than human positions of honour. He means that leadership should never be a goal to be sought for one's own benefit, or prestige, but as an opportunity to serve others, just as he did by his own example as Servant king.

Mark moved the scene to **the court of the women** in the temple, where thirteen chests, called **trumpets** because of their shape, stood. These trumpets stood at the entrance to the **treasure chamber for free will offerings and temple tax to be given.**

Jesus watched as many rich people threw in large amounts, but then a poor widow appeared and put in two very small coins, called mites in the NIV. Those small brass coins were lepta, worth less than a sixtieth of a farthing, yet they were all the widow possessed. Most widows of that time depended upon family support and their poverty was often grievous – hence Christ’s condemnation of the teachers of law who preyed upon and cheated them. Although the wealthy worshippers would have deemed her offering contemptible, Jesus declared that she had effectively given more than the wealthy donors, who offered what they could well afford, while she had given everything to the Lord. Unlike the rich donors, she gave all she had to God, trusting in his providential care.

This reading means more than being open-handed and warm hearted in our church offering, though the more the church receives, the more it can do. I still love the story of Wendy Dudley, a local preacher who, when leading worship at a church notorious for its parsimony, just before the offertory, quoted from the fourth verse of ‘Take my life, and let it be’,: **“Take my silver and my gold, / Not a mite would I withhold;”** She then glowered at the congregation and said, **‘I hope you think Jesus is worth more than a packet of cigarettes!’** It is said that a record amount was given.

I believe that what Mark is telling us is that we should offer ourselves to God’s service totally and sacrificially. If, or rather when he calls us, we should answer that call, whether or not it suits our purpose or inclination; whether or not that calling makes us humble ourselves, rather than exalting us. Jesus humbled himself by taking our mortal form, abandoning the riches of heaven to live among ordinary people, serving their needs, before dying in agony and shame at Calvary. **In God’s kingdom human values are inverted. Christ won’t judge us by our wealth or status, but by the love we offer our neighbours without expectation of repayment. My friends, how much is Jesus worth to you in all forms of giving? Amen**

*We close our worship with a hymn written by Revd. John Copley Winslow, or ‘Jack Winslow’, as he preferred to be known. He was a Church of England vicar, lecturer and missionary in India, from where he returned to serve as chaplain at Bryanston School and, later, Lee Abbey, North Devon. Hymn number 449, ‘Lord of creation, to you be all praise’.*

- 1. Lord of creation, to you be all praise!  
Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!  
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,  
And yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.**
- 2. Lord of all power, I give you my will,  
In joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.  
Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;  
And, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.**
- 3. Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,  
Rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;  
What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard  
Is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.**
- 4. Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;  
I praise and adore you for all you impart,  
Your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,  
Your presence to shield me, whatever betide.**

**5. Lord of all being, I give you my all;  
If I should disown you, I stumble and fall;  
But, led in your service your word to obey,  
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.**

© *Jack C. Winslow (1882 – 1974)*

***Benediction***

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