

## A service for 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2021 (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 34 verses 1 to 3

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. Amen.

*Our first hymn was written by Revd. Fred Pratt Green, at the invitation of a Methodist church in Texas, for the final service of a festival centred around worship, the arts and music in 1978. The dedication of a communion table, font and lectern was to be made during that service. The church wanted the hymn set to 'Abbots Leigh', but "Singing the Faith" uses Henry Smart's 'Bethany'. Hymn number 25, 'God is here! As we his people'.*

**1. God is here! As we his people  
Meet to offer praise and prayer,  
May we find in fuller measure  
What it is in Christ we share.  
Here, as in the world around us,  
All our varied skills and arts  
Wait the coming of the Spirit  
Into open minds and hearts.**

**2. Here are symbols to remind us  
Of our lifelong need of grace;  
Here are table, font and pulpit;  
Here the cross has central place.  
Here in honesty of preaching,  
Here in silence, as in speech,  
Here in newness and renewal,  
God the Spirit comes to each.**

**3. Here our children find a welcome  
In the Shepherd's flock and fold:  
Here as bread and wine are taken,  
Christ sustains us, as of old.  
Here the servants of the Servant  
Seek in worship to explore  
What it means in daily living  
To believe and to adore.**

**4. Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom,  
In an age of change and doubt,  
Keep us faithful to the gospel,  
Help us work your purpose out.  
Here, in this day's dedication,  
All we have to give, receive:  
We, who cannot live without you,  
We adore you! We believe!**

© Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

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

Loving heavenly Father, all honour, glory, power and praise are yours alone, for your Word transformed darkness and chaos into this vast swirling universe of stars, planets and moons. Your power and wisdom not only created life but formed self-sustaining

eco-systems enabling life to continue. In your love you reached out to humankind, offering guidance through the patriarchs and prophets. Even when we rebelled against your teaching and set ourselves in opposition to you, your love for us is so great that you did not abandon us, but instead took our form as Christ Jesus.

Jesus came to show us how we should live through his words and actions, but he also came to bear the judgment for the sins of the world by becoming the one perfect sacrifice on a cross at Calvary. His death broke the power of sin and when he was raised, Jesus ensured that death doesn't have the final word by offering us everlasting life as his great gift of grace, not something we can grasp by works, nor which we deserve. Loving heavenly Father, all honour, glory, power and praise are yours alone, so we come to worship you with hearts filled with joy and awe. Amen.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession.***

Lord, we have come to thank you for this beautiful world in which we live, for all the good things we enjoy, for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, for rich, fulfilling experiences and for opportunities that have enhanced our days, but above all things, thank you for being our Good Shepherd, for even when we stray from you, when we are loveless and unlovable, we know you will seek us out and save us from our folly.

Holy God, when we consider ourselves as straying sheep, we reflect upon our failures to love and serve you wholeheartedly and to love our neighbours as we know we should. .... For the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do, forgive us O Lord and bring us back to you in our deeds and words, so we may be your holy people.

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 second hymn was written by Karen Lafferty at a point in her life when money was tight after she had given up a successful singing career in order to serve as a missionary to drug addicts and prostitutes in Amsterdam. She lived out the words of the hymn we are about to sing. Hymn number 254, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God,'*

**1. Seek ye first the kingdom of God,  
And his righteousness,  
And all these things shall be added unto you;**

**Allelu- , Alleluia: *Chorus:***

***Alleluia, Alleluia,***

***Alleluia, Allelu-, Alleluia!***

**2. Ask, and it shall be given unto you;  
Seek, and ye shall find;  
Knock, and the door shall be opened unto you;**

**Allelu- , Alleluia: *Chorus:***

***Alleluia, Alleluia,***

*Alleluia, Allelu-, Alleluia!*

**3. We shall not live by bread alone,  
But by every word  
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;**

**Allelu-, Alleluia: *Chorus:***

*Alleluia, Alleluia,*

*Alleluia, Allelu-, Alleluia!*

© Karen Lafferty (born 1948)

***In our prayers of intercession we think of people near and far away.***

Heavenly Father, we offer praise and thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining planet which displays your power and glory. However, whenever we hear or read the news, we are reminded about the world's brokenness, much of which is the result of human failure, greed, cruelty, pride, foolishness and selfishness. Lord, we acknowledge that you have blessed us and as a result offer ourselves to serve as your earthly hands as we seek to help neighbours who are in trouble or in need. Grant us the patience, wisdom, courage and compassion to act as Jesus would act, but in situations where our best is not enough, we pray that you will reach out to others who can bring about healing and wholeness, for to you all things are possible.

Holy God, we ask you to revive our church and churches throughout the world, particularly as restrictions caused by COVID19 are eased, so that we may a blessing to our communities and to people further afield. Help us set aside our divisions and differences, so we speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him as a united body of believers. Bless and use our love, gifts and graces to share Good News in our actions as well as our words, so our lives reveal the grace of Jesus.

Almighty God, events like the terrible floods in Germany and Belgium with mass destruction and the loss of many lives are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for people affected by the floods and for campaigners against pollution and irresponsible consumerism. May not only governments but most of the population recognize the need for change, so that future generations will inherit a habitable world.

God of shalom, of peace and harmony, we pray for peace in a world defiled with conflicts, persecution, terrorism, prejudice and sectarianism. We pray for national leaders to seek justice and mercy in their dealings, so peace may flow like a healing river and we pray for healing of the divisions we see in our own society. Let your peace begin our own dealings with our neighbours, so our lives reflect what we ask for the world.

Author of wellbeing, we pray for people who are ill in body or mind, whose lives are blighted with pain and anxiety especially those whose treatment has been held up because of the pandemic. May they receive treatment that will restore their health, or at least mitigate the results of neglect and delay. We pray for those whose mental and spiritual health have been adversely affected by lockdown restrictions, asking that that they will not only seek but will receive they support they need. Lord, remember people living with a dementia, their families, friends and carers whose distress has been increased by this pandemic. Help them come safely through these testing times.

We offer our prayer for people who are in any kind of need or trouble; everyone who is living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, in particular, all who mourn 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 friendship and practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be comforted and healed. Bless them with courage, hope and enduring peace.

We pray for most people in the country to behave responsibly as legal COVID restrictions have been eased, so coronavirus can be kept in check and vulnerable people remain safe. Meanwhile, we continue to ask your blessing upon everybody who has been working for our wellbeing during this crisis, especially members of the NHS, scientists, carers and key-workers. Bless all of them, grant them success in their work and keep them safe.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us our families and our friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us be beacons of good news, day by day. May we learn to share the love you give us in such abundance with everybody we meet, in Jesus' holy name. Amen.

*Our next hymn was originally written in Urdu during 1940, by an anonymous Pakistani, and set to a Pakistani folk tune. It was translated by Dermott Monahan, ten years later, for Sunday School anniversary services. We shall sing hymn number 252, 'Jesus the Lord said: "I am the Bread,"'*

**1. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,  
The Bread of Life for the world am I.  
The Bread of Life for the world am I,  
The Bread of Life for the world am I.'  
Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Bread,  
The Bread of Life for the world am I'.**

**2. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Vine –  
The true and fruitful Vine am I.' .....**

**3. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Way,  
The true and living Way am I.' .....**

**4. Jesus the Lord said, 'I am the Light,  
The one true Light of the world am I.' .....**

**5. Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,  
The Resurrection and the Life am I.'  
The Resurrection and the Life am I,  
The Resurrection and the Life am I.'**

**Jesus the Lord said: 'I am the Life,  
The Resurrection and the Life am I.'** © tr. Dermott Monahan (1906 – 57) *Singing the Faith* version

**The Gospel reading is John chapter 6 verse 35 and verses 41 to 51**

Then Jesus declared,

“I am the bread of life. They who come to me will never go hungry, and those who believe in me will never be thirsty.” At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said,

“Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, those who believe have

everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a person may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, they will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.” Amen.

**Sermon: “*I am the living bread that came down from heaven.*” John 6:51**

When firms like Leyland Rover, BHS and Carillion collapsed, and thousands lost both their jobs and pensions, when smaller contractors weren't paid and went out of business, there was great indignation as senior executives walked away with fortunes. However, when they are exposed many of these people justified their actions with, 'Everybody does it', or 'If I didn't do it, someone else would'. This is simply self-interest over-riding morality.

Nevertheless, self-interest is not new: two thousand years ago Jesus fed a crowd of more than five thousand people with only five barley loaves and two fish, yet the Galilean multitude did not see the miracle as a sign that Jesus is the Messiah. All they saw was somebody who would provide food without the need for them to work for it. That is why they wanted to make him king – by force, if necessary – rather than work to establish God's kingdom. They tried to persuade Jesus to provide further food, claiming that they needed a sign to believe Jesus was God's anointed – a sign like Moses providing the Israelites with manna in the wilderness! However, Christ was not prepared to be a source of free food. He told the multitude that he was offering 'food that endures to eternal life'. They, however, could see no further than their own material desires: they forgot the Scriptures of Deuteronomy chapter 8; 'Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.'

To emphasise the point, Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. They who come to me will never go hungry, and those who believe in me will never be thirsty", adding, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, they will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." As most of the crowd were Galileans, they knew Jesus' family, so they were offended by his claim to have come from heaven. They did not recognise the signs of Christ's divinity: all they saw was an ordinary Nazarene, one who was making outrageous claims.

Jesus did not attempt to appease them, but told them to stop grumbling and stated that without God's call and revelation nobody can come to believe in Jesus and that only through Jesus can we see God. He observed that the manna God provided for the Israelites did not grant them everlasting life, whereas what Jesus was offering – spiritual food – did. Our reading ended with Jesus saying that, if anyone eats the bread he offers, they will live for ever and that the bread was his flesh which he would give for the life of the world. In fact, eating the bread meant accepting Jesus as Saviour and the Good News he preached; the flesh which he would give for the life of the world was his own life as the one perfect sacrifice to redeem all sins.

In Jesus, we see the true Shepherd, the leader who is motivated by the wellbeing of his flock, rather than narrow self-interest; the Shepherd whose love for his flock is sacrificial. The bread Jesus offers is agape, boundless, divine love: love for God the Father and love for our neighbours. The question we face is whether or not we want the bread of life more than the values our society hungers after: success in our work, or

career; fame; wealth; status; luxury; holidays in exotic locations; winning the National Lottery? All these are transient urges, whereas Christ offers everybody enduring values: peace; wisdom; affection; but above all else, the security of knowing that God loves us to the uttermost, flawed as we are.

Christ's bread frees us to share God's love with our neighbours, confident that the more we share, the more we shall receive. In our Gospel reading Jesus was inviting the crowd to see the possibilities for the world if only they would believe in him. Thus, we are challenged to hold onto kingdom values and trust God to work through us, for we can make a difference. Holding onto kingdom values is all the more important as we gradually emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, for many around us have been broken and bruised and will need support and friendship to recover. Will you share the spiritual food God gives us in abundance by caring for our neighbours? Let us pray for God to guide us.

Heavenly Father, help us to be receptive to Christ's call to look outwards and to find a way to serve the needs of our community. Give us the faith to reach out, confident that, just as you provided the Israelites with manna in the wilderness, so you will give us the resources we need as we serve others in Jesus's name. Amen.

*Our closing hymn was written by the Welsh equivalent of Charles Wesley. William Williams of Pantycelyn, nicknamed "The sweet singer of Wales", wrote eight hundred hymns, all in Welsh. This one was translated by Peter Williams – no relation of William – and was set to John Hughes' tune, "Cwm Rhondda", for the Welsh Revival of 1905. Hymn number 437, 'Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,'*

**1. Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but thou art mighty;  
Hold me with thy powerful hand:  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
Feed me now and evermore.**

**2. Open now the crystal fountain,  
Whence the healing stream doth flow;  
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar  
Lead me all my journey through:  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
Be thou still my strength and shield.**

**3. When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
Bid my anxious fears subside;  
Death of death, and hell's destruction,  
Land me safe on Canaan's side:  
Songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever give to thee.**

© William Williams (1717 – 1791) trans. by P. Williams (1722 – 1796)

### ***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.**