

Call to worship: Psalm 105 verses 1 to 4

Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done. Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts. Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice. Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written in 1979 to celebrate the bi-centenary of John Wesley's preaching in Paradise Square, Sheffield. The words and melody of this one were composed during a train journey between London and Chesterfield and it was inspired by the opening of the 1933 "Methodist Hymn Book", which reads 'Methodism was born in song.' The author, Revd. Brian Hoare was New Testament Tutor at Cliff College and in 1979 he was serving as a member of the main committee that created "Hymns and Psalms". We shall sing hymn number 21, 'Born in song'.

1. Born in song!

God's people have always been singing.

Born in song!

Hearts and voices raised.

So today we worship together;

God alone is worthy to be praised.

2. Praise to God!

For he is the one who has made us.

Praise to God!

We his image bear.

Heaven and earth are full of his glory;

Let creation praise him everywhere.

3. Christ is King!

He left all the glory of heaven.

Christ is King!

Born to share in our pain;

Crucified, for sinners atoning,

Risen, exalted, soon to come again.

4. Sing the song!

God's Spirit is poured out among us.

Sing the song!

He has made us anew.

Every member part of the Body;

Given his power, his will to seek and do.

5. Tell the world!

All power to Jesus is given.

Tell the world!

He is with us always.

Spread the word, that all may receive him;

Every tongue confess and sing his praise.

6. Then the end!

Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory.

**Then the end
Of all earthly days.
Yet above the song will continue;
All his people still shall sing his praise.**

© *Brian Hoare (born 1935)*

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we are gathered here to worship and adore you today, for you are the Light of the universe, King of Glory, a God of wisdom, might and love. At the right time you came as Jesus Christ to teach us how we should live through his words and actions. His life, death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death, offering us eternal life through faith in him, not as something we deserve or can earn. Amazing God, as we come before your throne of grace, take away all our anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Thank you, Lord, for the many blessings we receive from you: our wonderful world, our work and our rest, our homes, food, family and friends. Above all these blessings, thank you for loving us even when we are loveless and unlovable, for, whilst you are holy, our lives are marred by our sinfulness.

Merciful heavenly Father, we confess that, however hard we try, we still say and do things that fill you with grief. We don't always love and serve you wholeheartedly, as we know we ought to. We certainly don't always love other people as we would like them to love us. Help us to change our ways, to become more loving and faithful day by day and, in Jesus' lovely name pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Merciful heavenly Father, you hear our prayer and breathe forgiveness upon us. Help us, Lord, to love and serve both you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, 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 shall sing the praises of Jesus in our second hymn, which is based upon Philippians chapter 2 and was written by Caroline Maria Noel in 1870. Hymn number 317, 'At the name of Jesus'.

**1. At the name of Jesus
Every knee shall bow,
Every tongue confess him
King of glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure
We should call him Lord,
Who from the beginning
Was the mighty Word.**

**2. Humbled for a season,
To receive a name
From the lips of sinners
Unto whom he came,
Faithfully he bore it
Spotless to the last,**

Brought it back victorious,
When from death he passed:

3. Bore it up triumphant
With its human light,
Through all ranks of creatures
To the central height,
To the throne of Godhead,
To the Father's breast;
Filled it with the glory
Of that perfect rest.

4. In your hearts enthrone him;
There let him subdue
All that is not holy,
All that is not true;
Crown him as your Captain
In temptation's hour:
Let his will enfold you
In its light and power.

5. For this same Lord Jesus
Shall return again,
With his Father's glory,
With his angel train;
All the wreaths of empire
Meet upon his brow,
And our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

© Caroline Maria Noel {1817 – 1877}

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and for the needs of ourselves and others.

Lord of all, we pray for the world and all places where there is war, conflict, prejudice and fear, that leaders of nations will turn away from violence and seek justice and mercy for those they govern. We ask for swift and just conclusions to wars that are being waged at present, especially in the Holy Land, Ukraine and Iran and we remember victims of our failure to love one another as Christ has commanded us to, asking that they may find peace, refuge and security.

Loving Shepherd of your people, we pray for victims of disasters, refugees, the hungry, overlooked and homeless and for all who are seeking to help them. We pray in particular for the people of Venezuela and Japan as they recover from earthquakes and Canada and much of Europe, where wildfires are wreaking havoc. May you strengthen and comfort them.

Lord of healing and wellbeing, we bring our concerns to you for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit, for all who are lonely, needy, troubled and afraid; for people whose lives are coming to an end and for all who are grieving the loss of loved-ones. In a time of silence, we offer names of those for whom we are especially concerned, confident that you already know their needs and will reach out to them.....

Almighty God, we pray for this church, churches in our Circuit and the World Church, that we may serve you in Spirit, love and truth. Unite us in mission, so we build up your kingdom with acts of grace and goodness.

Abba, heavenly Father, please accept and answer our prayers, not as we deserve, but as you know and love us. Bless us, our families and friends, keeping us safe and free from sin. Most of all, help us to share your abundant love with friends and strangers, in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.

We continue our worship as we sing a lovely hymn by the Methodist Minister Revd, Fred Pratt Green. Hymn number 346, 'Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other,'

**1. Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;
Born in our darkness, he became our brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.**

**2. Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and none other;
No one can serve him and despise another.
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.**

**3. Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other;
Sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother –
He, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.**

**4. Give God the glory, God and none other;
Give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;
Give God the glory, God with us, my brother:
Glory to God on high.**

© Fred Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

The Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 14 verses 22 to 33

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.

When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them:

"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God." Amen.

We continue with a hymn written by Martin Lekebusch an I.T. specialist, who was born into a Methodist family and worshiped for a time at an inner city church on City Road Birmingham, but is now an elder at a Baptist church in Gloucester. It is possible that some of his experiences in the Winson Green area has influenced the sentiments of our hymn. Hymn number 641, 'When circumstances make my life'

1. When circumstances make my life

Too hard to understand,
No doubt or fear, no pain or strife,
Can snatch me from God's hand.

2. In valleys where the path is steep,
With shadows dark and long,
I know the Shepherd leads his sheep –
His grace will keep me strong.

3. Though sorrow and perplexity
Are often what I feel,
Gethsemane and Calvary
Affirm God's love is real.

4. It is enough for me to know
God's promise and God's care:
Wherever on life's path I go
My Saviour will be there.

© Martin Leckebusch (born 1962)

Sermon: *"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."* Mt 14:28
When he preached at Wordsley Methodist Church Graham Chattin often took delight in teasing me and my son, for supporting West Bromwich Albion. He would find ways of introducing an anti-Albion joke, even in the middle of his sermon. On one occasion he said, 'Jesus was approached by a man, who asked him to walk on water.

"Hm," Jesus said, "That's difficult. Ask me another."

"All right," said the man, "What about turning water into wine?" Jesus said, "That's still difficult. Ask me another."

"What about making the Albion a good Premiership team?" asked the man. Jesus sighed,

"I think I'd better walk on water!" Bless you, Graham!

I know quite a number of Christians who find it difficult to accept Jesus' miracles and attempt to find rational explanations for them. However, if we dismiss miracles as mere legends, are we not in danger of denying Jesus' divinity? Matthew's account of Jesus walking on water and stilling the storm follows the feeding of the five thousand and both have special significance. The feeding miracle may be compared with the manna God provided during the exodus and with Elisha feeding a hundred men with only twenty loaves. Thus, Jesus is shown to be even greater than Moses or Elisha, for he fed five thousand men and unnumbered women and children with minimal resources. The second miracle demonstrates his power over nature and fulfils Job's vision of the Omnipotent God: **'His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.'**

I have heard some say that Jesus' walking on water could be explained by his being seen from a storm-tossed boat when he was walking along the shore, or on a submerged sandbank. However, I firmly believe that Jesus walked on water: he did not walk along the edge of the Sea of Galilee, nor on concealed sandbanks, as some sceptics claim, for the account said the disciples' boat was a considerable distance from the land, as it was the fourth watch, sometime between three and six o' clock in the morning, probably six or seven hours after it had set out from Bethsaida. Indeed, John's

gospel indicated the boat was approximately three and a half miles from shore, so the sandbank theory is highly-flawed.

John tells us that the miraculous feeding led many in the crowd want to make Jesus their king, which is not what he wanted, nor what he came to be. This may be why he ordered his disciples to sail away at once, whilst he went to pray alone: he would not have wanted them to be caught up in such worldly enthusiasm. By the time he was ready to join them, the boat was in the middle of the sea, buffeted by a fierce headwind. Although several disciples were experienced fishermen, Jesus knew that everybody on board was afraid, for sudden squalls on the Sea of Galilee were more than capable of overwhelming a small boat. Therefore, he made his way to them across the water, but his appearance, probably as day began to break, added to their terror, for human beings cannot walk on water, whereas spirits might.

Jesus called out to them, **"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** It is worth noting that the Greek, **'ego eimi'**, literally means **'I am'** – God's name for himself – **'Jahweh'** in Hebrew. In effect he declared that he is the Almighty One, who rules the wind and waves which threatened them. Peter's request to walk on the water may sound typically vain, but in fact, it shows both a desire to imitate his Master and lack of faith, for he prefaced his request with, **"Lord, if it's you,"** so he needed to experience a miracle to believe that the approaching figure was indeed, Christ. At first, Jesus granted his wish, but Peter's limited faith let him down when he felt the wind and saw the waves. He took his eyes off the Lord and sank into the sea, only to be rescued by Christ's saving hand. And, as in the other accounts of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Jesus quietened the wind and waves, demonstrating that he is truly God's Son.

This reading is relevant to Christians today, as a challenge to our faith. It is all too easy to find ourselves out of our depth in life: in church; at home; at work, or a combination of the three. We may then compound our problems by trying to rely on our own resources, rather than appealing to Christ for help. When we pray for help, we cannot expect God to click his fingers and put things right, but he will offer ways forward, if we are open-minded enough to recognize them. None of us are immune for getting out of our depth and I frequently find myself in situations where I feel I am floundering, lacking the resources to complete the task. I know that God, who invested his Son's life to redeem fallen humanity, will never sell us short, so I always pray for help and guidance and he's never let me down, because there is always somebody, or something to draw me to safety. He'll do the same for you if you trust him and look for the help he provides. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written in 1981 by Daniel Shutte, a member of the St. Louis Jesuits in the USA. This hymn uses imagery from the call of Isaiah and has become one of our most popular hymns. Hymn number 663, 'I, the Lord of sea and sky,'

**1. I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry;
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.**

I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send? *Chorus:*
Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord,
If you lead me;
I will hold your people in my heart.

2. I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them –
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone;
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send? *Chorus:*

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame,
I will set a feast for them –
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts are satisfied;
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send? *Chorus:*

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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.