

A service for 9th August, 2020 (StF)

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.

We shall sing the praises of Jesus in our opening hymn, based upon Philippians chapter 2 and 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}

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we have come to worship and adore you today, for you are the King of Glory, the Creator of our universe and all life within it, a God of wisdom, might and love. You came as Jesus Christ to teach us how we should live through his words and actions. You came as Jesus Christ to become the one perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world, to set us free from the power of sin and when he rose from the tomb, Jesus broke open heaven's gates and offers us eternal life. Amazing God, as we come before your throne, take away all our anxieties and distractions, so we may worship you in spirit, love and truth.

Thank you, Lord, for the many blessings you have bestowed upon us throughout our lives: our wonderful world, our work and our rest, our homes, food, family and friends; for everything that has brought us pleasure and fulfilment and for opportunities that lie before us. Above all these blessings, thank you for loving us even when we are loveless and unlovable, for, while you are holy, our lives are marred by our sinfulness.

Merciful heavenly Father, we know that our words, thoughts and deeds sometimes hurt and upset other people and 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, we believe that you hear and answer our prayers and, confident that you have forgiven us and call us to follow you. May we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we use his gifts 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.

Our next hymn by Katie Barclay Wilkinson is one which will be sung at my funeral – not just yet, I hope! Katie was a Nineteenth Century evangelist in London. We shall sing hymn number 504, 'May the mind of Christ my Saviour'

1. May the mind of Christ my Saviour

Live in me from day to day,

By his love and power controlling

All I do or say.

2. May the word of God dwell richly

In my heart from hour to hour,

So that all may see I triumph

Only through his power.

3. May the peace of God my Father

Rule my life in everything,

That I may be calm to comfort

Sick and sorrowing.

**4. May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing –
This is victory.**

**5. May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.**

© *Kate Barclay Wilkinson (1859 – 1928)*

In our prayers of intercession we pray for our world and its.

Sovereign Lord, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to help our neighbours, both local and far afield. Grant us the spiritual resources we need to answer our call, but, where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to motivate and empower other people who can really make a difference to the world.

God of consolation, hear our heartfelt prayer for the people of Lebanon, following the devastating explosion this week that has wrought so much destruction in human and material terms. The country is already in financial and political difficulties and the explosion threatens the population with severe food shortages. May the people receive both immediate and long-term aid to help them rebuild their society and to recover from this disaster.

Lord, we pray for peace in those countries where wars are being waged, that your Holy Spirit will breathe hope and new life into the dry bones of old conflicts and your love will overcome the hatred in the world. Bless with success the work of peacemakers and those who work with the victims of conflict, terrorism and persecution. Guide the governments of the nations of the world, so they may work for justice and peace, learn to negotiate and resolve disagreements without resorting to violence and oppression and to strive to end poverty which cripple lives of so many people, here and abroad.

Heavenly Father, we continue to pray for victims of COVID 19, here and abroad and ask you to guide national leaders to adopt policies that will protect us until this pandemic is brought under control. We pray for medical staff, paramedics, care-workers, scientists and medical researchers as they continue their struggle to bring an end to this threat to humankind. Help us to play our part in defeating COVID19 by patiently observing guidelines laid down by the Government, difficult and confusing though they may be. Most of all, reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we can all face the future, with hope grounded in your saving grace.

Lord of wellbeing, may the light of your love shine upon people in our community who are sick in body, mind or spirit. May they find healing, renewed strength, comfort and peace, not only through the professional care and support they receive, but by experiencing your presence in their need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them, especially in these turbulent times. Grant them a sense of being loved and valued for who they are, despite their brokenness and the great problems they face.

Loving God, remember in your mercy neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, unemployed, or who face the loss of their jobs when furlough ends. We pray for all who are facing a broken relationship, as well as any who mourn the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, confident that you will know their needs and will reach out to them.

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, from which they may find healing, courage, strength and peace.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: unite us, so everybody may believe that Jesus is the Saviour of the world. Help your Church begin to plan for the ending of lockdown, as it faces many serious issues that have arisen during the past six months. Unite us in love and action, so we can continue to bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and often hostile world.

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 be bold in taking the light of the gospel to a sceptical and sometimes hostile world. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

We continue our worship as we sing 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.**

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Our Epistle is Romans chapter 10 verses 5 to 15

Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law:

"The person who does these things will live by them."

But the righteousness that is by faith says:

"Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Amen.

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.

I wrote our next hymn specifically for the last reading, as there was nothing about Peter attempting to walk on water. I suppose, if you think about it, who would want to write a hymn on such a subject? However, as I sat and mused, the melody 'Calon lan' filled my head and the words were written down with two hours! We shall sing the hymn, 'Save me, ever-gracious Saviour,'

1. Save me, ever-gracious Jesus,

As I face life's surging sea:

Where you've trodden I would follow,

But self-doubt is sinking me! Chorus:

Build my faith to keep me standing

As I tread life's surging sea.

Lord, the wind and waves commanding,

Take my hand – deliver me!

2. Lord, I love you and would follow,

But at times my fears prevail:

Bid me come – then I shall trust you,

For with you I cannot fail. Chorus:

3. In my weakness grant me courage

Help me share Good News with all;

Help me love through life's disasters –

Grant me strength to serve your call. Chorus:

4. Hold me, ever-gracious Saviour,

So, whatever life may bring,

I shall love and serve my neighbour,

Evermore your praises sing! Chorus:

M. Rider, 4th August, 2002, {based on Matthew 14:30-31}. {To be sung to 'Calon Lan StF323i, 'Hyfrydol' StF 103, or 'Blaenwern' StF503}

Sermon: "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." Mt 14:28

I know quite a number of Christians who find it difficult to accept any of 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? I have heard people 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. I believe this miracle must have happened as the gospel writer said, though Peter's failure may have been told in the pattern of Rabbinic teaching stories.

The walking on water and stilling of 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. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.'** I firmly believe that Jesus walked on water: he did not walk along the edge of the Sea of Galilee, nor on concealed sandbanks, 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 had to order 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 the 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. In effect he implied 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 a 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. There is a story about a devout but misguided Christian in a flood. When the local river broke its banks, waters rushed round his cottage and he was trapped. Soon afterwards, a man rowed up to his front window and told him to climb out, so he could ferry him to safety.

"Thank you, but no," the man replied. "The Lord will save me!" So the man rowed away. An hour later, the water had reached his bedroom and as he stood looking out at the flood and praying, a motor launch roared up. Two lifeboatmen called out, "Open your window, climb aboard and we'll take you to safety."

"Thank you, but no," the man replied. "The Lord will save me!" So the launch left him and went to rescue other people. Two hours later, the man was sitting on his roof with water lapping round his feet. Again he prayed for God to save him. Soon afterwards a helicopter clattered its way to his cottage and hovered above, whilst a man descended on a winch line.

"Come on, mate," said the man, "put this strap round you and we'll lift you to safety."

"Thank you, but no," the man replied. "The Lord will save me!" So the helicopter rumbled its way across the flood, looking for others to save.

Soon afterwards, the cottager arrived at the gates of heaven where he saw the Lord.

"Almighty God," he grumbled, "I'm very disappointed. I kept praying for you to save me from the flood, but you didn't answer me, so here I am."

The Lord sighed: "My child, I don't understand. I sent a rowing boat, then a lifeboat and finally a helicopter. How could you possibly have drowned?"

In my role as a Chaplain I frequently find myself in situations where I feel I'm out of my depth, that I lack the resources to provide the support, comfort or help that residents or carers need. 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'll provide. Amen.

We conclude our worship as we sing hymn number 661, 'Give me the faith which can remove'.

**1. Give me the faith which can remove
And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the child-like praying love,
Which longs to build thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower,
And all my simple soul devour.**

**2. I would the precious time redeem,
And longer live for this alone;
To spend, and to be spent, for them**

**Who have not yet my Saviour known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe, to breathe thy love.**

**3. My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
Into thy blessed hands receive;
And let me live to preach thy word,
And let me to thy glory live;
My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinners' friend.**

**4. Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless charity divine;
So shall I all my strength exert,
And love them with a zeal like thine;
And lead them to thy open side,
The sheep for whom their Shepherd died.**

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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 now and for evermore. Amen.