

A service for 18th May, 2025 Easter 5 – Christian Aid (StF)

Call to worship: Psalm 148 verses 1 to 6

Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the LORD, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away. 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.

Glorious God, Lord of all creation, whose compassion maintains life, you entered our world as Christ Jesus, to share our lives and experiences, to bring Good News to all peoples in words and deeds of grace. He died upon a cross to reconcile fallen humanity to you by breaking the power of sin. Through his resurrection, Jesus offers us everlasting life by his grace, not by anything we deserve, nor can earn. Therefore, we come to offer you all our praise, adoration and thanksgiving in our worship today.

Loving Lord, accept our wholehearted thanksgiving for this beautiful, self-sustaining world that you made for us, for all the blessings you bestow on us: for people who have guided, inspired and loved us, but most of all thank you for redeeming us at such a tremendous cost. Amen.

Let us set ourselves right with our Lord by confessing our sins.

Hear us, merciful God, as we confess our failure to live as you want us to. We know that we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly and we bring to mind occasions when we have failed to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, by acting and speaking in a way that shames us.

We know that sin angers and grieves you, so we ask you to help us turn away from sin and back to the path you call us to tread. Merciful Lord, bring us into the light of your love as we seek your forgiveness for the sins we have committed and the good we have neglected to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and that in your loving-kindness you have not only pardoned us but call us to follow you. May the power of the Holy Spirit guide and perfect our service, so our lives may provide evidence of our faith and be a beacon to draw others to know and love our risen Saviour. Amen.

We shall say the Lord's Prayer

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 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}**

***We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far-away.
Let us pray.***

Loving God, Jesus' passion, death and resurrection remind us that you care for us with boundless, unconditional and redemptive love. Grant us faith, wisdom, compassion and steadfastness to serve you as you desire. Do not let us not close our eyes and hearts to injustice, prejudice or neglect, but instead bid us strive courageously for the wellbeing of everyone and to share your love with our neighbours, nearby and far away.

This month, we are commemorating the eightieth anniversary of VE Day, giving heartfelt thanks for everybody who contributed to defeating Nazism and fascism and earning us the freedom which we sometimes take lightly. Help us to recall the terrible cost of war, so we may strive for peace and justice. We grieve that wars are currently being waged in Ukraine, the Holy Land, Myanmar, Congo, Somalia and Sudan with all the suffering, destruction, death and displacement that results from mankind's inability to co-exist with neighbours. We ask, too, that the fragile ceasefire in Kashmir will hold and that India and Pakistan ease current tensions. Teach the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise, rather than taking up arms when disputes arise. We pray for just and lasting settlements to the conflicts we have named and for your shalom to be bestowed on all nations.

Jesus is the source of healing and well-being, so we pray for people who are ill, for those brought low by loneliness, fear or need and for all who are experiencing the pain of bereavement. In a time of silence, we bring to mind friends and neighbours for whom we are especially concerned.....

Loving Lord, help us offer them practical support, but embrace them with your love, so they may be healed, encouraged and granted reassurance.

As Christian Aid Week comes to an end, we ask a blessing on its works throughout the world: for the provision of materials, crops, equipment and training that allow people in developing countries to make their own way forward in dignity, offering them hope of prospering. Thank you for those who lead the charity, those employed here and abroad. Grant them vision and courage to face the challenges of global warming and political instability and bless, too, everybody who contributes to its work with gifts and prayers.

Saviour God, hear our prayer for this church, churches in our Circuit and indeed the World Church. May the light of Jesus' love guide us through the darkness of this increasingly secular, materialist world and may we remain constant and true. Unite us in love and purpose and help us proclaim good news boldly to a world that needs good news so much.

Abba, Father God, may the risen Lord inspire us in our discipleship. Keep our hearts warm and teach us to reveal the light of your love in all we do and say, in the

name of Christ Jesus, to whom be honour, praise, glory and power now and forevermore. Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn written in 1999 by an anonymous writer. We shall sing it through twice. Hymn number 242, 'A new commandment'
A new commandment

I give unto you:

That you love one another

As I have loved you,

That you love one another

As I have loved you.

By this shall all know

That you are my disciples

If you have love one for another.

By this shall all know

That you are my disciples

If you have love one for another.

Anonymous

The New Testament reading is Revelation chapter 21 verses 1 to 6

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with humankind, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

He who was seated on the throne said,

"I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To those who are thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is John chapter 13 verses 31 to 35

When he was gone, Jesus said,

"Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Amen.

We shall sing a hymn by the prolific and long-lived Methodist Minister, Revd. Fred Prat Green. It was written in 1969, entitled "the Caring Church". Hymn number 415, 'The Church of Christ, in every age,'

1. The Church of Christ, in every age,

Beset by change, but Spirit led,

Must claim and test its heritage

And keep on rising from the dead.

2. Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.

3. Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humanity.

4. For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.

5. We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.

© F. Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

Sermon: “If anyone loves me, they will obey my teaching.” John 14:23

Our reading from John of Patmos' Revelation envisages the New Jerusalem at the end of the ages with God living alongside the faithful in a state of perpetual well-being; an age when suffering and death are banished, evil destroyed and, effectively, the Garden of Eden re-established, with its tree of life and river of the water of life.

Was John talking of an earthly state, or of heaven? Is his vision merely an impossible dream, crumbs of comfort for early Christians as they faced persecution from the Roman Empire? We do well to set aside pledges by politicians that they will lead us into the Promised Land, or build a New Jerusalem, for they are neither Moses nor the Lamb of God; nor can politics deliver a truly Golden Age, though it clearly does affect people's welfare. If we want a radically better world, we need to look beyond politics, to consider the teaching of Jesus, which calls for justice, mercy and inclusion, rather than vested, or self-interest and exclusivity. How many political manifestoes would dare cite the Beatitudes, or produce a mission-statement like Jesus' at the beginning of his ministry: **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour”?**

Much of Jesus' ministry was centred upon the despised and marginalised in First Century Galilee and Judea, for the gospels record how he offered healing, a new start and reconciliation to tax collectors, fallen women, to the deranged, the crippled, to lepers and outcasts, even to Romans and Samaritans, who Jews passionately despised. Despite the passage of two thousand years, our society is not always tolerant and caring towards our neighbours. Over forty years have passed since AIDs / HIV cast its shadow over us, yet people with AIDs are still shunned by many – rather like the lepers at the time of Jesus – even though Princess Diana was willing to give them hugs when she met them. Immigration is still a political hot-potato, yet instead of having a reasoned debate of the issues, we shy away from it, or turn to rhetoric, and make life more difficult for everybody.

This year, we are commemorating the eightieth anniversary of VE and VJ Day, but we ought also to celebrate the eightieth anniversary of the founding of Christian Aid. It was founded in 1945 by a number of British and Irish churches to help refugees

from the Second World War. By working with partner organizations, Christian Aid expanded its outreach to the most vulnerable people across the world, not only providing disaster relief, simply handing out food and shelter: it helps provide deep wells, so people have clean water and can irrigate their crops. It funds solar power which provides lighting and runs electrical equipment, allowing businesses to be run and children educated. It provides seeds that produce crops that are able to survive drought conditions; provides animals and chickens that can produce milk, eggs and meat that not only feed families but raise income to allow children to pay school fees. People helped by Christian Aid are not made to feel like beggars, but are dignified by having some control over their futures. It is a supreme example of what happens when different denominations work together.

At the Last Supper, Jesus reassured his disciples, knowing that his passion, death – and resurrection – were imminent and that his followers were not ready to take the Good News to an unbelieving world. He assured them that he would manifest himself to those who love him – physically to his disciples at the resurrection and in his spiritual presence thereafter. Christ told the disciples that God and he will make their home with anybody who loves him and obeys his teaching. He also gave the commandment, **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** The mark of our discipleship is how we care for both friend and stranger, so supporting Christian Aid is one such manifestation of our commitment.

Although the world is undoubtedly in a mess and deeply-troubled, Christianity has come through major difficulties throughout its history. In time, tyrants and dictators will fall, evil regimes pass away and wars will end. Sadly, our imperfections mean that other crises will inevitably arise, but we can take steps to face them with confidence. The cross and empty tomb mean that God has the ultimate word. Love will overcome hatred; goodness will triumph over evil in the long run. A world envisaged by John of Patmos might seem beyond our reach, but we’re called to work towards it by steadfastly sharing Christ’s teaching and love in words and deeds – so others recognise Jesus in us and want to find out what makes us different. If they do so, we open the door to their hearts and the Good News can enlighten their lives and build God’s kingdom, too. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written by Jacqueline Jones, a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, who was based in the United Kingdom for 5 years, but now lives in Christchurch, New Zealand and is enjoying the role of vicar's wife! Hymn number 662, ‘Have you heard God’s voice: has your heart been stirred?’

1. Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,

Though the way be rough and narrow? Chorus:

Will you walk the path that will cost you much

And embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you

The disciples of tomorrow?

2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent? *Chorus:*

3. In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless? *Chorus:*

4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
And believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:*

We will walk the path that will cost us much

And embrace the pain and sorrow.

We will trust in One who entrusts to us

The disciples of tomorrow.

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Benediction

Heavenly Father, by whose glory our Saviour Christ was raised from the dead,
strengthen us to walk with him in his risen life; and may the blessing of Almighty God,
Father, Son and the Holy Spirit be with us now and evermore. **Amen.**