

A Service for 11th September, 2022 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 25 verses 4 to 7

Show me your ways, O LORD, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD. Amen.

We meet at a time of mourning on the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. Our opening hymn by Revd. Henry Francis Lyte was one of her favourites and was sung at her wedding with the Duke of Edinburgh. Hymn number 83, 'Praise, my soul, the King of heaven'.

**1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To his feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee his praise shall sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!**

**2. Praise him for his grace and favour
To our fathers in distress;
Praise him still, the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.**

**3. Father-like, he tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame he knows;
In His hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.**

**4. Angels in the height, adore him,
Ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!**

© *Henry Francis Lyte {1793 – 1847}*

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, help us feel your presence among us as we come to worship and adore you on this Sabbath day, for you are the Creator whose wisdom brought all life into being throughout our universe. Your compassion and power sustain life and we know you are gracious, faithful, true, majestic and holy. Your glory is revealed in the vastness of space with its myriad suns, planets and moons, whilst the beauty and complexity of life on this planet fill us with awe. We are amazed all the more that you care for us so much that you sent your Son, Christ Jesus, to reveal your boundless love by his life, death and resurrection. Help us to pray to you in faith, sing our hymns joyfully and both understand and respond to your holy word.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the many blessings we have received from you: for all the good things that we enjoy, as well as experiences and opportunities that have enriched our lives; for challenges that have tested us and shaped our character. Above all else, thank you for Jesus, whose death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death, and offers us new life at the end of our earthly days.

Merciful God, although Jesus showed us how we should live, we confess that we don't always follow his teaching or his example, for we sometimes say and do things that upset, or hurt other people and grieve you. Moreover, we don't always help those we see in difficulty, or distress when we really know we ought to. Gracious God, we are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong, asking you to forgive us for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of grace, we believe you have heard and answered our prayer, pardoning us for our sins and calling us to renew our discipleship. Therefore, Lord, fill us with the power of the Holy Spirit, so we may serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully from now onwards, in Jesus' beautiful name. 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.

Our next hymn was written by Revd. Lyte at the end of his final service at Lower Brixham in September 1847. It was a favourite of King George V, the Queen's grandfather. We shall sing hymn number 141, 'Abide with me, fast falls the eventide'.

- 1. Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide;
When other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.**
- 2. Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O thou, who changest not, abide with me!**
- 3. I need thy presence every passing hour;
What but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me.**
- 4. I fear no foe, with thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness;
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.**
- 5. Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies;
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;**

In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me!

© Henry Francis Lyte {1793 – 1847}

We shall now bring our concerns for other people, nearby and far away, to the Lord our God. Let us stand as we begin with a prayer for our late Queen.

Eternal and everlasting God, we come to you in both grief and thanksgiving for the life and faithful service of our late Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth II. We are deeply saddened that her reign has come to an end after seventy years' devotion to both our nation and the Commonwealth. We recall with gratitude how she has been a constant in a world of shifting values, a world that changed profoundly since her reign began in 1952. We recall how she acted graciously in both good and bad times and was courteous even to world leaders and politicians who considered themselves our country's enemies. Thank you for empowering her to continue serving to the end of her life by her love for our Saviour, Jesus. Indeed, thank you for the gifts you gave, for her love for those she ruled and for all you accomplished in her. Grant her eternal rest, peace and joy at the end of her days on earth.

In your mercy, comfort and strengthen her family and friends, especially King Charles and Queen Camilla, Princes William and Harry and their wives, Princess Anne, Princes Andrew and Edward. May all the formalities and trappings of State not prevent them from grieving her Majesty's death and may King Charles be granted the wisdom and steadfastness to reign as well as his mother. May we as a nation come together to serve one another faithfully and compassionately in Jesus' name. Amen

Please be seated, as we continue our intercessions.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all you have given us and have done for us. Even though we rejoice in the beauty of nature in late summer and early autumn, we are not blinded to the great suffering which goes on around us, much of which is through human failings and sinfulness, so we bring our concerns to you, asking you to repair some of its brokenness.

Lord, where we are able, enable us to act as your earthly hands, by reaching out to our neighbours in their need or distress. Grant us compassion, courage, steadfastness and empathy when we serve others in Jesus' name, but where the best we can do is not enough, reach out in mercy, for everything is possible for you. May the fullness of your shalom be revealed in our world: peace, harmony, wholeness, prosperity, rest and blessing.

Adonai Shalom, Lord of Peace, we grieve about the number of conflicts around the world, especially at present, conflicts between Palestinians and Jews in Jerusalem and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Bring peace and reconciliation to these countries and guide the leaders of all nations to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, rather than resorting to war. Warm and mould their hearts so they seek justice and mercy in their dealings so that lasting peace can be built on solid foundations.

Jehovah Jireh, God our provider, we pray for organizations like the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can and Christian Aid that are working to provide desperately-needed aid to famine-stricken countries Afghanistan and especially those in the horn of Africa. May the relaxing of the blockade of Ukraine's ports continue to allow the export of much-needed grain and oil to these countries. We offer our prayer for victims of severe flooding in Pakistan, asking that the nation receives much needed help as soon as possible.

We remember, too, people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of energy, fuel and food increases to record levels and we thank you for food banks and for other organisations which help the poor. Nevertheless, may the Government and other agencies find ways of helping all who are finding it difficult to manage.

JHWH Rapha, God of healing and wellbeing, hear our prayer for neighbours who are sick in body, mind or spirit; or who are in any kind of need or trouble. Hear our prayer for neighbours who living with depression or whose relationships have broken down and, particularly, all who mourn the loss of somebody dear. Heavenly Father, 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 practical support and friendship, but enfold them in the warmth of your love which offers comfort, healing, hope, courage and a peace that passes all understanding.

Immanuel, God with us and among us, comfort and strengthen your people as we mourn the loss of our Queen. May your Spirit rest upon King Charles III on his accession that he may reign with as much grace and wisdom as his late mother. In this time of mourning, heal our divisions and help our nation unite to meet the challenges we face with steadfast courage and compassion, so we may be a light to our neighbours.

Adonai, Holy Lord, we pray for our church, all churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church. Renew and invigorate our calling as we seek new ways to serve our communities, at this time of emergence from the dark shadow of Coronavirus. Teach us to speak of the grace and glory of Christ Jesus with one voice and serve him in unity of mission so we bear the gospel light to our suffering, sin-darkened world.

Abba, Father God, Bless us, our families and friends. Inspire us in our discipleship and teach us to reveal the light of your love in all we do and say, in the name of Christ Jesus, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is John chapter 13 verses 1 to 17

It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel round his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped round him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus replied, "You do not realise now what I am doing, but later you will understand."

"No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered,

"Unless I wash you, you have no part with me."

"Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" Jesus answered,

"A person who has had a bath needs only to wash his feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not everyone was clean. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.

"Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them". Amen.

Our next hymn was written by New Zealander, Richard Gillard, in 1977, though he wrote the third verse first a year earlier! It speaks of service as a virtue and we remember how Queen Elizabeth devoted her life to serving God and us all. We shall sing hymn number 611, 'Brother, sister, let me serve you'.

**1. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you:
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.**

**2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.**

**3. I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.**

**4. I will weep when you are weeping:
When you laugh, I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through.**

**5. When we sing to God in heaven,
We shall find such harmony;
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.**

**5. Brother, sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you:
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too. © Richard Gillard**

Sermon: *'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you'. John 13: 15*
Jesus' washing of his followers' feet at the Last Supper is one of the best-known readings from the gospels, yet if you have gone to a Maunday Thursday service and had somebody wash your feet, or, indeed, wash somebody's feet, I'm sure you will have found it deeply moving. Bishops and Archbishops humble themselves to act as Jesus did two thousand years ago, but I wonder how many who have known their feet were to be washed had cleaned them beforehand rather than present two gnarled, sweaty and smelly feet to the clergyman! Jesus' disciples would have had dirty, sweaty and, yes, probably smelly feet at that supper in an upper room, so Jesus' action was not a token gesture, but an act of loving-kindness. He got his hands dirty on that occasion, but then Jesus is God with his

sleeves rolled up, dealing with the dirtiness and brokenness of the world. He taught his disciples and, by extension, us the virtue of serving others humbly and lovingly.

Whatever your views about the monarchy, we must acknowledge that the late Queen Elizabeth was a woman of great faith, who pledged herself to serve nation and Commonwealth throughout her life when she acceded to the throne. Being a monarch, Elizabeth had both privilege and power, but she exercised each without becoming ostentatious. She also had great responsibilities, constitutionally, as a wife and mother and as titular Head of the Established Church. She could not, did not, express a personal or political opinion in public and lived a life in a metaphorical goldfish-bowl. Every move was scrutinised far more than previous monarchs. Every gesture was analysed, every utterance pored over in case she stepped out of line. Although Prince Philip's quips sometimes resulted in controversy, she must have loved him for being so mischievous when she couldn't afford to be. She reigned through times of great change, of tensions and danger and her own life was touched by tragedy. It wasn't only the divorces of several of her children and the death of Princess Diana that she had to face. Lord Mountbatten, a favourite of hers, was blown up and killed by the IRA, yet she found it in herself to shake the hand of Martin McGuinness at a reception, even though he was the unofficial head of the IRA when Lord Mountbatten was killed. I wonder whether or not I could have shown such forgiveness if I were in her position.

The Queen led by example: she did not display her dirty washing in public, as some celebrities do, as some of her family have done, but kept what needs to be private private. One of the most poignant images I have of the Queen is of her sitting alone at Westminster Abbey during Prince Philip's funeral, observing the COVID regulations to the letter – unlike some in Downing Street! In the circumstances, she could have insisted on having Prince Charles, or another family member to support her in her grief, but she didn't, because she believed in the adage 'Do as I do, not do as I say'.

History will judge Queen Elizabeth II and I hope it will do so fairly. Like all of us, she will have had her weaknesses, but she did her best to keep them from public view, so she could be a true figurehead for the United Kingdom. Her seventy-year reign was remarkable not only for its length, but for its quality. May God receive and accept our thanksgiving for such a ruler and may he grant Her Majesty the peace and joy of eternal life. Amen.

Our closing hymn is a version of the 23rd Psalm, which was written and composed by Stuart Townend in 1996. This is how it happened in his own words: 'I never set out to write a new musical version of this psalm – it seems very brave, or very arrogant, to think you can improve on the existing hymn version, which has been loved and sung by millions of people for so long! I was actually working on a different song at the time, which after several hours' hard work was not going well... I happened to flick to this psalm in my Bible while taking a break, a simple melody popped into my head, and the whole thing was written in ten minutes (something I wish as a writer would happen more often to me!). Hymn number 481. 'The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;'

**1. The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green,**

**He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul. *Chorus*
And I will trust in you alone,
And I will trust in you alone,
For your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.**

**2. He guides my ways in righteousness,
And he anoints my head with oil;
And my cup – it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights. *Chorus***

**3. And though I walk the darkest path –
I will not fear the evil one,
For you are with me, and your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know. *Chorus***

© *Stuart Townend (Born 1963)*

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all now and forever more. Amen.