

A service for High Town Ragged School (StF)

10.45 a.m. 28th June, 2020

Call to Worship: Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me for ever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, O LORD my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me. Amen.

King David's Psalm refers to his trust in the Lord's unfailing love. We shall sing a hymn by Thomas Obadiah Chisholm that celebrates God's faithful love for us all.

Hymn number 51, 'Great is thy faithfulness,'

© Thomas O. Chisholm (1866 – 1960)

**1. Great is thy faithfulness, O God, my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with thee;
Thou changest not; thy compassions, they fail not;
As thou hast been thou forever shall be: *Chorus:***

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed thy hand has provided.

Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

**2. Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness,
To thy great faithfulness, mercy and love. *Chorus:***

**3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thy own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! *Chorus:***

Let us pray.

Almighty God, your Word created our universe and brought forth all life within it. You sought to bring us close to you through your Holy Law, yet we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies. In your boundless grace you came as Jesus Christ to share our lives. He not only brought Good News in words and deeds, but gave his life at Calvary to redeem the world from sin. His resurrection has broken the power of death, so that we who believe in him may have everlasting life. When he ascended to heaven, you sent your Holy Spirit to inspire, comfort and guide us through our life, because of his amazing power within us. Lord of all, hear and accept our worship and adoration, for all honour and glory, power and praise are yours forevermore.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all the good things that we enjoy, for the wide variety of gifts you offer us; for everyone who has brought light, love and joy into our lives and for those opportunities and experiences that have enriched our lives. Thank you for this beautiful world and for your enduring love, for we know that even when we stray from you, you seek us out and welcome us back home.

Merciful God, we confess that whereas you are holy and true, our own lives are marred by failure and sin. We don't love others as we love ourselves and we are sometimes half-hearted in our love for you. We don't always answer your call to serve others in Jesus' name because of our laziness, fear, or sense of unworthiness. Often, we let you down because we try to act in our own strength, rather than calling on the Holy Spirit to empower, guide and encourage us. O Lord, in Jesus' lovely name help us to change our ways and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we know you hear and answer our prayers and are confident that you have forgiven us and call us to serve you once more. From now on, let your Holy Spirit rule our words and deeds, so we live as you want us to, by using our gifts of the Spirit 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 was written by Sydney Carter, who wrote scripts for radio and the stage, including revues with Donald Swann. His interest then moved to folk song, which was enjoying a revival in the 1950s and 60s. It was in this idiom that he began to write new Christian 'folk songs', including 'Lord of the dance', 'One more step along the world I go' and 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?' which was often used as a protest song by anti-racist movements. We shall sing number 256, 'When I needed a neighbour, were you there?'

1. When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a neighbour, were you there? Chorus:

***And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
Were you there?***

2. I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there? Chorus:

3. I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there? Chorus:

4. When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a shelter, were you there? Chorus:

5. When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a healer, were you there? *Chorus:*

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,

Were you there?

6. Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there,

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, *Chorus:*

And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,

I'll be there?

© Sydney Carter {1915 -2004}

In our prayers of intercession, we bring our concerns for our beautiful but broken world to the Lord. Let us pray.

Creator God, we praise and thank you for this beautiful, self-sustaining world over which you have given us stewardship, but we are only too well aware that our failure to respect kingdom values has caused much of the brokenness that blights peoples' lives and is damaging the environment. As we acknowledge how you have blessed us throughout our lives, we offer ourselves to respond to your grace by serving you by helping our neighbours, nearby and far from us. We know that our powers are limited, so where the best we can offer is inadequate, then we ask you to warm the hearts of and motivate people who can really make a difference to the world.

Gracious God, inspire and lead those who wield authority and power in the nations of the world: guide them and all people in the way of justice and peace, so they learn to negotiate and resolve disagreements. We pray for victims of war, terrorism and persecution: those who have been killed and their families and friends; people who have suffered life-changing injuries; others who are broken in mind and spirit and refugees, many of whom are exploited and who face long, dangerous journeys. Grant all them practical support, so they may begin to rebuild their lives.

Lord of justice and mercy, hear our prayer for racial justice, particularly for the family and friends of George Floyd, whose death at the hands of a policeman has led to protests not only in the USA but in this country, too. Help us both spread and live out the message that, through Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free and every life counts, thinking of black lives especially at this time.

Heavenly Father, as we pray for the deliverance of victims of COVID 19, we grieve for the immense suffering of people here and abroad. Lord, the strains of the present state of lockdown are severely testing our faith and resolve, whilst some of the steps to relax it confuse us. Reassure us that you are with us throughout this time of trial, so we all face an uncertain, even threatening future, with hope grounded in your saving grace.

Lord of life, may the NHS receive all the support and equipment it needs to heal the sick and to grow to meet the changing needs of our society. Bless everybody, who is offering help to Coronavirus patients and vulnerable members of society. Keep them safe in their work.

Spirit of healing, let the light of your love shine upon people in our community who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble: for all who are sick in body, mind, or spirit, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, through the care and support they receive and by experiencing your holy presence in their time of need. We pray, too, for people who are living with a dementia and their friends, carers and families, who seek to support them; grant them comfort in their distress, reassurance in their confusion and a sense of being valued for who they are, despite the problems they face.

Loving God, we remember neighbours who are lonely, afraid, broken-hearted, overworked, or unemployed. We pray for those who are facing a broken relationship, as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. In a time of silence, we offer you names of people for whom we are particularly concerned, trusting that you will know their need and will reach out in compassion 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 there is healing, courage, strength and peace.

Lord, hear us as we pray for your Church, both local and worldwide: make us all one, so everybody may believe that Jesus is indeed, the risen Lord and Saviour of everybody. Unite us in love and action, so we bear the Gospel light bravely in a sceptical and often hostile world.

Abba, heavenly Father, look upon us, our friends and families with loving-kindness. Keep us from harm and may the power of the Holy Spirit help us resist the temptation to sin. Most of all, may all that we do and say, reflect your grace and goodness upon this sin-darkened world. Amen.

We continue our worship as we sing a hymn written in 1952 by George Briggs in answer to an appeal by the Hymn Society of America to celebrate the publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. We sing number 157, 'God has spoken – by his prophets', set to a lovely Welsh melody, "Hyfrydol".

1. God has spoken – by his prophets,

**Spoken his unchanging word,
Each from age to age proclaiming
God, the one, the righteous Lord.**

'Mid the world's despair and turmoil

One firm anchor holds us fast:

**God is King, his throne eternal,
God the first and God the last.**

2. God has spoken – by Christ Jesus,

**Christ, the everlasting Son,
Brightness of the Father's glory,
With the Father ever one;**

Spoken by the Word incarnate,

God from God, ere time was born,

Light from Light, to earth descending, / Man, revealing God to all.

**3. God has spoken – by his Spirit,
Speaking to our hearts again,
In the age-long word expounding
God’s own message, now as then.
Through the rise and fall of nations
One sure faith is standing fast;
God still speaks, the Word unchanging,
God the first and God the last.**

© George Wallace Briggs (1875 – 1959)

The Old Testament reading is Jeremiah chapter 28 verses 5 to 9

Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. He said,

"Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfil the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD'S house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognised as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true." Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Matthew chapter 10 verses 40 to 42

"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward." Amen.

Our next hymn was written in 1993 by Graham Kendrick as a prayer for justice and loving-kindness which are in great need in our world, though one of the few signs of light during this pandemic are random acts of kindness, especially to the lonely and vulnerable, including the courage shown by Marcus Rashford in his fight to ensure vulnerable children are fed during the summer holidays. We shall sing hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'

**1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!**

**2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills;
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,**

Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. *Chorus:*

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray:
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

**3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain. *Chorus:***

**4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
Make us content with the things that we need. *Chorus:***

**5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of your ways,
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. *Chorus: © Graham Kendrick (born 1950)***

Sermon: “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.” Matthew 10: 40.
It may speak volumes about my character, but Jeremiah, the prophet of lamentations, is one of my favourite prophets. He was called by the Lord between 16 and 20 years old, in the 13th year of **King Josiah, in 627 BC**, and served kings **Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah**, remaining until the destruction of Jerusalem in **586 BC**. Even after the fall of Jerusalem, he prophesied in Egypt, so that his work extended over a period of nearly 50 years. At first he lived in **Anathoth**, and ventured to Jerusalem only for the great festivals; later he lived in Jerusalem, and was there during the terrible times of the siege and destruction of the city.

From the beginning, Jeremiah knew that the message he was to proclaim to Judah would bring troubles, not blessings, because God sent him to warn the people of Judah that they would be crushed and exiled by the Babylonians, although the Jews reasoned that, since the Ark of the Covenant resided in Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem, the Lord would not permit Gentile enemies to triumph over them. However, Jeremiah preached that, as they had broken their covenant with the Lord Jehovah, they would suffer the same humiliation as the Northern kingdom had experienced about a hundred and fifty years earlier when Assyria had conquered its capital, Samaria.

Today’s reading is set in August or September, 593BC, when Jeremiah came into conflict with the prophet, Hananiah. Four years earlier, the Babylonians had taken Jerusalem, deporting some Jews and putting Zedekiah as a puppet leader over the remainder, since when advisers had tried to encourage the king to form an alliance with Egypt, so Judah could rebel against Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah opposed the hot-heads and, as a result was hated by them. The would-be rebels denounced Jeremiah as a traitor and had him held, first in a vile prison, then thrown into a slimy cistern from which he was saved by a courtier, **Ebed-Melech**.

The prophet Hananiah told the priests and congregation in the Temple that not only would the power of Nebuchadnezzar be broken within two years, but King Jehoiachin and the exiles would be returned with articles plundered from the Temple in 597. Jeremiah declared that he fervently hoped Hananiah’s prophecy was correct, but added that previous prophets had forecast war, starvation and disease, so people could only judge Hananiah’s declaration of peace if it was fulfilled in the course of time. By saying this, Jeremiah was telling the people that there would be no ‘**quick-fix**’, much to

Hananiah's rage, for the slighted prophet tore off the wooden yoke from Jeremiah's neck and broke it, signifying that the power of Babylon would similarly be broken. Six years later, Jeremiah was vindicated as Jerusalem was destroyed, the Temple plundered and razed to the ground, while most of the population was led into exile. The Jews had neither accepted nor honoured God's messenger and had, in effect, thereby rejected the Lord himself.

The gospel reading follows Jesus' instructions to the disciples before he sent them to spread the Good News, in deeds as well as words, to local towns and villages. Matthew probably intended that these words should be directed at people to whom the disciples went, rather than to the disciples themselves, for Jesus promised rewards to people who actively welcomed them. He went further, because he said, "**Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.**" What a thought that is: anybody who offered hospitality to the bearer of God's message, effectively offered hospitality to Jesus and, by the same fact, had offered it to God himself! After warning his followers earlier of the hardships and responsibilities of discipleship, Jesus was explaining what a privilege they carried, effectively serving as God's ambassadors!

By welcoming the followers, people would be accepting God and his message of salvation, so they would receive a reward from the Lord, be their hospitality be as limited as offering a disciple a cup of water, which is an act taken for granted in the Middle East and as such ordinarily merits no reward. The free offer of salvation is surely reward enough, yet Jesus suggested that welcomers would receive far more.

Nowadays, we Christians frequently find our views challenged by society at large: Good News is often not accepted by an increasingly secular society because it does not offer instant gratification, or a 'quick-fix'. Indeed, Jesus challenges all-comers to look at themselves honestly, to consider their relationships with God and with one another, to consider what is happening around us in global terms. The Church has often become involved in significant campaigns, such as nuclear disarmament, anti-apartheid, human rights, social justice, environmental issues, global terrorism and the plight of the world's poor. Critics have often suggested we should keep our noses out of politics, but if we don't stand up for justice and mercy, who will?

We may feel that we can do little as individuals, but even the equivalent of offering a cup of water – an outwardly insignificant act – can have greater effect than we might have expected. In Johannesburg, during the early 1950s, a young black boy was walking along a road with his mother when they saw a white priest approaching them. Black people were expected to step into the gutter when a white person passed them on the same pavement. Indeed, if they failed to do so, they would be shoved into the road by white men, but before the boy and his mother could step into the road, the priest did so and raised his hat as a greeting. Soon afterwards the same priest was a regular visitor when that boy spent a long time in hospital. The priest's humility and kindness made such a deep impression on him that he offered himself for the priesthood and rose to become Archbishop Desmond Tutu. It was Desmond Tutu who created and chaired the **Committee for Truth and Reconciliation**, which allowed those who had committed racial crimes during the apartheid era to confess their offences without retaliation, allowing a relatively peaceful transition, rather than the bloodbath that many had forecast. The white priest, who showed that God cares for all people by his actions and words, was Revd. Trevor Huddleston. Had they not met as they did, the course of South African history could have been vastly different, so we

ought to remember to treat others as we'd like to be treated, because even simple acts of goodness can produce surprising results.

Let us, therefore, not set aside kingdom values in favour of quick-fixes, or cheap popularity. Let us continue to campaign for a better world, even when it means making sacrifices, for without sacrifices change will not happen. And if you hesitate at the idea of making sacrifices, think of the sacrifice Christ made for our redemption! May we remember that we are God's ambassadors whose words and deeds should reflect the love of God and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, so people we meet have the opportunity to receive him as their Saviour and friend, too. Amen.

We conclude our worship as we sing a hymn written by Revd. Samuel Stone whilst he was a Curate at Windsor in 1866. Hymn number 690, 'The Church's one foundation'

**1. The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the word;
From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.**

**2. Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth;
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued.**

**3. 'Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace forevermore;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blessed,
And the great church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.**

**4. Yet she on earth has union
With God the Three in One,
And mystic, sweet communion
With those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with thee.**

© Samuel John Stone {1839 – 1900}

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.