

Two Gates Ragged School (StF)

6 p.m. 5th July, 2020

Call to Worship: Psalm 145 verses 8 to 14

The LORD is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made. All you have made will praise you, O LORD; your saints will extol you. They will tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that everybody may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The LORD is faithful to all his promises and loving towards all he has made. The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down. Amen.

We shall join the psalmist as we praise Almighty God in a hymn, originally written by Pastor Carl Boberg in Sweden during 1885. It was translated into German, then into Russian, before it was 'discovered' by Stuart Hine, an English missionary in Ukraine. After singing it in its original form for several years, Mr. Hine reworked it into the present form and sent it to a group of refugees in New Zealand in 1949. They were so impressed that they sent a copy to Billy Graham, who used it at all of his meetings from 1954. We sing hymn number 82, 'How great thou art!'

**1. O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
Thy power throughout the universe displayed: *Chorus***

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to thee,
How great thou art, how great thou art!*

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How great thou art, how great thou art!*

**2. When through the woods and forest glades I wander
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze: *Chorus***

**3. And when I think that God his Son not sparing,
Sent him to die – I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin. *Chorus***

**4. When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation
And take me home – what joy shall fill my heart!
Then I shall bow in humble adoration
And there proclaim, my God, how great thou art! *Chorus***

Let us pray.

Creator God, the Word who made our universe and all that lives within it, we come to offer our worship and adoration to you today with joyful songs of praise and prayers of faith, for you are the Sustainer of life who has brought us salvation through your Son, our Saviour, Christ Jesus. Thank you, O Lord, for all the good things that we enjoy and for the wide variety of gifts we have received from you: the gift of life itself, our work, our homes, our food, for people who have enriched our lives through their guidance, care and love. Loving God, thank you for this beautiful world over which you have granted 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. Loving heavenly Father, may all glory, honour, power and praise be yours now and evermore.

Merciful God, although we try hard to live as you call us to, but we know that we still say and do the very things we know we shouldn't. We aren't wholehearted in our love and service to you and our neighbours. We don't always answer your call to serve 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. Help us to change our ways, O Lord, and pardon us for the sins we have committed and for the good we have failed to do.

Gracious heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, so we are confident that you have not only forgiven us, but call us to serve you once more. From now on, let the Holy Spirit rule our words and actions, so we do as you desire and use our fruits of the Spirit for the good of all, 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 Carol Owens in Los Angeles for a musical, 'Come Together' in 1972 and was made popular by Pat Boone. Hymn number 424, 'God forgave my sin in Jesus' name,'

© Carol Owens {born 1931}

**1. God forgave my sin in Jesus' name;
I've been born again in Jesus' name,
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his love as he told me to: *Chorus:***

He said:

'Freely, freely you have received,

Freely, freely give;

Go in my name and because you believe,

Others will know that I live.'

2. All power is given in Jesus' name

In earth and heaven in Jesus' name;

And in Jesus' name I come to you

To share his power as he told me to: *Chorus:*

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

God of all grace, grant us the power of your Spirit to give us the courage, steadfastness, wisdom, empathy and compassion we need to serve our neighbours as you want us to, but in circumstances where we know we are powerless, we turn to you, for to you all things are possible.

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 the work of peacemakers and those who work with the victims of conflict.

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 them good support from professionals and their communities, so they may rebuild their confidence and face life resolutely.

Lord of justice and mercy, hear our prayer for racial justice, particularly following the death of George Floyd at the hands of a policeman in the USA. Help us both spread and live out the message that, through Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free, so we strive for our society to be even-handed in its dealings, especially with black and ethnic minorities.

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.

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, as the present state of lockdown is being relaxed, help us to follow the guidelines we are given to prevent a second outbreak. Reassure us that you are with us

throughout this time of trial, so we may all face an uncertain, even threatening future, with hope grounded in your saving grace.

God of wellbeing and wholeness, let the light of your love shine upon people who suffer from sickness, grief or trouble, that they may find healing, renewed strength and peace, not only as a result of the care and support they receive, but 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.

Lord, hear our prayer for neighbours who are lonely, anxious, overworked, or who feel undervalued and unloved as well as everyone who mourns the loss of a loved one. 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.

Gracious Lord, the Church was born in Spirit, truth and love: help the Church to share the Good News, united in words and deeds, so everybody may believe that Jesus is the risen Lord and Saviour of the world. And grant that the life of Christ is revealed in all we do and say.

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 boldly take 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 255, 'The kingdom of God is justice and joy', written by Revd. Bryn Rees in 1974. The set tune in "Singing the Faith" is 'Tetherdown', an apt choice as Revd. Rees was Minister at Tetherdown URC, Muswell Hill, London and the tune was composed by the church organist, Gerald Barnes. Hymn number 255.

© Bryn Rees {1911 – 1983}

**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!**

The first reading is St. Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 7 verses 15 to 25a

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me.

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! Amen.

Our Gospel reading is St. Matthew chapter 11 vs. 16 to 19 & 25 to 30

Jesus said,

"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others: 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and "sinners".' But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

At that time Jesus said,

"I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No-one knows the Son except the Father, and no-one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Amen.

Our next hymn was written by Horatius Bonar, who was born in Edinburgh in 1808 and ultimately became Moderator of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland, the highest position one could attain. We shall sing Hymn number 248, 'I heard the voice of Jesus say:'

© *Horatius Bonar (1808 – 1889)*

1. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
‘Come unto me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon my breast.’
I came to Jesus as I was,
So weary, worn and sad;
I found in him a resting-place,
And he has made me glad.

2. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
‘Behold, I freely give
The living water, thirsty one;
Stoop down and drink and live.’
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.

3. I heard the voice of Jesus say,
‘I am this dark world’s light;
Look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
And all thy day be bright.’
I looked to Jesus and I found
In him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I’ll walk
Till trav’ling days are done.

Sermon: “*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” **Matthew 11:30**

Those of you who are parents will no doubt be familiar with this situation: you are going somewhere special, so you wash and comb the hair of your young son or daughter and dress them in their best clothes. Then, just before you leave the house, you commit the ultimate folly: **you tell them not to get dirty.** What happens next is inevitable, or at least it was for my parents, for if I was drinking that concentrated orange juice, so popular just after the Second World War, I would be sure to spill it down my white shirt. I don’t know what colorant was used in it, but it was able to convert me from Tottenham Hotspur to Wolverhampton Wanderers in seconds. If there was a puddle, my feet would invariably seek it out, so my shiny shoes shone no longer, or if I was in my best trousers, I could always contrive to slip on grass and stain them. The same syndrome affects me even now, for the harder I try to do something, the more likely it is that I shall make a complete mess of it, so I share Paul’s frustration and grief.

In the reading from Matthew, Jesus upbraided the Jewish religious establishment for its blind refusal to accept either his teaching, or that of John the Baptist. He compared the Baptist’s sombre call to repentance with children playing funerals and his own Good News with other children playing at weddings. The Pharisees were like awkward children who would neither mourn, nor celebrate: they rejected John as demon-possessed because of his austere lifestyle as much as his message, whilst they condemned Jesus as a glutton, a drunkard and an associate of the dregs of society, because he sought out sinners more

than the self-righteous. He observed that the religious scholars were too proud to accept the Good News, which Jesus brought, but, instead the humble poor were open to God's salvation. He also warned that he is the One through whom we may come to know God the Father.

Therefore, he called on the humble poor, burdened by Pharisaic demands of 613 rules for righteous living, to turn to him, for he, too, was **'gentle and humble in heart'** and in him they **'would find rest for their souls. For his yoke is easy and his burden is light.'** Jesus was not saying that the Law of Moses should be rejected, but the petty man-made rules that had been derived from them had become an intolerable burden to ordinary people and they often made life miserable, whereas Jesus was offering life lived to the full. Paul understood what Jesus meant, for he wrote this to the Romans: **'Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for those who love their fellowman have fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore, love is the fulfilment of the law.'**

Discipleship does mean accepting the yoke offered by Jesus, but instead of trying to observe hundreds of rules, Jesus has gone to the heart of what God wants. When he was asked what the Greatest Commandment was, our Lord replied, **"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'** The second is this: **'Love your neighbour as yourself.'** There is no commandment greater than these." You can see that, for a Jew in Jesus' time wholehearted love of God was inextricably linked to loving your neighbour as yourself: the same rule applies today.

Although I did not support the previous Governments austerity policy I supported its aim to provide overseas aid, despite the fiscal challenges the country faced – on condition that the aid reached the right people and was not siphoned off by corrupt officials. I know that some newspapers and politicians have argued very strongly that, if we are cutting our own budgets, we ought to make similar cuts to foreign aid. However, I am reminded of the opening of **"The Fiddler on the Roof"** when the milkman, **Tevey**, introduced fellow-villagers, one of whom was a beggar. When Tevey declined to give him a coin, saying he'd had a bad week, the beggar quipped, **"You've had a bad week, so I should suffer?"**

Our Government has borrowed eye-watering amounts to try to bring us through the coronavirus crisis, sums that may not be repaid for many years, so it is tempting to cut foreign aid in the circumstances. However, our financial woes are relative: indeed, what we call poverty in the United Kingdom would be deemed luxury in the Developing World, where most of the population try to exist on less than two dollars a day.

It is a sobering thought that while the Sumatran Tsunami of 2004 claimed the lives of some two hundred thousand people, every seven days two hundred and ten thousand children die from poverty – four hundred in the time it has probably taken to read this sermon. The effects of the tsunami were headline items in the news Media for weeks afterwards, yet these children's deaths pass almost unnoticed. My friends, it is time to nail our colours to the mast, to work to break the chains of poverty in the Developing World.

As Christ broke the chains of our enslavement to sin, can we – dare we – do less than to fight to break the chains of debt that enslave and degrade our neighbour in the Developing World? Amen.

We conclude our worship as we sing hymn number 345, Charles Wesley's wonderful, 'And can it be'.

© Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

**1. And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**

**2. 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds enquire no more.**

**3. He left his Father's throne above –
So free, so infinite his grace –
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me!**

**4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray –
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.**

**5. No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own!**

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.