

Circuit Service Sunday 9th May 2021 Revd Lesley Martin

Welcome, wherever you are, to this service of praise.

We begin joyfully with a psalm of praise and a hymn of praise. You may not be feeling joyful or full of energy. You may be feeling quite the opposite. Hang on in there and let the words and feelings of our worship together flow over you to lift you into God's loving care.

We pray: Come Holy Spirit, enter into our homes, our lives, into our hearts and minds. During this holy time of worship remove any anxieties or pain we may be feeling and help us to know your peace and calm, as we hear the words of the psalmist:

Psalm 98 Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvellous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

²The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

³He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

⁴Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;

⁵make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,

⁶with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

⁷Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.

⁸Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;

⁹let them sing before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

Our first hymn is associated with Christmas: *Joy to the World*. Christ is with us... let every heart prepare him room.

STF 330 Joy to the World <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nC0I7D4a9nA>

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| 1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come !
Let earth receive her King ;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing. | 3 He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love. |
| 2 Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns !
Let all their songs employ ;
while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy. | Isaac Watts (1674–1748) |

Prayer of adoration and thankfulness

Almighty God, we rejoice that you are a great-hearted God, generous in love, generous in giving, generous without measure, and generous towards each one of us, whether it is in the extravagant beauty of creation; whether it is the offering of Jesus – His life, His love, What He said, what He did, who He spent his time with and the life that was given up on the cross.

Great God you are generous in the gift of the Holy Spirit. We praise you that your love knows no bounds, and reaches out to each of us, this day and every day. We respond to your love and seek to love and worship you through our words, our actions and service. In Jesus name we pray AMEN

All Age Address:

Very often when scrolling through Facebook I see video clips of animals being rescued. One of them recently was of a giraffe with a wire round its neck. Six or seven rangers were trying to catch this giraffe by its legs so that they could inject it and put it to sleep so that they could take the wire off. The giraffe of course was having none of it and was fighting against being caught. Another video was about a deer that slipped down into some ice, followed by a couple more. People were trying to drag them out by their legs, but the deer were struggling against this. A further video was about an elephant that needed some help with a wound on its chest, and again it was so difficult trying to catch this animal to inject it and treat the wound.

What has this got to do with worship in a church service. Well, what is the answer to all these animals that didn't want to be caught? (When I was teaching Junior Church many years ago my sons knew that the answer to most questions in church was "Jesus".) Well, the answer to this talk is that Jesus is wanting to help people, perhaps to help you, but that we flap about, or run away or make it ever so difficult for Jesus to catch hold of us and keep us safe.

Or perhaps we want to help people and they won't be helped. In the videos the people helping the animals were all persistent, they didn't give up. That may be the message for us, don't give up trying to help, trying to show Jesus in your life.

STF 513 Take this moment, sign, and space <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbZ6gGG0V-o>

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| 1 Take this moment, sign, and space ;
take my friends around ;
here among us make the place
where your love is found. | 4 Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old ;
help me here to find my worth
made in Christ's own mould. |
| 2 Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend. | 5 Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be ;
let my life be yours, and yet,
let it still be me. |
| 3 Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget. | |

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

Proverbs chapter 3 verses 27 – 28

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to act.
Do not say to your neighbour, "Come back tomorrow and I'll give it to you"—
when you already have it with you.

Prayer of Confession

Generous God, forgive us when we are short-sighted and blind to the needs of others;

Forgive us when we are hard-hearted and calculate what we can give or what is convenient for us to share.

Forgive us when we are mean-spirited and interpret your calling in ways that suit our own interests and preferences rather than invite love;

Forgive us when we selfishly follow the values of the world, rather than principles of your kingdom.

Heavenly Father, forgive us.

Out of love, Christ lived for us. Out of love, Christ died for us. Out of love, Christ forgives us. Out of love, Christ says, "Follow me". Thanks be to God, AMEN

Matthew 20 verses 1 - 16 Parable of the workers in the vineyard

Sermon

When I was at college training to be a Methodist Minister we had a session where we were all asked to say what theme we preached on most often. We had all had some previous experience of preaching. It was interesting to hear the variety of answers that were given and fascinating that most of us knew that we tended to lay stress in our preaching on one aspect of the gospel; that we each had a favourite topic. I remember one person saying that he preached most often on commitment. Another said that she

preached most often on forgiveness. Those are the only two answers I remember – except for my own of course – which was ‘God Loves You’.

My friend Stan, a Methodist all his adult life and a local preacher for over 40 years often takes issue with me over this, insisting that the gospel is more hard hitting than that and we need to hear more about sin and justice. He preaches, with great wisdom, *John 12 v 21 Sir, we would see Jesus*”. He’s right, isn’t he? So that’s what I am preaching on today. *Sir, we would see Jesus*. That phrase appears in John’s gospel following on from Jesus triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and John’s writes “*now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip and said “Sir we would like to see Jesus” (or, we wish to see Jesus)*. These Greeks, having made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem were most probably Gentiles. John the gospel writer underscores that they are non-Jews, representative of the Gentile World. And they want to see Jesus, personally. We are not told whether they do.

Plenty did see Jesus though: the Samaritan Woman at the Well testified that she had seen the Messiah. The Samaritans from her town believed in Jesus because of her testimony and then confirmed their belief when they met him for themselves

In today’s reading from Matthew’s gospel Jesus is in Jerusalem where things are hotting up politically. Jesus has already met with and shocked the rich young ruler, telling him to give his money away to the poor and follow him. Can you imagine that rich ruler in old age, looking back on his life and at his possessions and feeling how empty his life has been, wishing it had been different, that he had made the decision all those years ago to follow Jesus. After the rich young ruler turns away, Jesus tells the parable of Workers in the vineyard. He’s a master storyteller. The time had come to speak again about the Kingdom of God. Previously he had already described the Kingdom as a mustard seed, like yeast in dough, like good seeds, like treasure in a field, like fine pearls, like a net full of fish, like a wedding banquet, a vineyard.

Now in Jerusalem Jesus tells this parable about the workers in the vineyard. Jesus who sees Justice perhaps differently from us tells of paying the workers in the vineyard the same for an hour’s work as those who worked all day. The Kingdom of God according to Jesus has a different reality from the one we work with, a kingdom that quite often turns our expectations upside down. He speaks of the first being last, of loving enemies, of loving your neighbour. He speaks of a kingdom of justice and mercy. And perhaps we wonder where is the justice in paying the workers the same when they haven’t worked the same hours. Upside down kingdom, roundabout kingdom, puzzling kingdom. *Sir, we would see Jesus*. We would see Jesus to help our understanding. We would see Jesus to share in the joy of the kingdom.

The obvious point of the Workers in the Vineyard parable to those who were listening at the time was that the angry workers represented the Jewish legalists (Scribes and Pharisees) who thought that the Kingdom belonged to those who worked the hardest for it... that is to say, themselves. Underlying the parable Jesus is indicating that the Kingdom of God is a gift of God’s grace that cannot be earned. God’s justice is based on love. But don’t get me wrong.... You have your role within God’s Kingdom, to act and speak for Christ, to bring others to Jesus.

I have been reading some books recently on the growth of Christianity over the last 20 years in many Muslim countries. I am reading that Jesus is making himself known to Muslims across the world from North and West Africa eastwards through East Africa, the Arab world, Asia and Malaysia. Many are

experiencing Christ or the light of Christ moving in their lives and bringing joy. Sadly converts to Christ are often persecuted for their faith. Why is this wave of conversion happening at this time? It is suggested that people have had enough of hatred and killing. They would see Jesus and share in the light, joy and peace of the Kingdom.

Sir, we would see Jesus. And we would like people to see Jesus in us. Perhaps we achieve this by once more following the example of Jesus. Remember him with the Samaritan woman at the well. Most Jews used to skirt round the edges of Samaria. Jesus went directly into Samaria. Jesus went where others feared to go. Perhaps we should too. It's not always easy to go into places that feel threatening or unfamiliar, but if we want to follow Jesus we need to be brave at times and go where we wouldn't always want to go.

We would see Jesus who is the Christ, the Saviour, the door and the gate to the Kingdom. We would love to help others see Jesus too..... wouldn't we?

STF 407 Hear the Call of the Kingdom <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL-UdwB0Qvc>

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| 1 Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King ;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace. | <i>King of heaven, we will answer the call.
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim salvation in Jesus' name.</i> |
| 2 Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us. | 3 Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come :
let the nations put their trust in him.

<i>King of heaven, we will answer the call ...</i> |

Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

INTERCESSIONS

Lord so often we see others as more fortunate than ourselves, as getting more for what they do. Teach us in your time Lord how your love is much more than just fair. Teach us how it is a special caring for each of us.

Lord you call us to work for your kingdom to reach out to others in your name and bring your healing word, your gentle touch, your embracing love to them. Help us by your Spirit to be good workers, empower us as individuals and as a church to be ambassadors who know and do your will.

Lord hear our prayer for others. For those who do not have what they need in order to survive, who lack food and shelter, medical care..... We pray for those who live in fear for their lives with fighting and killing being an ever present danger....remembering the situation in Myanmar. We pray for those in danger of their lives or freedom through following Jesus Christ.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear our Prayer.**

We pray for those who have more than enough to meet their needs, but who continue to feel empty inside, who struggle to find meaning and purpose in life, who turn to alcohol drugs or other destructive behaviours to try and hide the pain.

Lord in Your Mercy, **Hear our Prayer**

God of the First and the Last and all those in between, your grace reaches out to all of us, strengthen us so that we might live in a manner worthy of the Good News we have received, offering our lives to the building up of Your upside-down kingdom, where there is mercy, justice and grace and love enough for all.

We continue in our prayers, offering the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples “Our Father, who art in heaven.....

STF 548 Blessed Assurance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n4pzveNsANw>

1 Blessèd assurance, Jesus is mine :
O what a foretaste of glory divine !
Heir of salvation, purchase of God ;
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood :

*This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song,
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,
visions of rapture burst on my sight ;
angels descending bring from above
echoes of mercy, whispers of love :

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Saviour am happy and blest —
watching and waiting, looking above,
filled with his goodness, lost in his love :

Frances Jane van Alstyne, (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915)

May the Lord, Mighty God, bless and keep you forever, Give you peace, perfect peace, strength for every endeavour. Lift your eyes and see his face, feel his grace surround you. May the Lord, Mighty God bless and keep you forever.

This time of worship has finished... let the Service begin.