

13th October 2024 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship - Psalm 90:14

Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad in all our days.

StF 137 – New every morning is the love

- 1) New every morning is the love
Our wakening and uprising prove;
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,
Restored to life, and power, and thought.
- 2) New mercies each returning day
Hover around us while we pray;
New perils past, new sins forgiven,
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.
- 3) If on our daily course our mind
Be set to hallow all we find,
New treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.
- 4) Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
As more of heaven in each we see;
Some softening gleam of love and prayer
Shall dawn on every cross and care.
- 5) The trivial round, the common task
Will furnish all we ought to ask:
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God.
- 6) Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love
For perfect rest with you above;
And help us, this and every day,
To live more nearly as we pray.

John Keble

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Most Holy God, glorious in power and resplendent in majesty, who are we to come into your presence? Yet, through Jesus Christ, your Dear Son who is our great high priest, we approach your throne with boldness, confident in the knowledge of your generous love, your mercy and your grace. We rejoice in you, most Holy God, and we praise you in Christ's name. **Amen.**

God, to whom alone we owe allegiance, we have not loved you as you deserve or served our neighbours as you have commanded. In mind and in heart we have been impure. In word and in deed we have been unkind. In negligence and ignorance we have failed to act with righteousness and to work for peace and justice. Forgive our sins, and so fill our thoughts with what is true and honourable, just and pure, pleasing and commendable, excellent and praiseworthy, that our words and actions may be worthy of our calling; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

StF 545 – Be thou my vision

- 1) Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
Be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2) Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
Be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
Be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
Be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
- 3) Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
Be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4) Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
Be thou mine inheritance now and always, -
Be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5) High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish 8th Century translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne, versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hall

Reading: Amos 5: 6-7, 10-15

Seek the Lord and live, or he will sweep through the house of Joseph like a fire; it will devour, and Bethel will have no one to quench it. You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground. You hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. You trample on the poor and force him to give you corn. Therefore, though you have built stone mansions, you will not live in them; though you have planted lush vineyards, you will not drink their wine. For I know how many are your offences and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts.

Therefore, the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the Lord God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the Lord God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph.

StF 243 – A rich young man came seeking

- 1) A rich young man came seeking -
God's kingdom was his aim.
The law had been his guidebook.
His life was free from blame.
But Jesus asked the courage
To give his wealth away.
The young man turned in sorrow,
That price he would not pay.
- 2) The rich men's gifts were lavish
And made for public show.
The widow's gift was humble
And only God would know,
In giving to the Temple,
Although her coins were small,
Her gift had so much meaning
Because she gave her all.
- 3) One boy brought loaves and fishes,
No other food was there,
But Jesus fed the thousands
And still had bread to spare.
The miracle of plenty
Soon spread beyond that place.
That simple gift was offered,
Then multiplied by grace.
- 4) Lord, keep our care for money
From turning into greed.
Help us to use it wisely
To meet each other's need.
For whether poor or wealthy,
We have so much to share
And open-hearted giving
Will show your loving care.

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Prayer of Thanksgiving

We thank you, God eternal, for creating and sustaining the universe and for all the blessings you shower upon us. You have done great and wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. We thank you for the redemption of humankind by our Lord Jesus Christ, who has taken away the sin of the world. By his death he has destroyed death, and by his resurrection he has restored us to eternal life. He is our great high priest, able to sympathize with our weakness, who pleads for us in heaven. We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit, who comes to work in our lives, bringing salvation to us, that we may die with Christ and rise with him. We thank you for the Church in which we are nurtured and nourished, challenged and called to show our love for you by our care for others and our zeal to proclaim the Gospel. For these and all your innumerable blessings we give you thanks and praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Reading: Mark 10: 17-31

As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. "Good teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" "Why do you call me good?" Jesus answered. "No-one is good – except God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honour your father and mother.'" "Teacher," he declared, "all these things I have kept since I was a boy."

Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for, the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.” The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, “Who then can be saved?”

Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.” Peter said to him, “We have left everything to follow you!” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus replied, “no-one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mother, children and fields – and with them persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last shall be first.”

Sermon

“Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. At this the man’s face fell.”

The cry ‘get a life’ has a very modern ring to it. In fact, it’s nothing new. Some 2,800 years ago, the prophet Amos surveyed his society and knew that it was just not good enough. There were all manner of things wrong with it. His contemporaries, he said, had great need to ‘get a life’. He could see that they were well and truly on the wrong road. Do much so, that it was as though they were literally heading to the wrong places – Bethel, Gilgal, and Beersheba. All those names conjured up hallowed memories for the Hebrew people but, with the passing of time, each sacred site had become corrupted and corrupting. What had been good had become evil. Travelling to any of them, even on pilgrimage with the best of intentions, would be to head into unending dissatisfaction. Not one of these places could help people achieve their dreams.

A dramatic change of direction was required. For them, getting a life meant returning to the demanding moral standards set before their forebears, seeking good and not evil. Even more, it meant coming afresh to the Lord whose presence had been at the heart of all that had originally made Bethel, Gilgal and Beersheba hallowed places. People thought they could please God by singing the right songs, setting apart choice gifts, offering the very best animals in sacrifice, playing the finest music, meeting together with a swaggering assurance that God was bound to be with his people. But all of the things were in fact little more than going through the motions, and all would be to no avail.

Getting a life meant really pleasing God who wants justice to flow like a river, and righteousness to crash down like the highly oxygenated waters of a tumbling mountain stream, thirst quenching and life giving.

The man who came to Jesus knew that he needed to get a life. He had many of the things that the people of Amos’s time dreamed about but somehow, they did not satisfy him. Even so, he was well on the right road. After all, he had avoided evil since childhood, just as the commandments required. The trouble was, as Jesus pointed out very quickly, he had not ‘done good’ – certainly not the good that he could have done. He could have used his wealth for the benefit of others. He had not done this. We are not told if he was of a kindly disposition and had given help on occasion. Perhaps he had. Maybe he had met requests for assistance with some satisfaction, feeling – in the curious way that we put it these days – that it was ‘the least he could do’. Jesus did not ask him to be more charitable. He told him that if he was to get a life, he must sell everything he had and give to the poor.

That put him on the spot. It demanded that he make a choice. Getting the life he was seeking would be costly. Indeed, there was no way he could do that without everyone in the district knowing about it. While the poor might rub their hands in anticipation, his peer group – to say nothing of his family – would throw up their hands in despair. Without any shadow of a doubt, they would feel that he was throwing his life away. Getting a life? He must be joking! It may well be that he went away sad because he knew that there was more to it than just shedding his wealth. The invitation to follow Jesus is symbolic of the full challenge he faced.

All of which, Amos and the rich man together, might lead us to suppose that getting a life is all about a life-style dedicated to doing the right thing; in the full standards set by the commandments and in the teaching of Jesus. But if we let our thinking stop there, we can very quickly find ourselves in the same position as those to whom Amos was speaking, and as that young man.

Getting a life does mean giving the needs of others priority. To seek justice for the oppressed, especially for those who cannot speak for themselves, is crucial. To work for equality in the distribution of wealth that society can offer is important. Giving the less fortunate the regard and esteem – the respect – that we ourselves like to receive is more than just a social grace. It stands at the centre of true community. If we take the teaching of Jesus seriously, there are brownie points to be had. Did he not say to the young man sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven? Yes – he did – and what he said is to be believed.

Jesus, however, did not stop there. He went on to say, then come and follow me. It is instructive to compare various Bible translations of this whole incident. Several different emphases come through in the way in which the man's question is framed. Some are passive. The man seeks eternal life as a gift to be received, or an inheritance which will come his way. The fact that he asks Jesus about it suggests that he does not really expect that it will just drop into his lap. One version uses the word "win" which carries a strong sense of personal achievement, the outcome of a lot of time and energy expended. Another uses the word "have" which carries overtones of possession, almost as if it another dimension of the riches he already has. Yet another speaks of "being sure", which suggests an underlying anxiety not relieved by his riches. We need to note carefully, then, that Jesus does not say do more. There is no sense in this story of the encouragement he gives to another man on another occasion. Then, he said, you are not far from the kingdom of God. (That is another two chapters further on than we read this morning.) To this young man in our story, he just says, Come and follow me.

By the response given to that final instruction both he, and we, will get a life, or not! Jesus makes clear in his last words to the young man that there is something more to getting a life than simply keeping the commandments within a moral lifestyle. He invites us to travel with him so that we might enjoy life in all its fullness. That's why the image of the tumbling mountain stream was used earlier. It has its channel, cut like our Christian tradition over many thousands of years, but its waters splash out creating gardens of delight way beyond the course it must follow. It gives us a picture of what happens when we truly 'get a life'.

Is this what we mean by 'getting a life'? Is this what other people experience in and through us? If the answer to either of those questions is "no", then we need to respond afresh to the Lord who says to us 'then come, follow me.' Get a life!

StF 254 – Seek ye first the kingdom of God

- 1) Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
And his righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia:
*Ch) Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,
Allelu-, Alleluia!*
- 2) Ask, and it shall be given unto you;
Seek, and ye shall find;
Knock and the door shall be opened unto you;
Allelu-, Alleluia:
- 3) We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word
That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu-, Alleluia:

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Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we pray that we may seek you and so enter into life. We pray for all who seek you in simplicity and humility, for all who find you in their service of others. Bless all who are seeking to consecrate their lives to you. We pray for any who have lost their faith or their way.

We pray for all who are choked by their riches, for people possessed by their possessions, for all who are afraid to give and afraid to share, for all who have amassed wealth but are poor in spirit, for all who are suffering through the greed and avarice of others.

Father God, we thank you for all who have sacrificed for us, for all who have enriched our lives by their goodness, for all who have been gracious and generous to us. Teach us to be generous and willing to give. We pray for our friends and families.

We pray for all who are overworked and the work-weary, for all who lack freedom and suffer through injustice, for all who are denied basic human needs. We pray for all who are ill or are in need of help. We give thanks for all who have entered into glory, for all who have triumphed over darkness and evil. We pray for loved ones departed.

Lord, give us grace, and help us in all our needs. These things we ask in and through the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour, who taught us, when we pray, to 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 Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 673 – Will you come and follow me

- 1) Will you come and follow Me if I but
call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and
never be the same?
Will you let My love be shown?
Will you let My name be known,
Will you let My life be grown in you and
you in Me?
- 2) Will you leave yourself behind if I but
call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and
never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let Me answer prayer in you and
you in Me?
- 3) Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in Me?
- 4) Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but
call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and
never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through My sight and touch and sound
in you and you in Me?
- 5) Lord, Your summons echoes true when You
but call my name,
Let me turn and follow You and never
be the same.
In Your company I'll go
Where Your love and footsteps show
Thus I'll move and live and grow in You
and You in me.

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Blessing

God our heavenly Father, whose Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, took the form of a servant, grant that you may serve him through serving others.

And the blessing of God, Father, on and Holy Spirit be with you all, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**