

16th June 2024 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship – Psalm 139:4-5

You encompass me behind and before and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, so high that I cannot reach it.

StF 81 – Now thank we all our God

- 1) Now thank we all our God,
With hearts and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things has done,
In whom his world rejoices;
Who from our mothers' arms
Has blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.
- 2) O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in his grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.
- 3) All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore,
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart translated by Catherine Winkworth

Prayers

Lord our God, the depth of your love and understanding are wonderful to us. We can hardly begin to grasp the extent of your knowledge of us and of all that you have made. We see the blazing light of the sun, and know that this is as a dim candle compared to your glory. We see the gentle light of the stars, each one different in brightness and colour, and gain only the slightest hint of the variety of the thoughts of your mind. We see the delicate pattern on a flower's petal, or on the wings of a butterfly, and perceive just a faint reflection of the attention to detail that you give to all that you have made. How great are your thoughts, words and works. How wise is your plan of salvation, that you gave your Son to be the sacrifice for our sins, in order that we through faith could become the righteousness of God in him and be assured of eternal life. How wonderful that you should send your Holy Spirit to be our guide and companion throughout our lives. Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we worship you. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins and shortcomings to the Lord.

God our Saviour, when we trust Jesus you give us the assurance of life that lasts for ever, and continual cleansing from our sin, yet we are not perfect and continue to fall short. Where we have neglected to love you or others because our gaze has been restricted to our own needs: **Lord, forgive.**

Where we have compromised your word because we wanted to make things easier for ourselves: **Lord, forgive.**

Where we have failed to respond to your call on our lives because we have not believed your promise to equip us: **Lord, forgive.**

With your help we turn from our sins and respond to your call.

Hear the words of grace: The Lord has wiped out our sins and remembers them no more. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Reading: 1 Samuel 15:34 - 16:13

Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. The Lord said to Samuel, 'How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.' But Samuel said, 'How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.' The Lord said, 'Take a heifer with you and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.'

Samuel did what the Lord said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, 'Do you come in peace?' Samuel replied, 'Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.' Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord.' But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.' Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, 'The Lord has not chosen this one either.' Jesse then made Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, 'Nor has the Lord chosen this one.' Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has not chosen these.'

So he asked Jesse, 'Are these all the sons you have?' 'There is still the youngest,' Jesse answered. 'He is tending the sheep.' Samuel said, 'Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.' So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said, 'Rise and anoint him; this is the one.' So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

StF 728 – O Lord you search me and you know me

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| 1) O God, you search me and you know me.
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me:
Ever the maker and keeper of my days. | 4) Although your Spirit is upon me,
Still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight. |
| 2) You know my resting and my rising.
You discern my purpose from afar,
And with love everlasting you besiege me:
In every moment of life or death, you are. | 5) For you created me and shaped me,
Gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new. |
| 3) Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,
You have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding:
God of my present, my past and future, too. | |

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Reading: Luke 7:36 - 8:3

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, 'If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is – that she is a sinner.'

Jesus answered him, 'Simon, I have something to tell you.' 'Tell me, teacher,' he said. 'Two people owed money to a certain money-lender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?' Simon replied, 'I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.' 'You have judged correctly,' Jesus said.

Then he turned towards the woman and said to Simon, 'Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.' Then Jesus said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The other guests began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' Jesus said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Sermon

When we meet someone for the first time we form immediate impressions of what we think the person is like. As we know virtually nothing about him or her at this stage these impressions come from our immediate reactions to aspects of the person such as physical features, clothing or manner of speech. Sometimes we get an immediate sense of how much we like (or do not like) the person. Because they are based on what is often superficial or flimsy evidence, these first impressions are not always accurate and we may find that our opinion changes as we get to know the person better.

Thankfully God does not operate in the same way. The Lord looks at the heart, not at outward appearances. We learn this from the story of the anointing of David to be king of Israel, and it is shown again in the gospel story that we have just heard. Jesus is at the home of a Pharisee, a member of a group comprised of people that have been described as the religious evangelicals of their day. They were meticulous in their observance of the Jewish law and had a strong sense of morality. Therefore when this woman, who had been living an immoral life, showed up at Simon's house, it caused quite a stir. Presumably it was well-known in that area that the woman had been leading such a lifestyle. Jesus' host, Simon, was certainly aware of it. However, he appears to think that Jesus is unaware of who the woman is and the lifestyle that she has been leading. Jesus, though, knows her past perfectly well, yet sees something in the woman that others have missed. He sees the love that she shows as a response to the forgiveness that she has received. Jesus sees what is beneath the surface. He does not operate merely on hearsay or learned knowledge of a person's past activities, nor on surface appearances, but sees what people do not see, a changed and repentant heart, and the potential in a person's life.

Turning to our passage about the anointing of David to be king, we have another story about the contrast between outward appearances and inward potential. To put this story in a larger context, let us rewind the tape a little, and go back to the previous king of Israel. His name was Saul, and his reign had started off looking promising. When he was picked out from the crowd for kingship it was noted that he was a head taller than anyone else. He looked like people thought a king should look! When at the beginning of his reign he also showed humility. He thought little of himself and therefore was more able to be used of God. When Saul was successful in his early military campaigns against the enemies of Israel, the Philistines, this success appears to have gone to his head and he became proud, narcissistic and autocratic.

Now we come to the scripture passage that we heard earlier. Because of Saul's pride the Lord has rejected him as king and is pointing out another to succeed him.

Samuel the prophet has been charged with going to Bethlehem to the family of Jesse, and anointing one of Jesse's sons to be the next king of Israel. Samuel arranges a sacrifice and invites Jesse and his sons to the event. Jesse shows up with seven of his eight sons and Samuel waits to find which one of these the Lord has chosen to be king.

First comes Eliab. Samuel is sure that this must be the one as his appearance and stature are like those that should be possessed by a king. However, it isn't this one! Then here is Abinadab. No, it isn't him either. The third is named Shammah. He isn't the one! Likewise, the next four (who are not named in this passage) are all rejected too. The eighth son isn't even there. David, the youngest, had been left to look after the sheep because his father hadn't even brought him to the sacrifice. He was more useful as a sheep-minder. When David finally comes before Samuel, the prophet knows that he is the one chosen for kingship.

It is in this passage that we find the words of the Lord: "*People look at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart*". The Lord sees what people do not see. Jesus saw in the woman something good that Simon the Pharisee had missed. Jesus even saw the inner thoughts of Simon when he questioned to himself whether Jesus was truly a prophet. We see elsewhere in the gospels that Jesus looked right into the hearts of those around him and could know what they were thinking. In the passage where he healed a paralysed man who was lowered into his presence through a hole made in a house roof, we learn that Jesus saw the faith of those who brought the man, and he also knew what objections the religious bystanders were raising in their own minds (see Luke chapter 5). In John chapter 2, Jesus would not entrust himself to people who on the surface appeared to believe in him, because he knew what was in people. Their outward show of belief was not matched by what was going on inside of them.

Let us have a look at some of the consequences of this that will help us in our lives. Firstly, the Lord knows everything about us. God knows all things, both good and bad. He knows our actions, even those that are hidden from others, and our innermost thoughts. This means that we cannot hide from him. There is nothing that he does not already know, therefore we can speak to him freely. He knows our sins and shortcomings, therefore there is nothing that we cannot confess to the Lord of which he is not already aware. We can be honest with him because nothing will surprise him. This should give us confidence in our prayers. We know that he calls us to him and will accept us and that there is nothing that we can say to him that will make him change his mind.

Psalms 139 tells us that the Lord knows our words before they are even on our lips, and each day of our lives is written in his book before it even happens. The Lord therefore knows our future. Without getting into a complicated discussion on predestination let us just say that this fact does not negate the concept of free will. We still have our free will and are able to make decisions; it's just that the Lord knows in advance what decisions we will make and what actions we will take. It's rather like our watching a recording of a sports event after the occasion. Seeing a particular event more than once we might know that a particular goal will be scored or when a certain wicket will fall, or whether a particular tennis ball will be ruled in or out. The result is not in doubt, but nobody would suggest that the players and referee or umpire do not have free will or that the outcome is predetermined. So it is with our lives as seen by God. He knows everything about us, past, present and future, and still calls us to be part of his family.

Secondly, because the Lord sees potential in us that no one else can see, we can have confidence in the Lord's call upon our lives. I wonder how many people fail to respond to the call of God to a particular task because they lack confidence in themselves to be able to carry it out. The truth is, God already knows we can do it or he wouldn't have called us. He does not give us assignments in order to watch us fail! Our ability to carry out our purpose may be in potential form when we are called, but the Lord will develop it within us or endue us with his own power. Note that the Spirit of God came upon David the day that he was anointed king by Samuel, and the Spirit remained with David. He was given power to fulfil his calling. This leads to a well-used saying in Christian circles: The Lord does not call the qualified; he qualifies the called!

When God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt, Moses made excuses as to why he could not do it, but God provided supernatural signs to make the elders of Israel believe Moses, and gave him Aaron his brother as a spokesman.

When you sense the call of God on your life, you may not feel that you are qualified to carry it out. Indeed you may question whether you have heard correctly or even wonder whether God has made a mistake (he hasn't!) or perhaps has not thought this through (he has!). God is looking for a response of faith and trust as we step forward into that calling and future that is unknown to us but known by God. We have the privilege today of knowing how David's story worked out. He became someone who in the view of many was the greatest king of Israel, and was the first of a royal dynasty that culminated with the Messiah, Jesus our Saviour. Although David had his weaknesses, which God knew about in advance, he was well able to fulfil his destiny. So are you! We know very little about the woman in our gospel passage in terms of what happened next, but we know that God had a purpose for her life. We don't know her name, where she was born or where she went subsequent to meeting Jesus, but here is what we do know: the story of her meeting Jesus is still being told today and you are listening to it right now! Her story is still giving hope to people who may feel that their lives are irredeemable, showing them that they are loved and have a purpose too.

Both David and the unnamed woman were able to say "yes" to God's plan for their lives; what about you?

StF 407 – Hear the call of the kingdom

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.

*Ch) 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.*

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.

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Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Lord, we give you thanks because you know everything about us, both the best and the worst, and you love us completely. Your salvation is a free gift for all who believe, no matter who they are or what they have done. Thank-you for your amazing generosity and for the assurance that we will be with you for evermore. **Amen.**

Just as you know us completely, so you see everything that happens in our world. You see people's actions and their motivations, and you know the past, present and future, yet you call us to be a part of your plan and to intercede for people everywhere.

We pray for a world in turmoil with wars taking place in many areas. We pray that you strengthen the peacemakers, those who seek to reconcile groups and individuals. We pray for the coming of Messiah to bring justice and true and lasting peace in our world. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We remember our brothers and sisters in the faith who are persecuted because of their stand for the gospel of truth, and their testimony to Jesus. Strengthen them in their faith and may the word of life continue to go forth in power. We pray for all who suffer for their faith or political beliefs and we pray for a just world where people dwell together in harmony regardless of their opinions.

Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our nation in this election time. We thank-you that you see the deepest motivations in human hearts. Grant us your discernment as we decide where to place our votes, and may we have the leaders that this nation needs. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Hear our petition for our own churches and circuit, and for the whole Church of Christ in our area and worldwide. May we be one with each other, as Jesus is one with the Father. In our local area grant us the strength to be all that you want us to be to our community. Revive us by the Holy Spirit and empower us as we pray together, as we bless our communities and as we testify to the life-transforming truth of the gospel. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for anyone known to us who needs your touch of healing, of strength, or of comfort. To the fearful, grant courage. To the intimidated, grant a new vision of your all-encompassing power and majesty. To the weak in faith, grant remembrance of your past faithfulness, and supply the strength to take the next step forward in trust. Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

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 550 – Forth in thy name

- 1) Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go,
My daily labour to pursue,
Thee, only thee, resolved to know
In all I think, or speak, or do.
- 2) The task thy wisdom has assigned
O let me cheerfully fulfil,
In all my works thy presence find,
And prove thy good and perfect will.
- 3) Thee may I set at my right hand,
Whose eyes my inmost substance see,
And labour on at thy command,
And offer all my works to thee.
- 4) Give me to bear thy easy yoke,
And every moment watch and pray,
And still to things eternal look,
And hasten to thy glorious day;
- 5) For thee delightfully employ
Whate'er thy bounteous grace has given,
And run my course with even joy,
And closely walk with thee to heaven.

Charles Wesley

Blessing

The Lord knows you completely, equips you and surrounds you with love. Go in peace to share the good news of the kingdom. The blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us now and for evermore. Amen.