

# 25<sup>th</sup> August 2024 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

## Call to Worship

Bless the Lord, O my soul, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.

## StF 117 – Sing praise to God

- 1) Sing praise to God who reigns above,  
The God of all creation,  
The God of power, the God of love,  
The God of our salvation;  
With healing balm my soul he fills,  
And every faithless murmur stills:  
To God all praise and glory!
- 2) What God's almighty power has made  
That will he ever cherish,  
And will, unfailing, soon and late,  
With loving-kindness nourish;  
And where he rules in kingly might  
There all is just and all is right:  
To God all praise and glory!
- 3) The Lord is never far away,  
But, through all grief distressing,  
An ever-present help and stay,  
Our peace, and joy, and blessing;  
As with a mother's tender hand,  
He leads his own, his chosen band:  
To God all praise and glory!
- 4) O you who name Christ's holy name,  
Give God all praise and glory:  
O you who own his power, proclaim  
Aloud the wondrous story.  
Cast each false idol from its throne,  
The Lord is God, and he alone:  
To God all praise and glory!

*Johann Jakob Shütz, Frances Elizabeth Coz & Honor Mary Thwaites*    © Michael Thwaites    CCL No. 515642

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Heaven and earth are full of your glory, majestic, holy, all-powerful God. We approach the blazing light of your presence with reverence and awe, with humility and penitence. Accept our adoration and teach us through your word so that, strengthened by your Spirit, our lives may be lived to your glory; through Jesus Christ, your Son, in whom we make our prayer. **Amen.**

*'Do you think of yourselves more highly than you ought to think.'*

Compassionate God, forgive us for thinking too highly of ourselves in relation to you. Forgive the pride that makes us imagine that we know what is best, regardless of your commandments. Forgive the arrogance that leads us to act as though the whole world revolved around us. Forgive the complacency that allows us to be content with our fainthearted discipleship.

Lord, have mercy.

Compassionate God, forgive us for thinking too highly of ourselves in relation to others. Forgive the selfishness that makes us behave as though they existed for our benefit. Forgive the self-righteousness that leads us to judge sisters and brothers for whom Christ died. Forgive the self-concern that allows us to ignore the needy and withhold food from the hungry.

Lord, have mercy.

Compassionate God, forgive our sins and purify our minds, that in thought and in action we may be worthy of our calling, in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### StF 238 – Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us

- 1) Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us  
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;  
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,  
For we have no help but thee,  
Yet possessing every blessing  
If our God our Father be.
- 2) Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us.  
All our weakness thou dost know,  
Thou didst tread this earth before us,  
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;  
Tempted, taunted, yet undaunted,  
Through the desert thou didst go.
- 3) Spirit of our God, descending,  
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy  
Love with every passion blending,  
Pleasure that can never cloy;  
Thus provided, pardoned, guided,  
Nothing can our peace destroy.

*James Edmeston*

### Reading: Joshua 24: 14-18

“Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshipped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Then the people answered, “Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods! It was the Lord our God himself who brought us up out of slavery, and performed those great signs before our eyes. He protected us on our entire journey and among all the nations through which we travelled. And the Lord drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the Lord, because He is our God.

### StF 322 – How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

- 1) How sweet the name of Jesus sounds  
In a believer's ear!  
It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,  
And drives away our fear.
- 2) It makes the wounded spirit whole,  
And calms the troubled breast;  
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,  
And to the weary, rest.
- 3) Dear name - the rock on which I build,  
My shield and hiding-place,  
My never-failing treasury, filled  
With boundless stores of grace!
- 4) Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,  
My Prophet, Priest, and King,  
My Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,  
Accept the praise I bring.
- 5) Weak is the effort of my heart,  
And cold my warmest thought;  
But when I see thee as thou art,  
I'll praise thee as I ought.
- 6) Till then I would thy love proclaim  
With every fleeting breath;  
And may the music of thy name  
Refresh my soul in death.

*John Newton*

### Reading: John 6: 56-69

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Our forefathers ate [manna] and died, but he who feeds on this bread will have life for ever.” He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

On hearing it many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching, who can accept it?" Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no-one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him."

From this time, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the twelve. Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

### **Sermon - "Joshua says, 'Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve.'" Joshua 24: 15**

It is a poignant scene. Joshua is nearing the end of his life. It had been an eventful life. As a young man he had experienced the desert wanderings of the Israelites after they had escaped from Egypt. And, when Moses died, just before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, he had emerged as the new Leader to complete the journey, enter the Promised Land, occupy it and settle it. A long and arduous and, it must be said, violent process. And now he was giving his farewell sermon.

It was a passionate plea. Because in the past the people had not been wholehearted in following the Lord. In the desert there had been moments of disloyalty. At one point, in the absence of Moses, they had made a golden calf and worshipped it. Moses had dealt with that! And now, in the Promised Land, where God had helped them to settle, they were tempted by the local religions. Although they had some questionable elements, the people had still be attracted to them. And it was up to Joshua to deal with that...

And so – his passionate plea: *Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve; whether the gods your ancestors served way back, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.*

The sermon had its intended effect: *Yes, the people said, The Lord is our God and the others are false gods. We, too, will serve the Lord, because the Lord is our God.* It was an important moment. And shortly after, Joshua died, content that the people, whom he had led, had declared that they would be faithful to the Lord. In the event, of course, they did not always remain faithful to the God who had safely brought them thus far.

So now to today's Gospel reading. That, too, is about moving on, but in a different sense. But it is a similar moment of decision: do you break with the past, or do you remain faithful to God and move on into the future?

Just before our passage started, Jesus had said, *"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, they will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.* That is a plea to remain close to him, identify with him, and follow his way of love, even though it may be difficult. And again, as in the Old Testament reading, there are those who are hesitant, and wish to hold on to the old ways. But Jesus goes on. He reminds his hearers that way back, in the desert wanderings, before their ancestors settled in the Promised Land, the Lord had provided bread from heaven, the manna, to give them strength to continue their journey. It was bread from heaven, provided by the Lord. They ate the manna...but in the end, they still died. By contrast, however, *whoever feeds on this new bread from heaven, my body, will live for ever.*

And here, we are at the heart of the Gospel. Communion with Christ, being in fellowship with him, following his way, leads to eternal life. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1930s, wrote: *"Those who ate the manna satisfied present hunger; but that was all. It was a physical refreshment, and could not ward off physical death. But there is a spiritual nourishment continuously offered by God, by the taking of which, eternal life is secured. It is supremely and uniquely offered in Christ, who is himself, the bread, the living bread.... come down out of heaven."*

Those words will, for many, be associated with Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper. There we eat the bread that conveys the life of Christ to us. It signifies to us that in our Christian pilgrimage we leave the old spiritual milestones behind, and set out on a new journey, with Jesus as our constant companion, the source of our energy and strength. And it is a demanding journey, but Jesus is offering the spiritual nourishment to give us the strength to complete it. And the challenge to us, like the challenge to the Israelites all those centuries ago, is: can we move on from what was spiritually useful in the past, or do we cling to these things and refuse to move on? It is very tempting to just stay where we are.

Joshua wanted the Israelites to leave other gods behind. In our modern secular world that may not seem to be applicable to us. Other gods? We do not believe in other gods! But do we? There is a modern paganism that has its attractions for some. And quite apart from that, there is a modern false god or idol, particularly in evidence in Western society: the pursuit of wealth for its own sake. Jesus once said, "*You cannot serve both God and money.*" Now much of our life is, quite rightly, dedicated to obtaining enough money to live on. Which is fine. But there is the temptation to let money become an idol, a false god, that we spend immense energy and time pursuing. It is possible to find Jesus' words too much of a challenge and decide that the Christian way is not for you. Some of Jesus' followers, when he started talking about leaving the precious memory of the manna behind and drawing their spiritual nourishment from him, found that too much. And St. John tells us: *From that time many of his disciples turned back, and no longer followed him.*

The hymn-writer, William Cooper, in the 18th Century, longed for "a closer walk with God", and he realised what could hold him back from it. He wrote: *The dearest idol I have known, whate'er that idol be, help me to tear it from thy throne, and worship only thee.*

"Choose this day whom you will serve". It is a challenge that comes to us across the centuries. The actual choice that we are presented with varies from generation to generation, but there is always a choice to be made. Jesus' invitation is to follow him, draw our spiritual nourishment from him, and so enjoy, already here and now, eternal life. May God give us the grace to accept his invitation.

### **StF 634 – Fight the good fight**

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| 1) Fight the good fight with all your might;<br>Christ is your strength, and Christ your right;<br>Lay hold on life, and it shall be<br>Your joy and crown eternally.          | 3) Cast care aside; upon your guide<br>Lean, and his mercy will provide;<br>Lean, and the trusting soul shall prove<br>Christ is its life, and Christ its love. |
| 2) Run the straight race through God's good grace,<br>Lift up your eyes, and seek his face;<br>Life with its way before you lies;<br>Christ is the path, and Christ the prize. | 4) Faint not nor fear, his arm is near;<br>He changes not, and you are dear;<br>Only believe, and prove it true<br>That Christ is all in all to you.            |

*John Samuel Bewley Monsell*

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Father God, we ask that you sustain and strengthen your people in these difficult days, that we may not be found wanting at the moment of trial. We pray that talents may not be lost through neglect or discouragement, but used for your eternal glory. Show the people of the world your truth, loving God, that they might be set free to live and work to your praise.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

Make your people whole, loving God, that our words, our attitudes, our deeds, may together reflect your love towards all needy humankind.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

Give your people a sure footing, loving God, that we may stand secure in the knowledge of your love, able to reach out to help and comfort those around us caught up in conflict and anxiety.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

Strengthen your people's faith in you, loving God, that together we may never be overcome by the trials and pains of life but be a sign of hope to a suffering world.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

Dispel your people's fears. Loving God, that we may boldly follow Christ along the path of saving, suffering love.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

Speak through your people, loving God, that your church may be a faithful witness to the new life to be found in you. Loving God, give us the help of your Holy Spirit, that the world may see and believe.

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 459 – Captain of Israel's host**

1) Captain of Israel's host, and Guide  
Of all who seek the land above,  
Beneath your shadow we abide,  
The cloud of your protecting love;  
Our strength, your grace; our rule, your word;  
Our end, the glory of the Lord.

2) By your unerring Spirit led,  
We shall not in the desert stray;  
We shall not full direction need,  
Nor miss our providential way;  
As far from danger as from fear,  
While love, almighty love, is near.

*Charles Wesley*

### **Blessing**

God, the Mighty One, defend you on every side. Christ the Redeemer, deliver you from all evil. The Spirit of God strengthen you in all goodness. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**