

# 28<sup>th</sup> July 2024 – Morning Service

Andy Haynes

## Call to Worship - Psalm 14 v 2

*The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.*

Let us seek God as we gather in His name, singing, with joy and enthusiasm, our first hymn.

## StF 254 – Seek ye first the Kingdom of God

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

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## Prayer of Adoration, Thanksgiving and Confession

Dear Lord God, please help us this morning to be sincere in our act of worship, to genuinely seek Your presence as we gather together in Your name, to praise and adore You for Your unfailing goodness and mercy, and to give You thanks for the wonder of creation and the beauty we see in all that Your hand hath made. We join in one accord to acknowledge the greatness of your creation, and echo the words of the hymn writer that declares *Oh Lord my God how great thou art*. For you are mighty and Holy, righteous and true, we bow before you in awe and wonder at the works thy hand hath made. As the psalmist says You have set the earth firmly on its foundations, You placed the ocean over it like a robe, and You are clothed with majesty and glory.

We thank you for the privilege of prayer, and we thank you that you understand us and that you meet us at the point of our need, you carry us through the trials and tribulations of life, and you lift us up to greater heights in the blessings of life.

But as we consider Your magnificence, we also see our own insignificance. For what are people that you are mindful of them? And yet you know us all by name. We thank you Father for your unchanging love for us. Oh Lord, how hopeless and feeble we are. We are born in sin to sin, and we fail to live up to your commands and teaching. We cannot achieve the standards you set for us in your word. Forgive us for the wrong thoughts we have, and for when our actions cause hurt and upset to others. And so we ask you now to assist us in confessing our sins, asking for your mercy and forgiveness, knowing that You are willing and able to purge and purify us because you love and care for each and everyone of us, and you showed that love, and made forgiveness possible through Your greatest gift to us, the gift of your Son the Lord Jesus, 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 518 – Father hear the prayer we offer**

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| 1) Father, hear the prayer we offer:<br>Not for ease that prayer shall be,<br>But for strength that we may ever<br>Live our lives courageously. | 3) Not for ever by still waters<br>Would we idly rest and stay;<br>But would strike the living fountains<br>From the rocks along our way.           |
| 2) Not for ever in green pastures<br>Do we ask our way to be;<br>But the steep and rugged pathway<br>May we tread rejoicingly.                  | 4) Be our strength in hours of weakness,<br>In our wanderings be our guide;<br>Through endeavour, failure, danger,<br>Father, be there at our side. |

*Love Maria Willis*

### **Reading: John 6:1-15**

Some time after this, Jesus crossed to the far shore of the Sea of Galilee (that is, the Sea of Tiberias), and a great crowd of people followed him because they saw the signs he had performed by healing those who were ill. Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with his disciples. The Jewish Passover Festival was near. When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming towards him, he said to Philip, 'Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?' He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. Philip answered him, 'It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!' Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, 'Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?' Jesus said, 'Make the people sit down.' There was plenty of grass in that place, and they sat down (about five thousand men were there). Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.

When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, 'Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted.' So they gathered them and filled twelve baskets with the pieces of the five barley loaves left over by those who had eaten. After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.' Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

### **StF 153 – Break thou the bread of life**

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| 1) Break thou the bread of life, O Lord, to me,<br>As thou didst break the loaves beside the sea.<br>Beyond the sacred page I seek thee, Lord;<br>My spirit longs for thee, O living Word! | 3) O send thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me,<br>That he may touch my eyes, and make me see;<br>Show me the truth concealed within thy word,<br>And in thy book revealed I see the Lord. |
| 2) Thou art the Bread of Life, O Lord, to me,<br>Thy holy word the truth that saveth me;<br>Give me to eat and live with thee above;<br>Teach me to love thy truth, for thou art love.     |   |

*Mary Artemisia Lathbury & Alexander Groves*

## Sermon

Our lesson today begins with the words *"Sometime after this..."* (John 6 v 1)

'Sometime after what?' I ask myself, but it's a good start because it makes you want to go back and study even more of God's word than the actual passage we've read. To find out what this *'Sometime after'* means we must turn to chapter 5 of John's gospel. Because the lectionary has been following Mark's gospel we are delving into new territory by examining the story only found in John.

John 5 v 1 begins with these words *"Some time later .."*

Some time later than what? I ask myself, but it's a good start because it makes you want to go back and study even more of the word..... But I don't want to spend the whole morning reading the Bible backwards like this, so just to quickly look at the incident of the healing of the man at the pool in Bethesda which John records for us, we see Jesus was in Jerusalem for one of the festivals. At this pool lay many disabled people waiting for the waters to be disturbed so they could be the first to enter in the hope of being healed. Jesus approached an invalid and asked him *"Do you want to get well?"* (John 5 v 7) When he tells Jesus he has no one to help him into the water and someone else gets in ahead of him, Jesus says *"Get up! Pick up your mat and walk"* (John 5 v 8) John tells us this man had been there 38 years, and now at once the man is cured. The problem then occurs of the man carrying his mat on the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders object to this 'breaking of the law' and question him. This results in these religious leaders persecuting Jesus. Not only persecuting Him, but wanting to kill Him.

We find a different attitude with the crowd in today's reading, which ended with these words in John 6 v 15 *"Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make Him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by Himself"* Both sets of people had misunderstood His teaching and mission.

So let's study today's story in more detail. John 6 v 3 tells us *"Then Jesus went up on a mountainside and sat down with His disciples."* People talk about the importance of spending quality time with our friends and family, but so often we do not desire or seek any quality time with our Lord. If we learn nothing else from this passage, let's all learn to do that; it's desperately needed if we are to sustain and feed our faith. There's a great need for those solitary moments – just you (or I) and Jesus. But it appears that this quiet time with the disciples came to an end when Jesus observed the great crowd heading towards Him. This incident is also recorded for us by Matthew 14 (v 13 – 21), Mark 6 v 30 – 44 & Luke 9 (v 12 – 17) as well as the one we've read today from John 6 (v 1 – 14). So every gospel writer gives an account of this miraculous story.

Rather peculiarly, John gives little detail of Jesus healing and teaching the crowd. Perhaps it's because John's gospel focuses more on spiritual matters rather than physical, but even so, it is important to realise that Jesus shows compassion towards these people who have gathered to meet with Him, as both Matthew and Mark tell us. Luke, the doctor, says of the crowd in chapter 9 of his gospel, verse 11 *"He (Jesus) welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing."* Jesus knows they have spiritual needs, but He also deals with their physical infirmities.

By the time Jesus had taught and healed many in the crowd time would have been pressing on. If we return to John's gospel we now find that Jesus says to the disciples in John 6 v 5 *"Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?"* In John 6 verse 7, Philip answers *"It would take more than half a year's wages to buy enough for each one to have a bite."* Then we read in verses 8 & 9 that Andrew finds a boy in the crowd who has five small loaves and two fishes, but exclaims it would not feed all these people gathered there. Nevertheless, verse 11 tells us that *"Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish."*

Another surprising omission from John is that there is no reference to Jesus breaking the bread. All the other gospel writers tell us that Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves. Rather significant I feel, that we are told Jesus broke the bread. Bread – what does that word conjure up in our minds? The smell of fresh bread is wonderful.

The texture is good too. A bit of butter and jam on some fresh crusty bread is a rather a treat when you're hungry. Bread is such a basic food item that it becomes synonymous for food in general.

But what picture does the word paint in Biblical terms? Nourishment – physical food for the body. Staple daily diet – The Lord's Prayer (Give us our daily bread?) The Israelites in the desert being provided with manna from heaven? And then there's the communion meal! That's why I find the mention of Jesus breaking the bread of great significance. For it is a symbol reflected in Jesus's actions at the Last Supper when He gives thanks and breaks the bread. At the last supper we read in Matthew 26 v 26 "*Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying 'Take eat; this is my body.'*" It's a symbol, not only for remembering His suffering and death for our sake, but for becoming one with Christ Jesus.

Just as God fed the Israelites in the wilderness each day with manna from heaven, so Jesus became the bread of heaven, that we should feed on Him and be satisfied. In John 6 v 35 Jesus says "*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry.*" Jesus is not talking of physical hunger, but spiritual hunger. And just as bread is part of our essential diet for physical strength and well-being, so we need the essential spiritual food which is found in and through Christ Jesus Himself if we are to be healthy Christians. So bread in the Bible is also a reference to our spiritual needs. Jesus Himself goes into more detail and by verse 51 of John chapter 6 He says "*I am the living bread which came down from heaven*" By equating Himself with bread, Jesus is in effect stating that He is essential for life. Second, the life Jesus is referring to is not a mortal life, but an eternal life. We need to be feeding on this living bread to be able to live forever. Jesus goes on to explain in John 6 verse 56 "*Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood live in me, and I live in them.*" If we read on it tells us that many of His followers said that this teaching was too hard for them to listen to – they did not understand what Jesus was saying to them. They didn't know about His death and resurrection. By John 6 v 66 we read that "*many of Jesus' followers turned back, and would not go with Him anymore.*"

Isn't this how we began today? The religious leaders rejected Him. The crowd wanted to make Him king, but neither understood Jesus and His teaching. The Jewish Leaders were jealous of His miracles, the crowd only wanted Him for His miracles, neither group understood His mission. We, on the other hand, have the complete picture, therefore should grasp its meaning to the full. But do we? After all, the disciples themselves did not fully understand Him, and they were with Him every day! We only have to look at their reaction to Jesus to see that they hadn't grasped the full picture. John tells us that Jesus only asked 'where to buy bread for the crowd' just to test them. None of them ask Him what they should do, but rather tell him it would cost too much! Is this a reflection of how we are today in church life and spiritually? Not asking Jesus for help, but being negative about the reality as we see it? Once Jesus had performed the miracle of feeding over 5000 people, I imagine the disciples were a little more enthusiastic. I can picture them now scurrying round with renewed energy picking up the crumbs and filling those 12 baskets!

Amazing when you put yourself forward to be used by Jesus, with faith and trust in Him, the energy required comes from the blessing He gives to those who labour in His glorious name. Oh that we embrace the faith we have in Him once again, that we might be in the very least a witness for him, becoming a beacon shining out in a land of darkness, that we seek to do His will, declaring our faith unashamedly in the one who gave His very being that we might live, so that those who do not know Him, will seek a knowledge of the love that drives us forward and binds us together in Christ Jesus! Sent by God the Father and one with God the Father His was no ordinary teaching, and Jesus makes it clear that the food which He can give will last forever.

Finally, there is one last meal I want us to note. Those who remain faithful have a feast to look forward to, for Revelation 19 v 9 tells us "*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.*" Just as Jesus took what was available, and multiplied it to the crowd, may God the Father provide us with every good thing we need in order to do His will, and may He, through Jesus Christ, do in us what pleases him. Amen.

## 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*

## Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God, who has promised to hear the prayers of those who ask in Faith, we pray for the Church throughout the world, for the need is great and the mission daunting, but help us to remain faithful and dutiful to the cause, not losing our passion or commitment to the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray especially for those in countries where they are persecuted for their faith, and those who have to meet secretly in fear of their lives because of their confession of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ – we ask you now Lord God to strengthen and encourage them, we give you thanks for their persistence, bravery and determination in remaining faithful in such difficult circumstances, praying You will reveal Yourself to them & unite them in love in Jesus name,  
Lord in your mercy – **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for peace in our world, the world that you created, that is full of your beauty and wonder but that man has destroyed by his greed and selfish ways. We pray that you'll give wisdom to its leaders, that they may seek to bring 'justice and freedom and dignity to those whom they rule over, and that they may have respect for other nations so that all may share peace and prosperity. With all this in mind we bring before You now the troubles in Ukraine and Gaza, and other parts of the globe where many innocent souls are suffering.

Lord in your mercy – **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for this country of ours, especially during this time when we have a change of government. We pray for the help and guidance of your spirit in all the decision making that now takes place, and pray for a revival in this land of ours, with all the many problems it's facing. Grant us Your wisdom and power as we move forward to face the future together, may Christian values once again be restored.

Lord in your mercy – **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for friends and family. We bring before you those people we are concerned for and care about. Those who are precious to us, and those we love. Help us to be there for them when they need us, not forgetting their spiritual needs, asking that You give us the right moments and opportunities to share with them the gospel message, that they too will be aware of the love that You have for them, so that one day, we can all share together in the heavenly banquet you have prepared for those who love and believe in You.

Lord in your mercy – **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for the Church throughout our land, that she will be firm in the confession of her hope. We pray for our circuit and all who work within it, that there may be oneness of heart and a harmony that drives us to serve you and not our own desires.

We pray for individual congregations, including our own, that the people will be a light in each community and the surrounding areas, so that all will see the witness we are, enabling the expansion of the gospel and the extension of the kingdom. We give thanks for the offerings made each week to help the churches function, praying that You will not only bless the gifts received, but bless the giver too. We pray for those who are sick and anxious amongst us, the lonely and bereaved, the elderly and infirm. We pray Your strength and comfort upon all those in need at this present time, asking that You will bind us together through the love and fellowship of Christ.

Lord in your mercy – **Hear our prayer. Amen.**

### **StF 465 – Guide me O thou great Jehovah**

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| 1) Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,<br>Pilgrim through this barren land;<br>I am weak, but thou art mighty;<br>Hold me with thy powerful hand:<br>Bread of heaven,<br>Bread of heaven,<br>Feed me now and evermore.<br>Feed me now and evermore.                            | 3) When I tread the verge of Jordan,<br>Bid my anxious fears subside;<br>Death of death, and hell's destruction,<br>Land me safe on Canaan's side:<br>Songs of praises<br>Songs of praises<br>I will ever give to thee.<br>I will ever give to thee. |
| 2) Open thou the crystal fountain,<br>Whence the healing stream shall flow;<br>Let the fiery, cloudy pillar<br>Lead me all my journey through:<br>Strong Deliverer,<br>Strong Deliverer,<br>Be thou still my strength and shield.<br>Be thou still my strength and shield. |  |

*William Williams translated by Peter Williams*

### **Blessing**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all for evermore, **Amen.**