

2nd June 2024 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

Call to Worship

“It is not who you are that matters so much as who God desires you to be.”

“The lamp of God had not yet gone out;” that light shines and draws us into God’s presence.

Let us worship in silence, song, thought and word.

StF 34 – O worship the Lord

- 1) O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim -
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.
- 2) Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,
High on his heart he will bear it for you,
Comfort your sorrows, and answer your
prayerfulness,
Showing the pathway your feet should pursue.
- 3) Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth you would count as your own.
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to bring to his throne.
- 4) These, though we bring them in trembling
and fearfulness,
He will accept for the name that is dear;
Mornings of joy give for evenings
of tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.
- 5) O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
With gold of obedience and incense
of lowliness,
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.

John Samuel Bewley Monsell

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Lord Almighty, we come in worship. We come wanting to declare words, speak thoughts, sound righteous; yet we know our words are insufficient and lacking. In a few moments let us be still and in the stillness adore our God not with thoughts and words, but just with our being,

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

In the stillness we simply declare,

How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

I am in awe of you. I worship by being me, created by you.

Your love is immense and overwhelming. You love me as I am but your love is so strong you desire to change me; to change me into the person you desire me to be.

I confess to you that I need forgiving and changing; I have not always listened to your words,

I have not always seen that which you have desired me to see, I have not always followed your ways.

Forgive us, Lord, and open our ears and eyes to your wisdom. **Amen.**

Imagine the Lord standing before you, arms outstretched, forgiving you.

Spend a moment silently thanking God for the power in that forgiveness.

You can go out as new. For nothing is hidden from God; if we acknowledge that, and confess our sins, we know God will forgive us and lead us deeper into a relationship with God.

God says to us, “listen to my words, in Jesus your sins are forgiven, go in peace.” **Amen**

Reading: Psalm 139:1-18

You have searched me, LORD, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

StF 511 – Speak in the stillness

- 1) Speak in the stillness, God we pray,
Come to our hearts and meet us here.
Bring us your peace for each new day
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.
- 2) We speak as though we have not heard
And live as if we do not know
Your love in Christ, the living Word
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.
- 3) When, in the anxious rush of days,
We lose our hold on faith and you,
Reclaim us with your calm embrace
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.
- 4) Lift us to see with heaven's eyes.
We long to soar on eagles' wings
As we press on to claim your prize
- the gift of grace to earth from heaven.
- 5) So may we be renewed in love,
Held and sustained by you alone.
Strengthened by you that we may prove
A gift of grace to earth from heaven.

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Reading: 1 Samuel 3:1-19

The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions. One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

Then the LORD called Samuel. Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

Again the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." "My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." And the LORD said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son." Samuel answered, "Here I am." "What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes."

The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

Sermon - 1 Sam 3:3 "the lamp of God had not yet gone out,"

Every so often, as you read a Bible passage, a phrase or two, may just jump off the page and cause one to pay attention. That line from 1 Samuel 3 (above) did it to me as I prepared this service.

In my early days of ministry Timothy was an important biblical character for me. Why? Because he was young. I would often be the youngest person in many a church service I was leading. That wasn't always comforting but as I was in my 20's it was not overly disturbing. Now, when I am nearer 70 than 50 it is of concern. No longer is Timothy an appropriate figure - or is he? - for I am still often the youngest, or one of the youngest present.

Timothy was told by St Paul, *"do not let anyone despise your youth"*

KJV/RSV 1 Timothy 4:12

"Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity."

Or in the NIV it is translated:- *"Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity."*

As I have grown older and served in the Methodist ministry for a growing number of years, and seen little numerical growth in congregations, I can feel like asking - Was it worth it? Have I got things wrong? Have I done things wrong? Well the answer to the last two questions has to be a resounding "Yes". But is it the same answer to the first question, "Was it worth it?" - for now I am not answering that question.

Many of you have been faithful in your commitment to a church community over many years and you may feel like I have felt. "Once I was a youngster in this gathering", many years later you are still one of the younger ones. Have you got things wrong? Have you done things wrong? Of course the answer is "Yes". Was it worth it? I let you hold that thought for a while.

In the Old Testament passage from the first book of Samuel, two people are mentioned, Eli and Samuel. At the time we are told *"The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread."* That phrase describes the desolate state of Israel at the time, at the beginning of this chapter: the word of the Lord was rare. But by the end, the word of the Lord is abundant through the prophetic ministry of Samuel, and Israel is back on course as a people in close relationship with their God.

What caused this turn to the good? The story is set in the old temple at Shiloh. Here the Lord chose to speak to the boy Samuel. Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. Initially Samuel's inexperience meant that he did not realise this was the Lord speaking to him. Eli, the old, disgraced priest, played a key role in helping Samuel to respond to the Lord. Eli had not had a wholly successful ministry. In the previous chapter (2:27-36) we find the words of an unnamed prophet pronouncing God's doom on Eli and his sons for corruption, and Eli's poor sight (v.2) symbolises his failure to recognise the responsibilities of his role. Despite this, he gave Samuel the insight to respond appropriately to God.

"The lamp of the Lord had not yet gone out." Even Eli, who had got much wrong in his ministry, was used once more to offer hope to the future of Israel. The repeated visits to Eli highlight Samuel's uncritical enthusiasm to obey the old priest's call, and Eli's dismissal would have been confusing for him. When Samuel realised that he was hearing the word of the Lord, he named himself as 'your servant'. Yet he quickly discovered the challenges of his new role and the ways in which it would change his relationship with Eli. The Lord's challenging word focused on the disaster coming upon Eli. Could Samuel pass such a message on (v.15)? As a young boy, dependent on Eli for his place in the temple, he was vulnerable to Eli's reaction, disapproval and anger. He did not yet have the trust in God's faithfulness that would allow him to take risks in proclaiming the Lord's word; the same is true for many a preacher today. Is it their words they want to proclaim or is it a message from God? Are they desiring the approval of the congregation; "lovely message," "just what we wanted to hear," "just what "they" needed to hear" or is the preacher confident it is the word of God however unpopular it will be?

Again, it was Eli's encouragement that gave Samuel the confidence to speak out, and Eli found the resources to accept God's hard words to him, coming from one he called 'my son'. Samuel was no longer the child Hannah had left in the temple; he was on the way to becoming the prophet and king-maker God intended him to be.

It is not who you are that matters so much as who God desires you to be if you are willing to become that person. There is a message to the elders amongst us – God can still use us despite us not having always done things right, and there is a message for the young amongst us – God can desire to use you, even you. There is a message to the elders - encourage the young to listen for the voice of God and let not one of us despise their youth.

As I draw near to the end of my wandering ministry, my itinerant life, I might ask questions about the years gone by. "Was it worth it?" - when I did what God asked of me the answer is "yes" and when I didn't, the answer is "the lamp of God had not yet gone out." There is still hope that God can use me, and you, in the days and years ahead for his Kingdom and the transformation of lives in his name. It is not always about numbers of "bums on seats," if I may use such a phrase - looking back and knowing that through God's grace I have been able to help people grow in faith and life means it has been worth it.

When Anita and I left Newport we were given a letter which is very precious for a number of reasons but one section of it reads, "*Because of all the good work the two of you have done through God's grace, there are now people in Newport who are now possessed of that kind of faith which survives, even against a ridiculous amount of battering. We are so thankful for your ministry, and know that we have you to thank, in part, that two out of our three offspring are now coming to church on a fairly regular basis.*"

When you look back over your life as an individual, and as part of a church community, you may not have seen growth in numbers, but that is not all that it is about, for "the lamp of God has not yet gone out," and though we may be laid aside we can offer encouragement to others and the Word of God will be proclaimed once again across our land.

Was it worth it? Remember "the lamp of God has not yet gone out," - the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has never put it out. Amen

StF 662 – Have you heard God’s voice

- 1) Have you heard God's voice;
Has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve,
Though the way be rough and narrow?
- 2) Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
When the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground
When the crowds are turning violent?
- 3) In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
Will you share your faith with the faithless?
- 4) Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
And believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?
- Ch) *Will you walk the path that will cost you much
And embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?*
- E) *We will walk the path that will cost us much
And embrace the pain and sorrow.
We will trust in One who entrusts to us
The disciples of tomorrow.*

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Prayers of Intercession

We hear the news, but much we pay little attention to it for a variety of reasons, whilst many of the problems in the world we hear nothing of. Lord God, you know the whole picture of the world as it was, as it is, and as it can be. You love what you have created and call us to love it to.

In stillness let us listen for the nudge of God in our prayer:

Lord, speak into our lives of the ones you would have us express love for before you...[Silence]

Speak into our hearts of a nation, or area of the world you would have us pray for...[Silence]

Speak into our hearts groups of people you would have us pray for...[Silence]

Speak into our hearts individuals you would have us pray for...[Silence]

Speak into our hearts the areas of our life that you want us to hand over to you this day and this week...[Silence]

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 636 – O love that wilt not let me go

- 1) O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.
- 2) O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee:
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.
- 3) O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.
- 4) O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

George Matheson

Blessing and Dismissal

Go in the name of the Lord to your homes, your neighbours, your communities. Go and make a difference by sharing the blessing you have received from knowing our God, Father Son and Holy Spirit. May your heart and mind be open to receive all that God gives to you and asks of you, that you can give to others as you encourage the disheartened, visit the lonely, comfort the bereaved and take the healing of Christ to all you meet. **Amen**