

8th September – Morning Service

Jill Martin

Call to Worship – Psalm 146

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, **whose hope is in the Lord their God,** who made heaven and earth, **the sea, and all that is in them;** who keeps faith for ever;

who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free; **the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.**

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; **the Lord loves the righteous.**

The Lord watches over the strangers; **he upholds the orphan and the widow,**

but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign for ever, **your God, O Zion, for all generations.**

StF 6 – Father we love you

1) Father, we love you,
We worship and adore You,
Glorify Your name in all the earth.

2) Jesus, we love You,
We worship and adore You,
Glorify Your name in all the earth.

Ch) *Glorify Your name,*
Glorify Your name,
Glorify Your name in all the earth.

3) Spirit, we love You,
We worship and adore You,
Glorify Your name in all the earth.

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Prayer of Adoration¹

God, we come to you and you welcome us.

Some of us are tired and others are bristling with energy. Your love upholds each one of us.

God we come to you and you welcome us.

Some of us exploring doubts, others filled with certainty. Your love inspires each one of us.

God we come to you and you welcome us.

Some at peace and others itching with anxiety. Your love calms each one of us.

God we come to you and you welcome us.

Some of us knowing joy and others in pain. Your love reaches out to each one of us.

God we come to you and you welcome us.

You search us and welcome us, you search us and you know us. Each of us fearfully and wonderfully made.

Each of us bearing your image and each of us celebrating your love!

Thank you God. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession²

Loving God, help us to remember that all people are made in your image and are worthy of care, love and respect. When we have ignored the needs of the most vulnerable people, forgive us. When we have believed the powerful and disregarded the cries of the voiceless, forgive us. Help us to transform our church into a place of safety, where we can tell our stories, where we can choose to show the scars of wounded bodies, hearts and minds, where there is the possibility of healing and a willingness to stand as pain bearers for one another. God who bears all things, help us and bless us. **Amen**

StF 687 – One human family God has made

- 1) One human family God has made,
And all for each to care.
One world, to be the home of all,
With all its wealth to share.
One Christ, to manifest on earth
Love's ultimate design.
One Church to know the mystery
Of broken bread and wine.
- 2) One race, one world - yet torn apart,
We spurn the way of love.
But still ahead, the Christ leads on
And calls his Church to move
From love of power to power of love,
To give the word to all -
To trust the love that conquered death,
Outside the city wall.
- 3) And are we brave enough to join
With that great company -
The cost not less than all we have
And are or hope to be -
The bitter cup of human sin
To drink with him who died,
And take his love outside the wall
To all the crucified?
- 4) Claim him who claims us for his own,
To share his pain and grief,
To bear the scars that stamp us his -
The hallmark of belief.
As partners of the living Christ,
Who risk the path he trod,
With wondering love we find we share
The timeless joy of God.

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Reading: Isaiah 35: 4-7a

Say to those with fearful hearts, 'Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you.' Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling springs.

Reflection

The prophet Isaiah brings words of great comfort and hope to a broken people, a people who are spiritually broken and feeling abandoned by God. They have been warned that they are to be punished for their rejection of God and His cries for justice and care for all His people, no matter what their wealth or status. But they have chosen their own way, believing they God will not notice because they are his chosen a Holy people.

Isaiah is among the most important of the prophetic books. It covers a long period of Israel's history (before, during, and after the exile) and offers the full range of God's prophetic message: terrifying words of judgment and comforting words of promise. Isaiah portrays God as the powerful Creator, like no other, and also the gentlest comforter, like an earthly lover or mother. Luke, the Gospel writer, tells us in Chapter 4, verse 18, that Jesus reads a passage from Isaiah reflecting on what God is calling him to do - referred to as his mission statement (Isaiah 61: 1-3).

Reading: Mark 7: 24-37

Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter. 'First let the children eat all they want,' he told her, 'for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.' 'Lord,' she replied, 'even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.' Then he told her, 'For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.' She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spat and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, 'Ephphatha!' (which means 'Be opened!'). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosed and he began to speak plainly. Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. People were overwhelmed with amazement. 'He has done everything well,' they said. 'He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.'

Sermon

In last week's gospel text, Jesus took to task the Pharisees and scribes for their ideas of 'purity' and their judgement of those who not conform to their standards of piety. Now as if to prove a point Jesus travels to the impure territory, the Gentiles region of Tyre. Mark tells us that Jesus is exhausted and searching for some quiet time, away from the following crowds. He enters a house and insisted that no one should know he was there but even here he could not escape notice. Such is his reputation that even in a Gentile area word has spread and once more people are seeking him for his healing power.

As in Matthew's Gospel, (Matthew 15: 21-28) a Syrophonecian woman, one who is breaking every convention and traditional barrier; here we have a woman, a Gentile, impure, living outside the land of Israel, beyond the law of Moses, a descendant of the ancient enemies of Israel. She is also a lone woman, unaccompanied by a husband or male relative, striking up a conversation with a strange man. On top of this she tells Jesus her daughter is possessed by a demon. Is she the same woman as in Matthew's Gospel, same background, same meeting place except in Matthew's story she is a Canaanite woman with a possessed daughter? From other Gospel readings and healings we can guess that the possessed child acted both in bizarre and anti social ways, not the sort of family most people would engage with. Whichever way we look at the story this woman is an outsider, vilified by her own society.

But Jesus reaction causes me much concern - where is the Prince of Peace? Where is the commandment "Love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself"? Can this be Jesus being racist and dismissing a woman with traditional insults? It is completely out of character and goes against all we are told of The Son of God. Again, as in Matthew, Jesus refers to her as a dog, the children he refers to are the children of Israel - Jesus mission is to reach the chosen people of God? Some commentators explain this by suggesting that Jesus is persuaded by Jewish folklore when he gives his answer. Others suggest that Jesus is testing the woman's faith, or is Jesus demonstrating his total exhaustion and reacting angrily to being disturbed and missing the point of his mission on earth. But the woman stands her ground, she has already broken with convention, what has she got to lose? She argues back "*Sir, even the little dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs*" (Mark 7: 28) at which point I can see Jesus, with a smile, impressed by her quick wit and agreeing that God's love is for all. Such is the woman's trust she leaves and makes her way home to find her daughter well.

Jesus continues into Gentile territory and is brought a Gentile man who is deaf and has a speech impediment. This time Jesus' response is immediate - he takes the man to one side and puts his fingers in the man's ears, spits and touches the man's tongue. Immediately he is able to hear and communicate, physically healed but also restored to his own community.

Jesus lived on earth being cared for by earthly parents, having a deep relationship with his Father in heaven, so deep that he gives his life that we can live. I struggle to believe that Jesus would ever be racist and cruel in his treatment of others. Could it be the interpretation of the Gospel writers? They never truly understood Jesus' mission, they were the people guarding Jesus jealously, telling Jesus to ignore those unacceptable to them to ignore those crying out for help.

How do we react to these ideas today? Even though we have laws in place, there still simmers just below the surface ingrained bias and racism.

The violent reactions which caused the riots just recently were based on a message sent on WhatsApp blaming a Muslim man, supposedly being watched by MI6, who took a knife and attacked little girls at a dance club. The woman responsible for the message has been arrested but what damage has she done and why was the knee jerk reaction to lash out and punish?

Reading: Philippians 2: 1-11

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Prayer

In a children's group I used to help run we had a very simple prayer with which to finish each session. "Jesus you guide our way, in what we do and what we say, help us to follow you every day and trust in you to guide our way. Amen"

StF 611 – Brother, sister let me serve you

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| 1) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too. | 4) I will weep when you are weeping,
When you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through. |
| 2) We are pilgrims on a journey,
And companions on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load. | 5) When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony. |
| 3) I will hold the Christ light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear. | 6) Brother, sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too. |

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Prayer of Thanksgiving

We thank you, Father, for your eternal witness to the world, that no generation has been left without faithful servants. We thank you for your Church universal, for its corporate witness to a secular world, for its ministry of teaching, healing and preaching, for its service to the poor, the lonely and neglected. We thank you for the faith of your people who sustain your work and witness, people steadfast in their faith and sensitive to your promptings. After all we thank you for Jesus, the ground of all our hopes, the church's living head. For he lived a life of faith, obedient to your call and loyal to your command. Trusting in You alone, he worked among us and died on the Cross for our salvation, revealing your boundless grace. We thank you for raising him from the dead, exalting him to your right hand and sending us the Holy Spirit, who helps us live by faith in you. We would grow in faith, Father, running a good race, confident of our high calling, faithful in your service, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayer of Intercession

God, our wisdom and our truth, we bring you our words, the words of those in authority, words that legislate, pass judgement, persuade, make promises.

Word of life, **take our words and speak through them.**

God, our wisdom and our truth, we bring you our words, the words of those expressing care, words that comfort, heal, bring hope, make affirmation of love.

Word of life, **take our words and speak through them.**

God, our wisdom and our truth, we bring you our words, the words of those who follow Jesus, words of faith, compassion, commitment, reaching out in reconciliation.

Word of life, **take our words and speak through them.**

God, of wisdom and our truth, we bring you our words, the words of those who tell others of your gospel, words of friendship, witness, invitation, offering salvation.

Word of life, **take our words and speak through them.**

In the name of Christ, your word made flesh. **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 504 – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

- 1) May the mind of Christ my Saviour
Live in me from day to day,
By his love and power controlling
All I do or say.
- 2) May the word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through his power.
- 3) May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.
- 4) May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing -
This is victory.
- 5) May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.

Katie Barclay Wilkinson

Blessing

Go, in the knowledge that your God goes with you and the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit surround you now and forever. **Amen**

¹ *Liam Dacre-Davies, 'Justice, Dignity and Solidarity User Guide'*

² *From 'The Survivor's Prayer Card'*