

9th February 2025 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.

StF 88 – Praise to the Lord the Almighty

- 1) Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,
the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy
health and salvation!
All ye who hear,
Brothers and sisters, draw near,
Praise him in glad adoration.
- 2) Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper
thy work and defend thee;
Surely his goodness and mercy here
daily attend thee:
Ponder anew
What the Almighty can do,
Who with his love doth befriend thee.
- 3) Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
Fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
Then to thy need
He like a mother doth speed,
Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.
- 4) Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness
of sin is abounding,
Who, when the godless do triumph,
all virtue confounding,
Sheddeth his light,
Chaseth the horrors of night,
Saints with his mercy surrounding.
- 5) Praise to the Lord! O let all that
is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now
with praises before him!
Let the amen
Sound from his people again:
Gladly for aye we adore him.

Joachim Neander translated by Cathering Winkworth & Rupert E Davies

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Everlasting God, creator of the ends of the earth, you do not faint or grow tired; you give power to the weary and strengthen the powerless. You heal the broken-hearted and bind up their wounds. Your understanding is unsearchable; your steadfast love endures for ever. You are worthy of nobler worship than we can offer, yet you do not despise the lowly. How good it is to sing your praise; for you are great and gracious. To you we ascribe all honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Holy God, we confess with shame our share in the sin of humankind that crucified the Lord of glory. In him you have given us life and joy and you call us in Christ to be lights for the world, but we hide your light from others. Forgive all that is wrong in our lives and remake us in your image and likeness; for the sake of him who died and rose again for us, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

StF 83 – Praise my soul the King of heaven

- 1) Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!
- 2) Praise him for his grace and favour
To his people in distress;
Praise him, still the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.

3) Father-like, he tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame he knows;
In his hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.

4) Angels in the heights, adore him;
Ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him! Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

Henry Francis Lyte

Reading: Psalm 138

I will praise you, Lord, with all my heart; before the “gods” I will sing your praise. I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness, for you have exalted above all things your name and your word. When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stout-hearted. May all the kings of the earth praise you, O Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth. May they sing of the ways of the Lord, for the glory of the Lord is great. Though the Lord is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar. Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me. The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me; your love, O Lord, endures forever—do not abandon the works of your hands.

StF 250 – Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

1) Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult
Of our life's wild restless sea,
Day by day his voice is sounding,
Saying: 'Christian, follow me';

4) In our joys and in our sorrows,
Days of toil and hours of ease,
Still he calls, in cares and pleasures:
'Christian, love me more than these'.

2) As of old apostles heard it
By the Galilean lake,
Turned from home and toil and kindred,
Leaving all for his dear sake.

5) Jesus calls us! By your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
Give our hearts to your obedience,
Serve and love you best of all.

3) Jesus calls us from the worship
Of the vain world's golden store,
From each idol that would keep us,
Saying: 'Christian, love me more'.

Cecil Frances Alexander CCL No. 515642

Reading: Luke 5:1-11

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, he saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch people.” So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Sermon - "But because you say so, I will let down the nets." Luke 5:5

In answer to a general question, it is not too hard to say that we have faith in God. It is quite another thing to have faith when the consequences are hard and demanding.

Our Gospel reading tells of Peter, exhausted after a long night's fishing, having his faith in Jesus tested. "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." It would be a lot more attractive, and probably a lot more sensible, to go home to bed! But the attractive and the sensible were put aside in favour of a profession of faith. *"But because you say so, I will let down the nets."*

We'll come back to that story in a bit, but first it may help to have a look at what the Psalmist had to say about faith. There is little doubt he was in favour of it! Not just in favour, but deeply persuaded of the goodness and glory of the Lord to which the only response was faithful worship and faithful living. Faith is the answer, not only for himself but also for all people, the important and the ordinary, the good and the bad. *"I will bow down toward your holy temple and will praise your name for your steadfast love and your faithfulness....all the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord, when they hear the words of your mouth...though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly; but the haughty he perceives from far away."*

These are powerful and impressive words but on what are they based? What makes the Psalmist so sure of God's steadfast love and faithfulness? In this Psalm at least, the answer is a bit disappointing – disappointing in the sense that the Psalmist's faith appears to rest on the fact that he has been able to emerge safely from the rocky patches of his life. This is how he puts it: *"When I called, you answered me; you made me bold and stout-hearted.... Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes."*

Now there is a good side to that, of course. Almost all of us have experiences of answered prayer, of deliverance from rocky patches and of the restoration of broken relationships. These things do happen, they are worth remembering, and they should be the cause of praise and thanksgiving. But faith needs a stronger basis than that. Or what happens to it when there is no answer to our plea for help of direction, when our enemies triumph unjustly, or when we catch no fish however many times we let down the nets? These also are normal experiences of life. For some, that is how life is today. And it seems that the writer of this Psalm can only say, hang on in there, the Lord will fulfil his purpose, it will all come out right with a lot of hope and patience.

Fortunately, this is not the only Psalm that deals with this question, a question that is handled most profoundly in the book of Job and answered most conclusively on the cross. Faith in God is not based on happy endings, it is based on the fact that God is with us in good times and bad, in times of deliverance and of struggle, and there is none other on whom we can depend to such an extent. Whatever the circumstances, there is no better place to be than in communion with the God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Against that background, Peter agreeing to let down the nets for a second catch does not seem particularly impressive. Most fishermen cast time and time again before they catch anything! Letting down the nets again is not a sign of the fisherman's great faith, it is just part of the sport. But Peter did not fish for fun, he did it for a living and he was a lot better judge than Jesus of where and when it was best to fish. So it was against the odds, against his professional judgment, that he let down the nets. Jesus had to be trusted, not because he always knew where the fish were, but because he was Jesus. Sometimes Peter forgot the point, but not in this story and not once he had been witness to the Resurrection. So, we may say that Peter's faith was based on two things: first that Jesus was somehow greater, somehow more holy, somehow different from all other people, and second that Jesus wanted to relate to this ordinary fallible person who was Peter. On that basis he left everything and followed Jesus.

All that is in the past; the question now is how does this story affect us, how may it affect our faith in God, be it strong or be it fragile? A way into the answer is to ask why the Gospel writer included the story in his record. What did Luke have in mind when he wrote down this story, rather than one of the dozens that were never told? The honest answer is that we don't know!

It's impossible to read the mind of someone who died centuries ago! But a good guess would be that Luke had in mind the infant church, small in number and facing opposition and even persecution. He was writing for this infant church, inheritor of Jesus's words "*from now on you will be catching people.*"

They had been trying to catch people, goodness knows that they had been trying to catch people – with their words, their actions of love and justice, and with the quality of their worship and their community life. But it wasn't working and they wanted some advice from this senior apostle. Why have leaders if they can't make helpful suggestions? The story addresses such a situation with a clear response. Let down your nets again! Keep trying to catch people! There is the meeting point between faith and discipleship. Do it because Jesus is Jesus. Do it because he wants you to, whether or not you are successful.

And if Luke used the story in his advice to the infant church, there is no reason at all why we should not apply it to our situation. At the most obvious level, the churches in this country are not too successful in catching people. Not simply in persuading them to come to church, but also in the deeper challenge of capturing people's hearts and minds, and converting their actions into ways of justice, peace and love. "We have worked all night long, but have caught nothing" would accurately be the witness of many of our churches.

The story can equally be applied to personal discipleship. A person may have worked for months to get rid of some recognised but persistent sin or failing within themselves without success, and they ask, "What can I do now?" Or a group may have campaigned energetically for the correction of some local or international justice, but with no effect, and they ask, "What more can we do?" The natural response to such a question is, "Well you've tried it and it doesn't work. Have a rest or try something different." And sometimes that is the right response. Yet this story challenges us to consider a different response and one that does not always go down well in church circles. Let down your nets again! Fair enough you've tried it already, but if it's the Lord's will, you have no option but to keep on trying. That's the point when faith makes a difference. Nothing must separate us from the love of God, not even our lack of success so far!

StF 550 – Forth in thy name

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| 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. | 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; |
| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | |

Charles Wesley

Prayers of Intercession

Holy God, open our ears to your call, our eyes to your presence, our hearts to your love. Give us the courage to say, "Here I am, Lord, send me." Strengthen our faith that we may be willing at all times to heed your call. We pray for all who are called to proclaim your glory, all who seek out the lost, uplift the fallen and comfort the wounded. We pray for the outreach of the church to which we belong. Lord, as you have called us, **make us worthy of our calling.**

God, as you are gracious to us, make us sensitive to the needs of others. We remember before you the world's poor, nations that are in debt, hungry and homeless peoples. We pray for all who work for relief organisations, and for the emergency services, for all who give their lives in the care and service of others. Lord, as you have called us, **make us worthy of our calling.**

We give you thanks for all who have encouraged us and built up our confidence. We pray for the young, that they may not be discouraged. We pray for all families that are in difficulties at this time, for young people forced to leave home. We give you thanks for our homes and all that you have called us to do. Lord, as you have called us, **make us worthy of our calling.**

Lord of all compassion, we pray for the lost and the dispirited; for all who have lost hope of vision, for those who have lost confidence in themselves, in others or in you. We pray for all who are anxious and fearful. We remember all whose lives are restricted by illness or circumstance. Lord, as you have called us, **make us worthy of our calling.**

Lord you call us to share with you in the glory of your eternal kingdom. Make us worthy of our calling. We remember all who have served you faithfully and are now in life eternal with you. Lord, as you have called us, **make us worthy of our calling.**

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 666 – Master, speak! Thy servant heareth

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| 1) Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for thy gracious word,
Longing for thy voice that cheereth;
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
What hast thou to say to me? | 3) Master, speak! Though least and lowest,
Let me not unheard depart;
Master, speak! For O thou knowest
All the yearning of my heart,
Knowest all its truest need;
Speak, and make me blest indeed. |
| 2) Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,
Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the rock. | 4) Master, speak: and make me ready,
When thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady
Still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for thee;
Master, speak! O speak to me! |

Frances Ridley Havergal

Blessing

The God of love who calls you, guide you this day and always: his might uphold you, his love enfold you, his peace empower you. And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you all, this day and for evermore. **Amen.**