

A service for – Lent 2 – 16th March, 2025 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 27 verses 1 to 3

The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

Amen.

Just as King David recognized the Lord as his light and salvation, so we stand in need of God's redemptive grace. Our opening hymn, written by the prolific Methodist minister Revd. Fred Pratt Green, points us to the source of our true Light. We shall sing hymn number 346, 'Christ is the world's light, Christ and none other'.

**1. Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;
Born in our darkness, he became our Brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.**

**2. Christ is the world's Peace, Christ and none other;
No one can serve him and despise another.
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.**

**3. Christ is the world's Life, Christ and none other;
Sold once for silver, murdered here, our Brother –
He, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.**

**4. Give God the glory, God and none other;
Give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;
Give God the glory, God in us, my Brother:
Glory to God on high.**

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Let us pray.

Glorious God, Light of the world, Creator of all life throughout the universe, we come to worship you in awe and adoration, for you bless us with your love, despite our sinfulness. From our earliest days you have sought to draw us close as your earthly children, a holy priesthood, yet we rebelled against you and made ourselves your enemies. Instead of abandoning us as we deserved, you took human form as Jesus Christ, not only to teach us how we should live, but to reveal your boundless love by dying on a cross at Calvary to atone for the sins of the world. His resurrection offers us eternal life through grace, not by anything we can do to deserve it. We take comfort that, through Christ death no longer has the final word.

We offer praise and thanksgiving for all your blessings: for the good things we enjoy; for opportunities and experiences that fulfil us; for challenges that test us and mould our characters, but most of all for loving us despite our failure to live as you call us to.

Merciful Lord, forgive us for not loving and serving you wholeheartedly, for our failure to love others as we would like to be loved, for the sins we have committed and the good we've neglected to do. Help us to amend our ways and to walk the path Christ Jesus has set before us.

Amazing God, you hear and answer our prayer, offering us not only your pardon, but inviting us to follow you once more. May we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, serving our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, to bring you honour in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples:

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.

We continue our worship as we sing a hymn written by Samuel Crossman, who lived in troubled times that may make ours seem almost tame by comparison: in his lifetime the English Civil War and the Restoration happened; King Charles 1 was beheaded, "The Book of Common Prayer" was outlawed and the celebration of Christmas was forbidden. He was born in Suffolk, graduated from Cambridge University, was appointed King's Chaplain, became Prebendary or Dean of Bristol Cathedral, where in 1664 he wrote a pamphlet of nine poems, one of which was "My song is love unknown". We sing hymn number 277, 'My song is love unknown;'

**1. My song is love unknown,
My Saviour's love for me,
Love to the loveless shown,
That they might lovely be.**

O who am I.

**That for my sake
My Lord should take
Frail flesh and die?**

**2. He came from his blest throne,
Salvation to bestow;
But men made strange and none
The longed-for Christ would know.**

**But O my Friend,
My Friend indeed,
Who at my need
His life did spend.**

**3. Sometimes they strew his way,
And his sweet praises sing;
Resounding all the day
Hosannas to their King.**

**Then 'Crucify!'
Is all their breath,
And for his death
They thirst and cry.**

**4. Why, what hath my Lord done?
What makes this rage and spite?
He made the lame to run,
He gave the blind their sight.**

**Sweet injuries!
Yet they at these
Themselves displease
And 'gainst him rise.**

**5. They rise and needs will have
My dear Lord made away:
A murderer they save,
The Prince of Life they slay;
Yet cheerful he
To suffering goes,
That he his foes
From thence might free.**

**6. In life no house, no home,
My Lord on earth might have;
In death no friendly tomb
But what a stranger gave.
What may I say?
Heaven was his home;
But mine the tomb
Wherein he lay.**

**7. Here might I stay and sing,
No story so divine:
Never was love, dear King,
Never was grief like thine!
This is my Friend,
In whose sweet praise
I all my days
Could gladly spend.**

© *Samuel Crossman {1624 – 1684}*

In our prayers of intercession, we bring to God our concerns for people near and far. Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, although we have been blessed by living on this achingly beautiful planet, we grieve and lament about the brokenness we see here and abroad. We want to play what part we can in making the world a better place, but we recognize that our own powers are limited and confess that at times many complex issues threaten to overwhelm us. However, we are not afraid to ask you to reach out to inspire people with more ability, power and influence than we possess; people who can heal the suffering we see around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Lord of the world, we grieve about the wars in Ukraine and the Holy Land and civil conflicts in Congo, Sudan and Somalia, for the destruction, suffering and death that result from our inability to love our neighbours. Lord, we pray for President Zelensky and the people of Ukraine in their peril and distress, particularly after the meeting with President Trump. Lord, We ask for a swift, just end to these conflicts and for a humane resolution to them. Teach us to recognize our common humanity and your love for all, so we learn to co-exist in harmony. Guide the leaders of the nations to govern with compassion and justice, to learn to negotiate and compromise when disputes arise, so that lasting peace is established on earth.

In the name of Jesus, Lord of wholeness and wellbeing, hear our prayer for people in our community who are struggling with bodily, mental or spiritual health, for

those who are brought low by loneliness, trouble, or need and for everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear to them. In a time of silence, we bring to mind those who are in special need of your care and, as we name them before you, we are confident you will know their needs and will reach out to them:
Lord, help us to offer them practical support and friendship as well as sympathy, but may the warmth of your love enfold them to grant them healing, courage, comfort, hope and transcending peace.

Creator God, forgive us for our failure to be good stewards and teach us to help play our part in reducing the harm we are doing the planet, so we may pass on a healthier world to forthcoming generations.

Holy God, we pray for our church, churches in our Circuit and, indeed, for the World Church as we face the challenges of bringing good news to an increasingly secular and hostile world. Unite us in love and outreach, so we may reveal Christ's kingdom by words and deeds of love.

Abba, Father God, look upon us, our families and our friends with compassion. Keep us safe and guide us in your holy ways. Above all, may we share the abundance of the love you give us with both friend and stranger in the glorious name of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 13 verses 31 to 35

At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him,
"Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."

He said to them,

"Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'" Amen.

Our next hymn was written in 1993 by Australian Darlene Zschech, a well-known as a singer, songwriter, worship leader and speaker. Over many years, she was involved in the worship and music publications of Hillsong Church, Sydney, the largest Pentecostal "mega-church" in Australia, with many branches around the world. Hymn number 363, 'My Jesus, my Saviour'.

My Jesus, my Saviour,

Lord, there is none like you.

All of my days I want to praise

The wonders of your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter

Tower of refuge and strength,

Let every breath, all that I am,

Never cease to worship you. Chorus:

Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing,

Power and majesty, praise to the King.

Mountains bow down and the seas will roar

At the sound of your name.

I sing for joy at the work of your hands

Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand.

Nothing compares to the promise I have in you.

Darlene Zschech (born 1965)

Sermon: and on the third day I will finish my work”, Luke chapter 13 verse 32.

King Herod Antipas was a vile ruler. A son of Herod the Great, who had ordered the execution of his second wife and her sons. He was made Tetrach or ruler over Galilee and Perea by Augustus Caesar following a bitter dispute with his brothers. Antipas had scandalised many Jews by divorcing his wife to marry his niece, Herodias, who was already married to his half-brother, Philip, son of Mariamne II! John the Baptist soundly condemned this immoral and probably illegal union, as a result of which he had been imprisoned and later executed when Herodias' daughter, Salome, was rashly promised anything she wanted by her step-father. (Matters got even worse when Salome married Herod Antipas' younger brother, Philip – her Great uncle!)

Herod was not popular with the Pharisees, not only as a result of his lifestyle, but because he held power through the Romans, so it seems surprising that a group of them warned Jesus as he travelled towards Jerusalem. However, as Herod believed Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist, it is possible he wanted to warn him off, rather than add another murder to his list of offences. Therefore, although many Pharisees were antagonistic towards Jesus, some might have gone as Herod's messengers, for they acknowledged that he was a prophet, who deserved their warning, though they disliked his message. Of course, an ulterior motive may have been to want Jesus away from Jerusalem that Passover, lest he cause trouble.

Irrespective why they warned Jesus, the Pharisees were given a defiant answer by our Lord. Indeed, Herod is the only person Jesus is recorded as having treated with contempt, both in this incident and when he was brought before him after he had been betrayed. By saying, “**Go and tell that fox,**” Christ was not just indicating that Herod was a crafty, cruel, worthless man. Instead, he referred to a verse in the second chapter of the Song of Songs, ‘**Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.**’ Herod Antipas was like a fox that ruined the vineyard – a term often used to symbolise the Jewish nation. In other words, Jesus identified Herod as somebody who undermined the covenant between God and his chosen people. Christ stated that he still had his Father's work of healing and reconciliation to carry out now and in the near future, but his reference to ‘**the third day I shall finish my work**’ showed that his ministry would soon come to an end – through his act of redemption at Calvary and, of course, his resurrection three days later. Jesus was not going to allow Herod's malice to deflect him from doing his Father's will, for he had come to reconcile and reclaim sinners in a new, covenant, based on love and faith.

Jesus' lament, “**Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You kill the prophets, you stone the messengers God has sent you**” began with references to incidents when the kings and high priests killed prophets whose message was unpalatable: for example in the second book of Chronicles **King Joash** and his officials stoned **Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest**, when he rebuked them for worshiping Baal; in chapter 26 of his book, Jeremiah related how the prophet, **Uriah, son of Shemaiah**, who had the same warning message for **King Jehoiakim** as he did, was brought back from Egypt where he had sought refuge and killed with a sword in Jerusalem. However, instead of condemning Jerusalem and its people, Jesus expressed a deep longing to enfold them in his arms, to care for them as a hen cares for its chicks, but he grieves that they would not let him comfort and protect them.

By rejecting him, not only Jerusalem but the Jewish nation would suffer as a result of their choice, **‘until the time comes when you say, ‘God bless him who comes in the name of the Lord.’** This does not mean the triumphal entry at Passover, for the adoring crowd was mainly composed of Galileans who had gone to the capital city to celebrate the festival. Instead, it refers to the Second Coming, when Jesus will return in triumph and glory. In other words, although the Jews rejected God’s new covenant – and would suffer as a result – the door was not completely closed against them: Christ’s second coming would provide another opportunity to return to the fold, for God’s mercy is boundless and wonderful.

This Lent we are challenged to choose wisely in an uncertain world where values are constantly being undermined. We live in a society where our faith often conflicts with worldly desires for material prosperity, power and prestige, but if our faith is subverted by these false values, we become what St. Paul described as **‘enemies of Christ’s death on the cross.’** Remember, we are citizens of God’s kingdom whose values should be the same as Christ’s. In the last few years we have seen large companies collapse, but while employees and contractors were left high and dry, company executives walked away with huge bonuses. We see national leaders and some celebrities abuse their powers to the detriment of those they govern and for so-called personalities to effectively sell their souls to remain in the public eye. It is abundantly clear society as a whole and we as individuals need to reassess our values and choices. There’s nothing wrong getting ahead in the world, provided it is done honestly, without trampling over others and is not at the cost of relationships with family, friends and God! After all, John Wesley advocated earning as much as we can – but only to use it for the benefit of the needy. As an Oxford student he even saved £4 per annum by growing his hair long, therefore not needing a wig, so he could give the sum he saved to the poor. We can choose to follow Jesus’ example of caring for all-comers, even if we find it hard to like them, or we can simply reject them. We can stand up for the Developing World through Fairtrade or ethical – buying, or we can buy goods made cheaply by sweated labour in the Third World, often by children as young as five. We can take a stand against exploitation and injustice, just as Methodists have stood up for the poor and marginalised from the times of the Wesleys and George Whitfield.

Why should we choose Jesus’ way? He is simply the personification of God’s love for everybody, who laid down his life to cancel the debt of human sins and was raised to offer us everlasting life. Surely, our only response can be our own sacrifice of love and service to our Saviour, Lord and friend. Amen.

Our closing hymn was written in 1886, when Francis Rowley was pastor of First Baptist Church, North Adams. A remarkable young Swiss singer and musician, Peter Bilhorn, after a Sunday evening service, suggested Pastor Rowley ought to write a hymn which he would set to music. That same night he wrote the words we shall sing. Peter Bilhorn composed a tune, entitled ‘Wondrous Story’.

We, however, are going to sing it to either “Hyfrydol” or “Calon Lan”, Welsh melodies! The melody, ‘Calon Lan’ was composed 1904. John Hughes of Glandwr, the commercial manager of Duffryn Steel and Tinsplate Works in Swansea had just returned from a Sunday School meeting when his friend, Daniel James, arrived, holding a piece of paper in his hands upon which were written the words of “Calon Lan”. It was, Daniel explained, important that the words should be set to music for the children to sing - as quickly as possible. Although he was

hungry, John took the manuscript from his friend and within a short time he produced a lovely tune to set off the words. In fact, John Hughes not only composed the melody for “Calon Lan”, but ate his tea and was still in time to attend the evening service! Hymn number 323, ‘I will sing the wondrous story’

**1. I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
How He left the realms of glory
For the cross on Calvary: *Chorus:***

*Yes, I’ll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it with his saints in glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.*

**2. I was lost; but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Raised me up, and gently led me,
Back into the narrow way: *Chorus:***

**3. Faint was I, and fears possessed me,
Bruised was I from many a fall;
Hope was gone, and shame distressed me;
But his love has pardoned all: *Chorus:***

**4. Days of darkness still come o’er me;
Sorrow’s paths I often tread;
But the Saviour still is with me,
By his hand I’m safely led: *Chorus:***

**5. He will keep me till the river
Rolls its waters at my feet;
Then he’ll bear me safely over,
Where the loved ones I shall meet: *Chorus:***

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Benediction

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