

A service for 16th February, 2025 (StF)

Call to Worship: Psalm 34 verses 1 to 3

I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. Glorify the LORD with me; let us exalt his name together. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written in 1979 to celebrate the bi-centenary of John Wesley's preaching in Paradise Square, Sheffield. The words and melody of this one were composed during a train journey between London and Chesterfield and it was inspired by the opening of the 1933 "Methodist Hymn Book", which reads 'Methodism was born in song. Charles Wesley wrote the first hymns of the Evangelical Revival during the great Whitsuntide of 1738 when his brother and he were "filled with the Spirit," and from that time onwards the Methodists have never ceased to sing.' The author, Revd. Brian Hoare was New Testament Tutor at Cliff College and in 1979 he was serving as a member of the main committee that created "Hymns and Psalms". Enough said; we shall sing hymn number 21, 'Born in song'.

1. Born in song!

God's people have always been singing.

Born in song!

Hearts and voices raised.

So today we worship together;

God alone is worthy to be praised.

2. Praise to God!

For he is the one who has made us.

Praise to God!

We his image bear.

Heaven and earth are full of his glory;

Let creation praise him everywhere.

3. Christ is King!

He left all the glory of heaven.

Christ is King!

Born to share in our pain;

Crucified, for sinners atoning,

Risen, exalted, soon to come again.

4. Sing the song!

God's Spirit is poured out among us.

Sing the song!

He has made us anew.

Every member part of the Body;

Given his power, his will to seek and do.

5. Tell the world!

All power to Jesus is given.

Tell the world!

He is with us always.

Spread the word, that all may receive him;

Every tongue confess and sing his praise.

**6. Then the end!
Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory.
Then the end
Of all earthly days.
Yet above the song will continue;
All his people still shall sing his praise.**

© Brian Hoare (born 1935)

Let us pray

Lord of life, how majestic is your name in all the universe! Your glory shines brightly throughout heaven and earth. When we consider the wonders of your creation, which you spoke into being, the beauty of earth, sea and sky, the vastness of space and reflect upon the ecosystems that maintain life, we are astounded by the vastness of your might and wisdom, and are astonished that you care for feeble, sinful human beings. Yet you have given us stewardship over this planet and seek to draw us ever-closer as your earthly children.

Even when we set ourselves against your holy will, you came to us as Christ Jesus, whose life, death and resurrection, not only revealed your true nature and showed us how you want us to live, but broke the hold of sin and death and offers us everlasting life. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the universe! Amen.

Let us offer a prayer of thanksgiving and confession to the Lord. When I say, 'Lord, in your mercy', please reply, 'Hear our prayer'.

Heavenly Father, we offer heartfelt thanks for the many blessings we receive from you, day by day: for good things we enjoy; for people who have blessed us by their example and loving-care, but most of all that you love us even at our worst, when we are loveless and faithless.

'Lord, in your mercy' 'Hear our prayer'.

Merciful Lord, we confess that, too often, we don't love our neighbours as we love ourselves and, when we see neighbours in need or distress, we don't help them. We are slow to respond to your call to serve others in your name and acknowledge that we are not as committed to you as we ought to be. Help us to change our ways, so that our lives become Christ-centred, not self-centred.

'Lord, in your mercy', 'Hear our prayer'.

Gracious and faithful God, we believe that you have heard our prayer and have not only forgiven us, but you call us to follow you once more, unburdened by guilt. Therefore, Lord, as you offer us a fresh start, fill us now with the power of the Holy Spirit to love and serve both you and our neighbours faithfully and joyfully in the blessed name of Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend. 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.

Our next hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed Kendrick's visit to India the previous year.

Hymn number 693, 'Beauty for brokenness,'

**1. Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.**

**Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!**

**2. Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for all people, trade for their skills;
Land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak. *Chorus:***

***God of the poor, friend of the weak,
Give us compassion we pray:
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;
Come, change our love from a spark to a flame.***

**3. Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain. *Chorus:***

**4. Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned – our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
Make us content with the things that we need. *Chorus:***

**5. Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
Until your justice burns brightly again;
Until the nations learn of your ways,
Seek your salvation and bring you their praise. *Chorus: © Graham Kendrick (born 1950)***

We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away.
Heavenly Father, you have blessed us with a beautiful, life-sustaining planet on which to live and with the richness of your love, yet we are aware of the brokenness of the world and suffering that results from it. Lord, help us to act as your earthly hands by helping neighbours who are in need or any kind of trouble. May we play what part we can, however small, to build a better world by seeking justice for all, by campaigning to end poverty here and abroad and by learning to co-operate with one another, accepting and even celebrating our differences, rather than being divided by them. Where what we have to offer is not enough, we ask you to inspire people with power and influence who can heal the brokenness we see around us, for we know that to you all things are possible.

Lord, 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. We pray for a swift, just end to these conflicts and pray for a humane resolution to the situation in Gaza in particular. 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, the Source of wholeness and wellbeing, hear our prayer for people in our community who are ill in body, mind or spirit, for those who are brought low by loneliness, trouble, or need and for everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear 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.

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.

Creator God, the wildfires in California, arctic conditions in central and eastern states of the USA, super-storms in Ireland, Scotland and parts of Europe provide clear evidence of global warming, with super-storms, floods and wildfires occurring elsewhere, too. Help us play our part in reducing the harm we are doing the planet, by polluting less, recycling more and using only the earth's resources we actually need. Help us pass on a healthier world to forthcoming generations by making our own sacrifices for their sakes.

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.

We continue our worship as we sing a hymn by Revd. John Keble, whose Assize Sermon in 1833, led to the movement of a number of Anglican priests, including John Henry Newman, to the Roman Catholic priesthood, though Revd. Keble himself remained a loyal member of the Church of England. We shall sing hymn number 244, 'Blest are the pure in heart'.

**1. Blest are the pure in heart,
For they shall see our God;
The secret of the Lord is theirs,
Their soul is Christ's abode.**

**2. The Lord, who left the heavens
Our life and peace to bring,
To dwell on earth in lowliness,
their pattern and our King.**

**3 Still to the lowly soul
He does himself impart,
And for his dwelling and his throne
Chooses the pure in heart.**

**4 Lord, we your presence seek,
A vision of your face;
Give us a pure and lowly heart,
A temple of your grace.**

Verses 1 & 3 John Keble (1792 – 1866) verses 2 & 4) William Hall (alt.)

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 6 verses 17 to 26

He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the

prophets.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets. Amen.

We continue our worship with a hymn by the prolific and long-lived Methodist Minister, Revd. Fred Prat Green. It was written in 1969, entitled “the Caring Church”. Hymn number 415, ‘The Church of Christ, in every age,’

**1. The Church of Christ, in every age,
Beset by change, but Spirit led,
Must claim and test its heritage / And keep on rising from the dead.**

**2. Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.**

**3. Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring Church that longs to be
A partner in Christ’s sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ’s humanity.**

**4. For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.**

**5. We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.**

© F. Pratt Green {1903 – 2000}

Sermon: “Makarios” Luke 6:17 – 26

In Matthew’s gospel, the Sermon on the Mount began with what are called ‘The Beatitudes’, while Luke has his blessings and woes as a sermon on the plain. The use of “Blessed” at the beginning of each of the qualities to which Jesus refers, is a poor translation of the Greek ‘**Makarios**’, which is better rendered as ‘happy’, or better still, ‘fortunate’. The Good News Bible uses ‘happy’, not in the sense of being cheerful, or content, but to be congratulated. So, what qualities does Christ advocate and declare those who possess them as being fortunate? They may seem absurd today, because there is no mention of celebrity, fame, wealth, power over others, nor pre-eminence in public gatherings. Instead, Jesus tells us what really matters in our attitudes as disciples.

Jesus copied the style of Old Testament poetical books to outline the qualities of true discipleship, where we accede to the demands of God’s kingdom. Let us examine what Jesus regards as kingdom qualities. He addressed the disciples directly when he declared, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God”, for he was not advocating poverty and by comparison condemning wealthy people, but was acknowledging that the disciples lacked resources and had to rely on God’s provision. Unlike the worldly, they do not use their talents for their own benefit, to gain wealth or power, which the world reveres, but instead they offer their gifts for the benefit of others. The kingdom of heaven consists of such men and women.

‘Blessed are you who hunger now’, refers to people with a sincere desire to obtain righteousness, to lead holy lives in God’s kingdom. These people knew that even trying to follow the 613 Rules of Righteousness scrupulously and offering sacrifices when they fell short was not enough to draw them close to the Almighty. They were waiting for God’s kingdom to be established on earth. Jesus declared that they would be rewarded, for their desires would be satisfied, though this required him becoming the One perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

‘Those who weep now’ does not necessarily mean the bereaved, or penitent: they are people who are saddened by the state of the world, by their own failings and their inability to set things right, and who turn to the Lord in their distress. Jesus declares they will find inner peace through God’s salvation and laugh for joy.

‘Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man’ means all who suffer in material terms, or who are scorned by the worldly for living as God directs them, for not compromising their conscience and lifestyles in order to gain favour, or wealth, or power. They are people who are willing to stand up and be counted when they see injustice, or evil at work, even though they may suffer for doing so. Jesus ended by warning followers that they might well face persecution and character assassination as a result, but called them not only to be strong but even to be glad in their suffering, for prophets had often been persecuted and rejected. Indeed, Christ would be put to suffering and be killed for being true to God the Father.

The woes are not intended as Christ’s curse, but effectively means ‘how unfortunate are those’ and they seem to have been addressed to wealthy Pharisees among the crowd who loved and put their faith in material possessions. Just as he was not advocating poverty, Jesus didn’t attack all wealthy people. His attitude is reflected in John Wesley’s sermon, ‘The right use of money’: ‘Earn all you can; save all you can; give all you can as long as ever you can’. I’m confident Jesus would approve of Bill and Melinda Gates’ use of their wealth via their Foundation. No, the rich Christ alluded to were those who felt self-sufficient and were far less likely to accept the Good News and felt no need to rely on God. Indeed, the phrase, ‘those that are full’ means more than people who have enough food: it refers to all who are satisfied with their wealth, don’t consider giving to needy neighbours, lack the desire to seek either their own salvation by following Jesus, or try to improve the lot of less fortunate people. ‘Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep’, is certainly not a rejection of laughter, for Jesus spoke against the killjoy attitudes of many in the Jewish religious establishment. Laughter here means self-satisfaction, indifference to the plight of others and spiritual complacency. A time would come when they would see the error of their ways, but it would be too late.

The final woe, ‘when all speak well of you’, indicts all who’ve sacrificed their principles in order to court favour. Truth is often an early victim for those who seek popularity and the Old Testament records how true prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah suffered for standing up for the truth. Christ calls us to be true to the gospels and to ourselves, even if we become unpopular by doing so. It is worth noting that these blessings and woes echo a warning from Jeremiah, who saw that people who regard themselves as self-sufficient often don’t feel the need to rely on God, or indeed to make room for God in their lives. Those who put their trust in God, who acknowledge his grace and goodness will receive his blessing, though not necessarily in material terms.

We may well feel these qualities are beyond us and it’s certainly difficult for us to possess all of them, yet Jesus demonstrated each in his earthly ministry: he gave up

the riches of heaven to live among us; he placed himself in his Father's hands and trusted him enough to face crucifixion to save us; he trusted he would be raised and glorified. Jesus was humble, despite being the Son of God and though he did not seek earthly riches, he freely shared the most important thing he possessed: **REDEMPTIVE LOVE**. *May we be as generous with our gifts of the Spirit, to build up one another and be a blessing to our neighbours. Amen.*

We end our worship with a hymn by John Bell and Graham Maule of the Iona Community. Usually, they set their hymns to old Scots ballads, but this uses a Fifteenth Century carol tune, "Noel nouvelet". Hymn number 251, 'Jesus Christ is waiting'.

**1. Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely, too:
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you.**

**2. Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry, too:
In the kingdom's causes,
Let me rage with you.**

**3. Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets,
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity, too:
Let my care be active,
Healing, just like you.**

**4. Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph, too:
Where good conquers evil,
Let me dance with you.**

**5. Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
'Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet.'
Listen, Lord Jesus,**

**Let my fears be few:
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.**

© *John L. Bell (B 1949) & Graham Maule (B 1958)*

Benediction

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