

A service for 23rd February, 2025 (StF)

Call to Worship: Habakkuk chapter 3 verses 17 to 19

Though the fig-tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Saviour.

The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights. Amen.

Our opening hymn was written in 2001 by British worship leaders, Matt and Beth Redman, in the USA, shortly after the 9/11 attack that destroyed the World Trade Centre. It echoes the steadfast faith of the minor prophet, Habakkuk, six hundred years earlier, when he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem. We shall sing hymn number 41, 'Blessed be your name'

1. Blessed be your name

In the land that is plentiful

Where your streams of abundance flow

Blessed be your name.

And blessed be your name

When I'm found in the desert place,

Though I walk through the wilderness,

Blessed be your name.

Every blessing you pour out

I'll turn back to praise.

When the darkness closes in, Lord,

Still I will say: *[Chorus]*

Blessed be the name of the Lord,

Blessed be your name.

Blessed be the name of the Lord,

Blessed be your glorious name.

2. Blessed be your name

When the sun's shining down on me,

When the world's 'all as it should be',

Blessed be your name.

And blessed be your name

On the road marked with suffering,

Though there's pain in the offering

Blessed be your name.

Every blessing you pour out

I'll turn back to praise.

When the darkness closes in, Lord,

Still I will say: *[Chorus]*

Blessed be the name of the Lord,

Blessed be your name.

Blessed be the name of the Lord,

Blessed be your glorious name.

You give and take away,

**You give and take away.
My heart will choose to say,
'Lord, blessed be your name,' [Chorus]
*Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your name.
Blessed be the name of the Lord,
Blessed be your glorious name.***

© Matt & Beth Redman (2002)

Prayer and Lord's Prayer

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.

As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:

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.

Our next hymn was written by Oklahoma-born Carol Owens, who, with husband Jimmy, have written many hymns and gospel songs. This one was popular at once when it was published in 1972. Number 424, 'God forgave my sin in Jesus' name'.

1. God forgave my sin in Jesus' name;

**I've been born again in Jesus' name,
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his love as he told me to: *Chorus:***

He said:

***'Freely, freely you have received,
Freely, freely give;
Go in my name and because you believe,
Others will know that I live.'***

**2. All power is given in Jesus' name
In earth and heaven in Jesus' name;
And in Jesus' name I come to you
To share his power as he told me to: *Chorus:***

© Carol Owens {born 1931}

We come now to our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away. Let us pray.

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. 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.

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, floods and 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.

Our next hymn was written by Graham Kendrick for the 25th anniversary of the charity Tearfund in 1993 and followed his visit to India the previous year in which he had seen the contrast between the opulence of the rich and grinding poverty of ordinary villagers. We shall sing 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.**

**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:***

**4. 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)*

Our Gospel reading is Luke chapter 6 verses 27 to 38

"But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop them from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners', expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without

expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Amen.

Our penultimate hymn was written under the name Damian Lundy. He was born Michael Lundy at Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire in 1944, a member of a Roman Catholic family. He later became a brother of the de la Salle order and became a leading innovator in many forms of Catholic ministry and education in the UK. Hymn number 397, 'The Spirit lives to set us free'.

1. The Spirit lives to set us free,

Walk, walk in the light;

He binds us all in unity,

Walk, walk in the light. Chorus:

Walk in the light,

Walk in the light,

Walk in the light,

Walk in the light of the Lord.

2. Jesus promised life to all

Walk, walk in the light;

The dead were wakened by His call,

Walk, walk in the light. Chorus:

3. He died in pain on Calvary,

Walk, walk in the light;

To save the lost like you and me,

Walk, walk in the light. Chorus:

4. We know His death was not the end,

Walk, walk in the light;

He gave His Spirit to be our friend,

Walk, walk in the light. Chorus:

5. By Jesus' love our wounds are healed,

Walk, walk in the light;

The Father's kindness is revealed,

Walk, walk in the light. Chorus:

6. The Spirit lives in you and me,

Walk, walk in the light;

His light will shine for all to see,

Walk, walk in the light. Chorus:

© Damien Lundy (1944 – 1996)

Address: 'Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you' Luke 6:27
Today's reading is a continuation of Jesus' sermon on the plain and it relates how Jesus told his followers, "**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also**". I imagine some of his listeners may have considered his teaching absurd, if not treacherous, for Palestine was under Roman

occupation and Jews were taxed heavily by Caesar. Surely, patriotic Jews would have reasoned that they ought to use every opportunity to strike at Romans, for although Torah commanded them to love their neighbour, by the First Century Jews only regarded fellow-Jews as neighbours and considered Gentiles damned and unclean. Indeed, Jews would not enter a Gentile household, for they would become ceremonially unclean by doing so.

Christ is asking a great deal of his listeners – and us – for it really is not easy to love our enemies, **to turn the other cheek, or if someone takes your cloak, not to stop him from taking your tunic.** However, he did not mean we should literally allow people to assault and steal from us – that would result in a race of battered, but saintly paupers and another race of prosperous thugs and villains. Now, it is relatively easy to care for those we like, people who are like us, who share our values, who don't act against us or threaten our interests, but far less so for those who hate us and what we stand for. I say 'relatively easy', for if we consider Paul's letters to the Corinthian churches, all was not light and peace there, in fact their differences were tearing them apart.

Jesus' declaration, **'Do to others as you would have them do to you'**, was not a new teaching. **Rabbi Hillel** was once asked to teach somebody the Law of Moses whilst he, Hillel, was standing on one foot, so she said, **'What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour: that is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary'**.

Nevertheless, this is the heart of Christ's teaching. We ought not strike out in anger, but give a measured response. We must be generous if we see somebody in need, whatever our feelings toward them.

Jesus certainly lived out his teachings: he offered forgiveness to tax collectors, who were not only seen as collaborators with Rome, but crooks who demanded more than they were entitled to and kept the difference; he offered grace to fallen women, like the much-wedded Syro-Phoenician at Jacob's well; he healed the lame, blind and deranged, all of whom were deemed sinners under God's judgment; he bore his betrayal, mock trial, abuse by the Sanhedrin and scourging without retaliating and when he was crucified, he did not call an army of angels to destroy his enemies, but asked his Father to forgive them. **"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!"** He gave his life so our sins are forgiven.

You may ask if such forgiveness is possible for us. Here is a story that suggests it is. At the end of the Second World War, my father, who served with the Desert Air Force, was offered two highly-paid engineering jobs in South Africa, but turned them down, because he had seen at first-hand how badly non-whites were treated there, three years before Apartheid came into being. He came back to Birmingham convinced that there would be a devastating civil war in South Africa in his lifetime. Had it not been for Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu, my father's fears may have been realised.

Nelson Mandela was born into a Xhosa royal family and graduated as a lawyer in 1942. He became involved in anti-colonial and African nationalist politics in Johannesburg, joining the ANC in 1943. When Apartheid was established, he became involved in passive resistance, but they were met with violence by South African authorities and the ANC was banned. Consequently, Nelson Mandela organized an armed movement that became involved in a campaign of sabotage against the

apartheid government, following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960. He was arrested and imprisoned for life in 1962, for conspiring to overthrow the state. Although his trial was widely viewed as corrupt, Nelson Mandela served 27 years in gaol. International campaigns were organized to have him released and, fearing a racial civil war, the President of South Africa, Frederik de Klerk, bowed to public pressure and released Mr. Mandela in 1990.

It would have been natural for Nelson Mandela to have been filled with hate, but he agreed to work with President de Klerk to negotiate an end to Apartheid. Their work was supported by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who had been inspired to serve Christ because of the support and kindness he received from Revd. Trevor Huddleston when he was a youth. They founded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in which people who had committed human rights abuses were able to admit their crimes, but were pardoned, easing the way to the first multiracial general election in 1994 in which Mr. Mandela became the first President of the Rainbow State.

Rugby and the national team remained an issue, for the Springboks had been exclusively all-white and was seen by many non-whites as a hangover from the Apartheid era. In the 1995 Rugby World Cup competition only a couple of non-whites represented South Africa, though the die was clearly cast. In the Cup Final, the Springboks narrowly defeated the All Blacks and when Nelson Mandela walked onto the stadium to hand the Webb Ellis Trophy to captain Francois Pienaar, he delighted the crowd by wearing the number 6 jersey of Francois Pienaar, who had already become a friend. As he presented the trophy, he said, "Francois, thank you for what you have done for the country," to which Francois Pienaar replied, "No, Mr. Mandela, thank you for what you have done for the country."

My father lived just long enough to witness the transition from Apartheid to a multicultural South Africa, but had it not been for Nelson Mandela's capacity to forgive, I think it would have been unlikely to have happened. **No one should think forgiveness is easy, for it comes at a personal cost. However, it pales into insignificance when we consider what it cost Jesus Christ to earn forgiveness for the sins of the world at Calvary. Generous God, help us learn to care for all-comers, as our Saviour did, even when we find it hard even to like them. Amen.**

We shall conclude our worship with a hymn based on a prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. The hymn was written by Johann Sebastian Templehoff, a South African who became a Franciscan monk in Los Angeles. We shall sing hymn number 707, 'Make me a channel of your peace'.

1. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;

Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord;

And where there's doubt, true faith in you. Chorus:

O Master, grant that I may never seek

So much to be consoled as to console;

To be understood as to understand;

To be loved, as to love with all my soul.

2. Make me a channel of your peace.

Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope;

Where there is darkness, only light;

And where there's sadness, ever joy: *Chorus:*

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console;
To be understood as to understand;
To be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

3. Make me a channel of your peace.

**It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
In giving unto all that we receive,
And in dying that we're born to eternal life.**

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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 all evermore. Amen.