

A service for 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2024 (StF)

**Call to worship: Psalm 86 verses 11 & 12**

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name for ever. Amen.

*Our opening hymn was written by Revd. John Monsell and published in the mid Nineteenth Century. In his preface to “Hymns of Love and Praise for the Church’s Year” Rev. Monsell wrote, ‘Most of us are too distant and reserved’ ... ‘we sing not as if our hearts were on fire with the divine flame of love and joy as we should hymn Him who is chief in the courts of heaven and altogether lovely’ ... ‘We sing, not as we should sing to He who is Chief among the ten thousand, the Altogether Lovely.’ Let’s try to prove him wrong! Hymn number 34, ‘O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’*

**1. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,  
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,  
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.**

**2. Low at his feet lay your burden of carefulness,  
High on his heart he will bear it for you,  
Comfort your sorrows, and answer your prayerfulness,  
Showing the pathway your feet should pursue.**

**3. Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness  
Of the poor wealth you would count as your own;  
Truth in its beauty, and love in its tenderness,  
These are the offerings to bring to his throne.**

**4. These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,  
He will accept for the name that is dear;  
Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,  
Trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.**

**5. O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,  
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim;  
With gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,  
Kneel and adore him: the Lord is his name.**

© John Samuel Bewley Monsell {1811 – 1875}

***Let us pray.***

Lord of Creation, you spoke our universe into being, your love maintains life and through whose grace we may call you Abba, Father, we are here to worship and adore your holy Name. You are amazing, for when we turned away from you, instead of condemning and punishing us, you came as Christ Jesus, who not only taught us how live as you call us to in words and deeds of love, but was crucified at Calvary for the sins of the whole world. His resurrection broke the power of death and offers us everlasting life through him. Lord, take away any anxiety or distraction that prevents us dwelling upon your holiness and beauty in this time of worship in Jesus’ lovely name. Amen.

***In our prayer of thanksgiving and confession, when I say, ‘Lord in your mercy’, please respond, ‘Hear our prayer’.***

Heavenly Father, thank you for your gift of life, for this beautiful, self-sustaining world in which we live, for the many blessings we receive from you, but above all else, thank

you for living among us as Jesus, for without him we are helpless and hopeless. Help us to respond to your goodness and grace.

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

Merciful Lord, you are faithful, true and holy, whereas we are often faithless, loveless and unlovable. Pardon us when we fail to love our neighbours as ourselves and when we are sometimes lukewarm in our discipleship. Breathe your Holy Spirit upon the embers of our faith, warm our hearts and restore us to righteousness. Help us change our ways and live as you want us to.

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

Gracious God, we believe you hear our prayers and have not only forgiven us, but call us to walk with you once more. Keep us close, Lord, so we serve you and our neighbours joyfully and faithfully, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

***As our Saviour taught his disciples, we pray:***

**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 with a hymn written thirteen years ago by Marjorie Dobson, a Methodist local preacher from County Durham. Hymn number 243, 'A rich young man came seeking'.*

**1. A rich young man came seeking –**

**God's kingdom was his aim.**

**The law had been his guidebook.**

**His life was free from blame.**

**But Jesus asked the courage**

**To give his wealth away.**

**The young man turned in sorrow,**

**That price he would not pay.**

**2. The rich men's gifts were lavish**

**And made for public show.**

**The widow's gift was humble**

**And only God would know,**

**In giving to the Temple,**

**Although her coins were small,**

**Her gift had so much meaning**

**Because she gave her all.**

**3. One boy brought loaves and fishes,**

**No other food was there,**

**But Jesus fed the thousands**

**And still had bread to spare.**

**The miracle of plenty**

**Soon spread beyond that place.**

**That simple gift was offered,**

**Then multiplied by grace.**

**4. Lord, keep our care for money**

**From turning into greed.**

**Help us to use it wisely  
To meet each other's need.  
For whether poor or wealthy,  
We have so much to share  
And open-hearted giving  
Will show your loving care.**

© Marjorie Dobson (Born 1940)

***We offer our prayers of intercession for people nearby and far away.***

Lord of all, we recognize your faithfulness in meeting our daily needs and for loving us so much that you sent your Son, Jesus, to show us how to live as you want us to. We pray for our neighbours, those near to us or far away: for people who face hardship and suffering, both here and abroad. Grant us faith and compassion to act as your earthly hands, by offering practical support to people who are in need or distress, but where the best we can offer is inadequate, we ask you to intervene, for nothing is impossible to you.

Lord of all, bring forth leaders who have the wisdom and compassion to care for the well-being of the people they rule over. Teach them to seek justice and to deal mercifully, for only when they do so will real peace prevail. We pray for peace in the world, especially for a just and swift end to fighting between Israel, Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah, between Ukraine and Russia. We pray, too, for Sudan and Somalia where conflicts are often unreported by our Media, yet where their populations are threatened with severe famines. Lord, bless everyone who is working for peace: for negotiators, aid-workers and medics, particularly those who are putting themselves at risk by serving on the front line. Remember in your mercy, all victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and oppression, that they may receive the courage and support they need to rebuild their lives and find healing.

We pray for the churches in our area and, indeed, the World Church. May we learn to speak of the love and beauty of Christ Jesus with one voice and to serve him in unity of mission. Let us bear the gospel light bravely in a sceptical and sometimes hostile world.

We remember people who are sick in body, mind or spirit; for all who are lonely, afraid, or in any kind of need or trouble. We pray in particular for everybody who is mourning the loss of somebody dear and finds bereavement unbearable. In a time of silent reflection, we offer you names of people for whom we are especially concerned.

.....  
Lord, while we ask you to help us provide them with both practical support and friendship, enfold them in the warmth of your love, so they may be comforted, find healing, courage, hope and enduring peace.

Lord of life, recent terrible floods here, in Europe and the USA and wildfires on several continents, are salutary reminders about the effects of climate change and our collective failure as stewards of this planet. We offer our prayer for all disaster- stricken people and pray for them to receive swift, practical aid. Most of all, we pray that all humankind comes to recognize the need for change the way we live on this planet before it is too late, so that future generations will have a habitable world in which to live.

Abba, Father God, bless us, our families and friends. Keep us safe in your care and help us share your abundant love with all-comers, thereby glorifying your name, through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

## **Our Gospel reading is Mark chapter 12 verses 38 to 44**

As he taught, Jesus said,

"Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted in the market-places, and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honour at banquets. They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. Such men will be punished most severely."

Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on." Amen.

*We continue our worship with a hymn by Matt Redman, who became a Christian at the age of 10 and attended the Anglican church of St Andrew's Chorleywood, in Hertfordshire. It was there he learned to play guitar, and by the age of 20, he began leading worship services and released his first album. Hymn number 446, 'I will offer up my life in spirit and truth'.*

**I will offer up my life in spirit and truth,**

**Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to you.**

**In surrender I must give my every part;**

**Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart. *Chorus:***

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring*

*To so faithful a friend, to so loving a King?*

*Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung*

*As a praise of your name for the things You have done?*

*O my words could not tell, not even in part,*

*Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart.*

**You deserve my every breath for you've paid the great cost;**

**Giving up your life to death, even death on a cross.**

**You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin,**

**Opened up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in. © Matt Redman (Born 1974)**

**Sermon: *Hypocrisy and Commitment*. Mark 12:38 – 44**

Our reading refers to Jesus in the Temple in the week leading to his crucifixion. Mark had related how the Lord entered Jerusalem in triumph, then caused consternation by overturning the tables of traders in the temple courts. From that point, Sadducees, Scribes and Pharisees asked loaded questions to try to discredit Jesus, or even to lay himself open to charges of blasphemy. Naturally, the Lord turned the tables on his adversaries, but Jesus was clearly angered by their deviousness, so he criticised them publicly. Interestingly, Matthew devoted almost a chapter to this condemnation, but Mark's remarks, though short, deliver a hard blow, nevertheless. I am going to broaden some of Mark's comments with references to Matthew's, so we can reach the heart of what Christ was saying, for this was the point at which he finally broke with the Jewish religious establishment.

He began by warning his listeners about teachers of law who sought the praise of men and abused their privileges. Clearly, not all Scribes and Pharisees did so, though a large number did. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus told the crowd to obey what the teachers

of law said, but not to copy what they did. In other words, while their knowledge of the Scriptures, the **Midrash**, or book that clarifies gaps or inconsistencies in Bible stories, and the **Talmud**, or book of religious customs and legal code was sound, they failed to practise what they preached. For example, they liked to wear long, flowing robes like priests, or, in Matthew, they wore a tallit, or prayer shawl with extra-long fringes, and over-size phylacteries, (boxes containing scrolls of scripture which are worn by Jews on their left arm and forehead), so they appeared holier than others.

These teachers of law expected to be greeted with titles such as Rabbi, Master or father by ordinary people, to have places of honour in the synagogue and at banquets. It ought to be remembered that teachers of law were not paid for their services, so they relied upon the hospitality of devout Jews. Unfortunately, those against whom Jesus spoke exploited the generosity offered them by people of limited means, especially widows. Worse still, they often appropriated widows' property, either by charging extortionate rates for giving financial advice, or turning the property to their own use. Last but not least, they tried to impress the people of their piety by offering lengthy prayers, not to honour God, but to boost their public image.

Jesus did not deny that these teachers of law knew a great deal about religious matters, but he condemned them all the more for their blatant hypocrisy and abuse of the very people God commands us to care for: the poor, vulnerable and weak. He declared that such renegades would face severe punishment at God's final judgment. In effect Christ was telling us that service for him was more important than human positions of honour. He means that leadership should never be a goal to be sought for one's own benefit, or prestige, but as an opportunity to serve others, just as he did by his own example as Servant king.

Mark moved the scene to **the court of the women** in the temple, where thirteen chests, called **trumpets** because of their shape, stood. These trumpets were at the entrance to the **treasure chamber, for free will offerings and temple tax to be given**. Jesus watched as many rich people ostentatiously threw in large amounts, but then a poor widow appeared and put in two very small coins, called mites in the NIV. Those small brass coins were **lepta**, worth less than a sixtieth of a farthing, yet they were all the widow possessed. Most widows of that time depended upon family support and their poverty was often grievous – hence Christ's condemnation of the teachers of law who preyed upon and cheated them. Although the wealthy worshippers would have deemed her offering contemptible, Jesus declared that she had effectively given more than the wealthy donors, who offered what they could well afford, while she had given everything to the Lord. Unlike the rich donors, she gave all she had to God, trusting in his providential care.

This reading means more than being open-handed and warm hearted in our church offering, though the more the church receives, the more it can do. I believe that what Mark is telling us is that we should offer ourselves to God's service totally and sacrificially. When he calls us, we should answer that call, whether or not it suits our purpose or inclination; whether or not that calling makes us humble ourselves, rather than exalting us. After all, Jesus humbled himself by taking our mortal form, abandoning the riches of heaven to live among ordinary people like us, serving their needs, before dying in agony and shame at Calvary. **In God's kingdom human values are inverted. Christ won't judge us by our wealth or status, but by the amount love we offer our neighbours without expectation of repayment. My friends, how much is Jesus worth to you in all forms of giving? Amen.**

*We close our worship with a hymn written by Revd. John Copley Winslow, or 'Jack Winslow', as he preferred to be known. He was a Church of England vicar, lecturer and missionary in India, from where he returned to serve as chaplain at Bryanston School and, later, Lee Abbey, North Devon. Hymn number 449, 'Lord of creation, to you be all praise'.*

**1. Lord of creation, to you be all praise!**

**Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!**

**Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,  
And yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.**

**2. Lord of all power, I give you my will,**

**In joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.**

**Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;**

**And, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.**

**3. Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,**

**Rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;**

**What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard  
Is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.**

**4. Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;**

**I praise and adore you for all you impart,**

**Your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,**

**Your presence to shield me, whatever betide.**

**5. Lord of all being, I give you my all;**

**If I should disown you, I stumble and fall;**

**But, led in your service your word to obey,**

**I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.**

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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.**