

Good morning and welcome to worship, where ever you are.

The Lord is here; His spirit is with us.

Call to Worship:

Psalm 8 vv. 3 – 5

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which you have set in place
What is man that you are mindful of him
the son of man that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
And crowned him with glory and honour

Song: "Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim" (Youtube e.g. https://youtu.be/N5dNBL_G5bE)

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| 1 Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol ;
his kingdom is glorious, and rules over all. | 3 'Salvation to God who sits on the throne !'
Let all cry aloud, and honour the Son ;
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces, and worship the Lamb. |
| 2 God ruleth on high, almighty to save ;
and still he is nigh, his presence we have ;
the great congregation his triumph shall
sing,
ascribing salvation to Jesus our King | 4 Then let us adore, and give him his right ;
all glory and power, all wisdom and might,
all honour and blessing, with angels above,
and thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love. |

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

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Prayers

Collect of the Day

Blessed are you O Lord, and blessed are those who observe and keep your law.

Help us to seek you with our whole heart, to delight in your commandments

and to walk in the glorious liberty given us by your Son, Jesus Christ

in whose name we make our prayers. **Amen**

We come before you Father Almighty wherever and however we seek to worship this day.

We thank you for the freedom which you have given us to raise hands, hearts and voices in grateful thanks for everything.

Yet as we come into your presence, we are fully aware that we are not worthy to be here, for our sins burden us and our deeds condemn us, but you are a forgiving God and through the power of Your Spirit you cleanse us and re-energise us for your work wherever we are placed.

So, we thank you and praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **AMEN**

READINGS: Matthew 25 vv. 31 – 46 (NIV)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger

and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

"Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

"They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

"He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

"Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

John 1 vv. 1 – 14 ('The Message')

¹⁻² The Word was first,
the Word present to God,
God present to the Word.
The Word was God,
in readiness for God from day one.

³⁻⁵ Everything was created through him;
nothing—not one thing!—
came into being without him.
What came into existence was Life,
and the Life was Light to live by.
The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
the darkness couldn't put it out.

⁶⁻⁸ There once was a man, his name John, sent by God to point out the way to the Life-Light. He came to show everyone where to look, who to believe in. John was not himself the Light; he was there to show the way to the Light.

⁹⁻¹³ The Life-Light was the real thing:
Every person entering Life
he brings into Light.
He was in the world,
the world was there through him,
and yet the world didn't even notice.
He came to his own people,
but they didn't want him.
But whoever did want him,
who believed he was who he claimed
and would do what he said,
He made to be their true selves,
their child-of-God selves.
These are the God-begotten,
not blood-begotten,
not flesh-begotten,
not sex-begotten.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and blood,
and moved into the neighbourhood.
We saw the glory with our own eyes,
the one-of-a-kind glory,
like Father, like Son,
Generous inside and out,
true from start to finish.

Song: **“Father, we adore You”** (Youtube e.g. <https://youtu.be/rXgk20xpBN8>)

Verse 1

Father, we adore You,
Lay our lives before You:
How we love You!

Verse 3

Spirit, we adore You,
Lay our lives before You:
How we love You!

Verse 2

Jesus, we adore You,
Lay our lives before You:
How we love You!

Terrye Coelho (b. 1952)

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H O M I L Y

Occasionally there are times in life when a situation confronts and radically changes what you originally sought to do such was the case with me recently.

I had been to a welcome service for a new colleague where the preacher had chosen a reading from John’s Gospel from ‘The Message’..... A fairly modern version of Scripture which stopped me in my tracks and has caused me to think a lot of this passage in recent days.

I am neither a modernist nor a traditionalist, but something with fresh words which bring the message home to roost is not a thing that needs to be pushed aside.

So, for the second time in as many weeks I have changed tack and seek to bring the Word I believe the Lord has given this day, for this situation.

He (John) came to show EVERYONE where to look, who to believe in (John 1.7)

For those who are ‘in the comfort zone’, this is radical, frightening even, for the doors of the beloved sanctuary have not just been opened, but smashed down so that EVERYONE can have access to the Living Godthe Life-Light ... to Jesus.

So when Jack came into a small congregation with his life-changing story, folk who were acquainted with him were just that little bit astonished. For Jack was more at home swilling beer on a Sunday afternoon in a pub in the centre of an East Midlands town and as a ‘sport’ would be baiting the soap box preacher with rotten fruit and vegetables much to his and his mates drunken delight until that is, Jack heard words like ‘Jesus died for you’.

The power of that renewing Spirit fell on Jack and as a result his so-called ‘mates’ left him, but Jesus was now the centre of Jack’s life and the Word he now preached was powerful indeed for it came from the depths of his heart.

On my final service in the little chapel Jack now called 'home' and before I went off to theological college, his final words to me were'Now the mantel of Elijah has fallen on Elisha'

Come all you vagabonds, come all you 'don't belongs' winners and losers people like me

(From 'Vagabonds' by Mark Edwards, Phil Baggaley, Stuart Townend, © 2011 Thankyou Music, Admin. by Integrity Music Ltd; Verse 1)

Then some of the 'everyone group' will begin to ask questions.... not just the whys and wherefores as to how we got here as a Church, but questions of faith and about Jesus.

Although many such questions I acknowledge are covered in courses ably run, when you are conjoined in conversation over coffee, where do we begin?

For as we call many to 'come and meet Jesus' are we really ready for what might come from that invitation? The 'what if?'; 'what is?'; 'what can be?' and many more like those which can haunt us ----- and may indeed call even us to the foot of the empty Cross and re-affirm what Jesus means to us and for us and seek to do what He said. There are many times when we struggle to 'feed' those who really need it; to clothe with the garments of righteousness those who need the protection and love of God and really looking after on that journey of faith wherever it has begun and wherever it will take us. Together in prayer we can seek His face and rejoice in His love

Come all you questioners looking for answers and searching for reasons and sense of it all

('Vagabonds'; verse 2)

So, we continue looking at whom the Apostle may have been showing 'where to look', and my mind goes back to the time I was in prison. NOT as an inmate I hasten to add, but as a very frightened visitor!

A young member of one of my churches in Barry, South Wales who had demonstrated that he was good at helping the elderly property steward, got himself into some bother with his mates on Barry Island. He was apprehended, tried and sentence to a custodial sentence to be served in Cardiff prison. This is a Victorian monolith on the edge of Tiger Bay and it certainly scared me when I had to visit. Despite my clerical garb I was frisked and my hand stamped with an indelible stamp which turned out to be a crown visible only under ultra violet light, so that I was unable to swap clothes with an inmate.

Chas had tried to hold on to some remnants of his young faith but it was gradually being physically beaten out of him by others and he was changed during his time at HM's pleasure. But worse was to come

When he was released his local church turned their backs on him as well as his mother and grandmother and there was much distress; yet what the congregation failed to realise was that by their unchristian action they pushed the young lad deeper into crime.

'I was in prison and you visited me' (Matthew 25.36)

'Come all you fallen, and come all you broken

('Vagabonds'; verse 2)

Despite the incident happening some twenty years ago I am still haunted by it and the actions of so-called Christians that instead of welcoming a wandering sheep back into the fold, added to an increasing crime wave. How will that be judged in heaven?

This is but one of many incidences I have encountered in my journey as a Minister of the Gospel. Situations which have ranged through many issues, which included matters of single-sex relations and sexual orientation. Both have blasted groups apart and left bitter tastes within the wider society in which the Christian group was set. The worst for me was when a male couple was literally hounded out of a society just because of their love for one another and their desire to serve God in that capacity. Oh I hear folk saying 'times have changed now', and I realise that but surely as Christians we should have taken time to understand?

Or a ministerial candidate at theological college in a single sex relationship, who was in no uncertain terms told there was no place for him a family orientated college he now has an active ministry in Canada.

'The Word became flesh and blood and moved into the community' (John 1.14)

"Come those ... from every station and orientation, the helpless, the hopeless, the young and the old"

('Vagabonds'; verse 3)

'He came to His own people, but they didn't want Him' (John 1.11)

The Church as it now stands, and has indeed stood for many centuries is in the midst of a cauldron of humanity and continues to seek ways and means to connect, establish relations and share a timely message of the Life-Light who is among us now.

BUT there remains, as has been the case really since the beginning of the Church on earth, that many people are selective as to who they want to be part of that community of Christ on earth: dogmas clash; traditions are challenged; organisation put in a strong spotlight; and leadership needing clarity and cleansing. This is the organisation which is the Church : created through the Risen Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and ruined by human beings who seek to wear the god-mantle.

"But whoever did want him, who believed he was whom he claimed and would do what he said, He made their true selves, their child-of-God selvesTHESE ARE THE GOD-BEGOTTEN" (Jn 1.12)

He came to show everyone where to look ... who to believe in ----- (John 1.7)

Come all believers and dreamers and schemers, and come all you restless just searching for home; movers and shakers and givers and takers, the happy, the sad and the lost and alone
(*'Vagabonds'; verse 4*)

COME TO THE FEAST THERE IS ROOM AT THE TABLE

('Vagabonds'; Chorus)

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION (Pauline Newman)

Bidding The Lord hears our prayer

Response **Thanks be to God**

Let us make our prayers in faith, for we know that the Spirit of God is at work in the world, willing that which is good for His creation.

Father, we pray for the world at a time when its future existence is matter of uncertainty: We pray for peace between nations and within countries; for governments to look to long-term benefits and not short-term expediencies; for the proper care, education and nurturing of the children of the world.

The Lord hears our prayer

Thanks be to God

Father, we pray for the suffering of the world; for those who have lost their faith in the love of You and of others: For those who go hungry, who thirst or who are homeless; for those who are ill, or wounded, or who are disabled; for the bereaved, and those who now watch over a dying loved one; for the victims of warfare, of crime or of persecution; for children, whose upbringing has left them emotionally scarred.

The Lord hears our prayer

Thanks be to God

Father, we pray for the people with whom we share our daily lives: For those whose faith in the goodness of life is being tested by illness, anxiety or sorrow; for those who feel they have little to live for; for those for whom their faith in You is a problem and not a joy; those wrestling with feeling of doubt, those outraged by the suffering of the world, those unable to believe that they are forgiven; for the people we know who are finding life difficult for any reason.

The Lord hears our prayer

Thanks be to God

Father, we pray for Your church throughout the world: For those who are persecuted because of the faith to which they hold; for ministers, preachers, leaders and teachers, that they may convey the truth of the Gospel by which we can live; for the whole church of Christ, that she may remain faithful to You, and for ourselves for the grace to live by faith alone.

The Lord hears our prayer

Thanks be to God

Heavenly Father, your love for us, which we see in Christ, is constant and never failing. Light up our lives with faith in you, that we, like the saints who have gone before us, may be loyal servants and shining witnesses to your Good News for all.

We pray in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who taught his disciples to pray, saying:

**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.**

Song **“Guide me O Thou Great Redeemer”** (Youtube e.g. https://youtu.be/aTT_gcfAVtY)

- 1 Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
 pilgrim through this barren land ;
 I am weak, but thou art mighty ;
 hold me with thy powerful hand :
 Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
 feed me now and evermore ;
 feed me now and evermore.

- 2 Open thou the crystal fountain
 whence the healing stream shall flow ;
 let the fiery, cloudy pillar
 lead me all my journey through :
 strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,
 be thou still my strength and shield ;
 be thou still my strength and shield.

- 3 When I tread the verge of Jordan
 bid my anxious fears subside ;
 death of death, and hell's destruction,
 land me safe on Canaan's side :
 songs of praises, songs of praises,
 I will ever give to thee ;
 I will ever give to thee.

William Williams (1717–1791)
translated by Peter Williams (1727–1796)

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Blessing

Now may the blessing of our Living God, father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you all and with all whom you love and pray for. Thanks be to God. **AMEN**

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