

4th February 2024 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship - Psalm 147: 5

Great and mighty is our Lord; his wisdom cannot be measured.

StF 56 – King of glory, King of peace

- 1) King of Glory, King of Peace,
I will love thee;
And that love may never cease,
I will move thee.
Thou hast granted my request,
Thou hast heard me;
Thou didst note my working breast,
Thou hast spared me.
- 2) Wherefore with my utmost art, I will sing thee,
And the cream of all my heart, I will bring thee.
Though my sins against me cried, thou didst clear me, -
And alone, when they replied, thou didst hear me.
- 3) Seven whole days, not one in seven,
I will praise thee;
In my heart, though not in heaven,
I can raise thee.
Small it is, in this poor sort
To enrol thee:
E'en eternity's too short
To extol thee.

George Herbert

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Everlasting God, creator of the ends of the earth, you do not faint or grow tired; you give power to the weary and strength to the powerless. You heal the broken-hearted and bind up their wounds. Your understanding is unsearchable; your steadfast love endures for ever. You are worthy of nobler worship than we can offer, yet you do not despise the lowly. How good it is to sing your praise; for you are great and gracious. To you we ascribe all honour and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Holy God, we confess with shame our share in the sin of humankind that crucified the Lord of glory. In him you have given us life and joy and you call us in Christ to be lights for the world, but we hide your light from others. Forgive all that is wrong in our lives and remake us in your image and likeness; for the sake of him who died and rose again for us, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

StF 365 – Jesu the joy of loving hearts

- 1) Jesu, the joy of loving hearts,
The fount of life, and light of all,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to heed your call.
- 2) Your truth unchanged has ever stood;
You save all those who on you call;
To them that seek you, you are good,
To them that find you, all in all.
- 3) We taste of you, the living bread,
And long to feast upon you still;
We drink of you, the fountain head,
Our thirsty souls from you will fill.
- 4) Our restless spirits long to be,
With you, where'er our lot is cast,
Glad when your gracious smile we see,
Blest when our faith can hold you fast.
- 5) O Jesus, ever with us stay;
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away;
Shed on the world your holy light.

Ray Palmer

Reading: Isaiah 40: 21-31

Do you not know? Were you not told long ago? Have you not heard how the world began? It was made by the one who sits on his throne above the earth and beyond the sky; the people below look as tiny as ants. He stretched out the sky like a curtain, like a tent in which to live. He brings down powerful rulers and reduces them to nothing. They are like young plants, just set out and barely rooted. When the Lord sends the wind, they dry up and blow away like straw.

To whom can the holy God be compared? Is there anyone else like him? Look up at the sky! Who created the stars you see? The one who leads them out like an army, he knows how many there are and calls each one by name! His power is so great – not one of them is missing! Israel, why then do you complain that the Lord doesn't know your troubles or care if you suffer injustice? Don't you know? Haven't you heard? The Lord is the everlasting God; he created all the world. He never grows tired or weary. No one understands his thoughts. He strengthens those who are weak and tired. Even those who are young grow weak; young people can fall exhausted. But those who trust in the Lord for help will find their strength renewed. They will rise on wings like eagles; they will run and not get weary; they will walk and not grow weak.

StF 388 – Let every Christian pray

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| 1) Let every Christian pray,
This day, and every day,
Come, Holy Spirit, come!
Was not the Church we love
Commissioned from above?
Come, Holy Spirit, come! | 3) Always the Spirit strove
To teach her how to love:
Come, Holy Spirit, come!
Age after age, anew,
She proved the gospel true:
Come, Holy Spirit, come! |
| 2) The Spirit brought to birth
The Church of Christ on earth
To seek and save the lost:
God never has withdrawn,
Since that tremendous dawn,
Those gifts of Pentecost. | 4) Only the Spirit's power
Can fit us for this hour:
Come, Holy Spirit, come!
Instruct, inspire, unite;
And make us see the light:
Come, Holy Spirit, come! |

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Reading: Mark 1: 29-39

Jesus and his disciples, including James and John, left the synagogue and went straight to the home of Simon and Andrew. Simon's mother-in-law was sick in bed with a fever, and as soon as Jesus arrived, he was told about her. He went to her, took her by the hand, and helped her up. The fever left her, and she began to wait on them.

After the sun had set and evening had come, people brought to Jesus all the sick and those who had demons. All the people of the town gathered in front of the house. Jesus healed many who were sick with all kinds of diseases and drove out many demons. He would not let the demons say anything, because they knew who he was.

Very early the next morning, long before daylight, Jesus got up and left the house. He went out of the town to a lonely place, where he prayed. But Simon and his companions went out searching for him, and when they found him, they said, "Everyone is looking for you." But Jesus answered, "We must go on to other villages round here. I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came."

So he travelled all over Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and driving out demons.

Sermon - “Everyone is looking for you”. (Mark 1: 37)

Jack made a seriously wrong decision. He wanted to buy a car and the choice came down to two on the Garage forecourt. One looked dull and a bit tired but seemed to run well. The other was brightly painted, with many accessories and fancy fittings. The engine roared through its sporty exhaust, and so Jack bought it. Sadly, it proved to be an expensive runner, with many unseen problems. But Jack was not the first to be seduced by spectacular appearance, a short-term joy when what he hoped for was long term reliability. Some things, some people, can be immediately impressive. We are almost blinded by them. But focusing on the spectacular ay well distort what is really going on.

And so it was with the ministry of Jesus. The first chapter of Mark’s gospel gives us “a day in the life of Jesus” as he starts his ministry. It begins with him coming into Galilee with his message, after being baptised and then tested in the desert. “The right time has come”, he says, “and the kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the Good News.”

He calls his first disciples and they follow him. The ministry is up and running. They come to Capernaum, and people were impressed. Then, in the synagogue, he healed a demented man – and that certainly got people talking. It was proving to be a pretty spectacular first day. But it wasn’t over. Simon and Andrew invite him home, where they find Simon’s mother-in-law confined to her bed with a fever. Jesus comes, helps her up and the fever has gone. Another wonderful healing.

Let’s pause here a moment. Mark says that Simon’s mother-in-law began to serve them. Just that. Don’t read gender stereotypes into the story by saying, as some do, that she immediately made a meal for them all. Mark simply says that she began to serve them, and he uses the same word that he uses later in the text when he quotes Jesus as saying, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve...” He only uses the word in the context of discipleship. Surely Mark is telling us something here about the proper response to Jesus. She gives service because she understands.

However, the news has spread and the whole city, it seems, has come to the door. Jesus cast out many demons, Mark tells us, commanding them to silence because they recognise him. This is a feature of mark’s gospel. It is not yet time to tell who Jesus really is. But it’s time for bed. Night comes to end an exhausting but spectacular day. Come the morning, and as people woke up they realised that Jesus had gone. Simon and the others looked for him but without success. Mark says that Jesus had gone early to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

Let’s pause again. Jesus had gone to a deserted place. Is he wrestling again in prayer with what it means for him to live and preach the good news of the kingdom? Has that spectacular first day raised all those problems again? Then Simon and the others burst into his prayers. They are eager to tell him that such is his fame, everyone is looking for him. We can almost imagine Simon saying, “Come on, they are longing for you, capitalise on your success, you are on a roll, pack them in, this could be the biggest thing in Galilee for years!” But no. It is not his task to make a spectacular name for himself, located at one great power base. So instead he says, “We must go on to the other villages round here. I have to preach in them also, because that is why I came.”

Jesus knows, and Mark is reminding us, that we can miss the point of it all, being blinded by the immediately impressive. If we reflect on that first day and hold together the undoubted healings and the command to silence, Simon’s mother-in-law’s response, Jesus wrestling with his calling and his fundamental task of preaching and living the gospel of the kingdom – then we realise that there is much more to Jesus than we have been told in the story so far. We must not be beguiled by the spectacular, as if that is all. There will always be those who want to make Jesus into what he always resisted becoming – a kind of quick-fix wonder-worker, with a fame and following while the power lasted. The world is not going to be saved by healing miracles. Our problems go much deeper than that.

Peter was impressed, and wanted more of the same. But Jesus knew that he must go on preaching the good news of the upside- down kingdom of God, where greatness is shown in service.

And more than that, Jesus must walk this way, this life of service himself – right up to the cross. And in Mark’s gospel it is only here that the truth of the matter is seen. Jesus is the saviour, not because he is a wonder-worker, nor a successful religious impresario, but because he is the work of God. He is the Son of God, not in spite of the fact that he serves and gives himself, but because he does just that.

People are still impressed by spectacular works. And thank God for healing miracles. But the significance of Jesus is more than that, as is the hope and salvation he brings. Let’s go back to the message he preached at the beginning. He said, “the right time has come and the kingdom of God is near! Turn away from your sins and believe the good news!” Right now, Jesus is saying, the kingdom is pressing down on you. This is God’s moment. It is full of challenge and choice. Believe it. The time is now!

Whenever the story of Jesus is told, God confronts us with this hope and challenge. And ever since the first Easter Day, the living Christ comes with his message and his call. And it takes us way beyond any personal longings for wellbeing, to a world where the will of God is done for all. Jesus keeps on coming with his strange works, but even more with self-sacrificing love. He calls us to his way and life, to pray - and live the prayer – Thy Kingdom come! And now is the time! Can you hear him? He is saying even here, follow me!

StF 595 – Lord we have come

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| 1) Lord, we have come at your own invitation,
Chosen by you, to be counted your friends;
Yours is the strength that sustains dedication,
Ours a commitment we know never ends. | 3) When, at your table, each time of returning,
Vows are renewed and our courage restored,
May we increasingly glory in learning
All that it means to accept you as Lord. |
| 2) Here, at your table, confirm our intention,
Give it your seal of forgiveness and grace;
Teach us to serve, without pride or pretension,
Lord, in your kingdom, whatever our place. | 4) So, in the world, where each duty assigned us
Gives us the chance to create or destroy,
Help us to make those decisions that bind us,
Lord, to yourself, in obedience and joy. |

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Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we wait, we watch, we long for you. Renew our powers, refresh our spirits, restore our well-being, for you give new strength to the faint and power to the powerless. May your Church be found working among those who lack resources or rights. May we seek to care for those who cannot care for themselves. We pray for the lowly and the humiliated, and for relief organisations. Lord be to them a tower of strength. Great are you, O Lord, **and mighty is your power.**

We give thanks for all who have cared for us in times of weakness, for those who have uplifted our spirits and given us new hope. We pray for our friends and loved ones, especially any who are finding life difficult at the time. We pray for any in our community that may feel neglected or rejected. Lord, be to them a tower of strength.

Great are you, O Lord, **and mighty is your power.**

We pray for all who are in weakness of body, mind or spirit, all who have come to the end of their own resources. We remember all who are losing their mobility or agility, those who are losing their memories, and all who have lost their grip on reality; for those who no longer trust in anyone and those who doubt the love of God; for all who are caring for loved ones in illness. Lord, be to them a tower of strength.

Great are you, O Lord, **and mighty is your power.**

We give thanks that Christ is our healer and our redeemer; he will not allow us to be lost. We pray for loved ones departed who are renewed and refreshed in the love and light of God. Lord, be to them a tower of strength.

Great are you, O Lord, **and mighty is your power.**

We ask these things in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and saviour, who told us, when we pray, to say:

The Lord's Prayer

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 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.**

StF 255 – The kingdom of God

- 1) The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.
- 2) The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
The prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened in place of despair.
- 3) The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ
to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.
- 4) God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory to God all in all!

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Blessing

God, the Holy and Strong One, who gives power to the powerless, who restores the weary, and gives new life to his people, give you his peace; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you this day, and always. **Amen.**