

## A service for 28<sup>th</sup> January, 2024 (StF)

### Call to Worship: Psalm 111 verses 7 to 10

The works of the hands of the Lord are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy. They are steadfast for ever and ever, done in faithfulness and uprightness. He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever—holy and awesome is his name.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise. Amen.

*We shall sing a hymn written by David Evans in 1985, which was his reaction to some contemporary worship songs which he felt were over-familiar to the Lord. It is also a hymn to use if your church has a number of over-excited children present! We shall sing hymn number 20, “Be still, for the presence of the Lord.”*

**1. Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here;**

**Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear.**

**In Him no sin is found, we stand on holy ground;**

**Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.**

**2. Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;**

**He burns with holy fire, with splendour He is crowned.**

**How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light;**

**Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.**

**3. Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;**

**He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister His grace.**

**No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from Him;**

**Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place. © David J. Evans**

### ***Let us pray.***

Eternal Word who created the universe and gave life to everything that lives on this world, you revealed yourself to us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amazing God, it was your intention that Jesus should experience our lives and know us intimately, for he came as Immanuel – God with us and among us – not remote from us. Heavenly Father, you gave him to the world even though you knew that he would suffer and die to save us from the powers of sin and death. Almighty God, accept our praise and adoration for all that you have been, are and shall be and for your boundless, everlasting love. Free us from anxiety and distractions, so are free to sing your praise joyfully, pray to you trustingly and listen to your holy word attentively. Amen.

***In our prayer of confession, when I say ‘Lord, in your mercy’, please respond with ‘Hear our prayer. Let us pray once more.***

Thank you, Lord, for all the good things with which you have blessed us, for people who have brought light, joy, love and guidance to our lives and for everything that has brought us happiness and fulfilment. We thank you for this beautiful world and your enduring love, but most of all, thank you for continuing to love us even when we know we are often faithless, loveless and disobedient.

Merciful God, we confess we don't live as you want us to, for we know we do not always love and serve you wholeheartedly. We certainly do not always love our neighbours as we love ourselves and, although we often try to excuse our faithlessness and disobedience, we know how deeply we grieve you and add to the world's brokenness. Forgive us, Lord and help us change our ways.

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

Forgive us Lord for being slow to learn from Christ, reluctant to follow him, and afraid to answer our calling, for the formality and selfishness of our prayers, our neglect of fellowship and the means of grace and our hesitating witness for Christ:

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

Lord, forgive us for our failure to be good stewards of your creation, for tolerating injustice, of being quick to judge others and our lack of generosity with the gifts you have blessed us:

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

Loving heavenly Father, we believe you hear and answer our prayers, and, in your grace you proclaim our sins forgiven and you call us to follow you. May we do so in the power of the Holy Spirit, so we may serve you and our neighbours with joyful, faithful hearts in the name of Christ the One true Light of the world. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer that Jesus taught us.***

**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.**

*In 1740, Charles Wesley heard a Moravian friend, Peter Bohler, say, 'If I had a thousand tongues I would praise Jesus with them all.' The result was the hymn which we are going to sing. Number 364, 'O for a thousand tongues to sing'*

**1. O for a thousand tongues to sing**

**My great Redeemer's praise,  
The glories of my God and King,  
The triumphs of his grace.**

**2. My gracious Master and my God,  
Assist me to proclaim,  
To spread through all the earth abroad  
The honours of your name.**

**3. Jesus – the name that charms our fears,  
That bids our sorrows cease;  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'Tis life, and health, and peace.**

**4. He breaks the power of cancelled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean,  
His blood availed for me.**

**5. He speaks; and, listening to his voice,  
New life the dead receive;  
The mournful, broken hearts rejoice;  
The humble poor believe.**

**6. See all your sins on Jesus laid:  
The Lamb of God was slain;  
His soul was once an offering made  
That all may heaven gain.**

**7. In Christ, our Head, you then shall know,  
Shall feel, your sins forgiven,**

**Anticipate your heaven below,  
And own that love is heaven.**

© Charles Wesley {1707 – 1788}

***In our prayers of intercession when I say, ‘Your kingdom come’, your response is ‘Your will be done’. Let us pray.***

Merciful and Loving God, we celebrate and give thanks for the beautiful planet upon which we live, but we are not blinded to its fragility and brokenness. We are gravely aware of the huge number of people who suffer as a result of our inability to love our neighbours as we love ourselves, so we turn to you in prayer, asking you to bring healing and wholeness, for although so many situations lie beyond our power, to you all things are possible. Certainly, Lord, we want to seek the well-being of people whose lives touch ours, so we ask you to grant us the courage, faith, steadfastness and compassion we need to bring healing rather than hurt to our neighbours.

Your kingdom come: **Your will be done.**

Loving God, we pray for our community: may we answer your call to serve you through the mission of our churches, or by supporting the work done by food banks, street pastors, the Salvation Army and any organization that serves the poor and vulnerable in our society, or by supporting Christian Aid, All We Can and other relief organizations that address the grievous poverty in the Developing World.

We pray for our church, the churches in our area and for the World Church. Guide us how best to serve our communities and support the poor and disfranchised. Help us to find new ways, to not only preach Good News but to live it day by day; to be a light of hope in a self-centred, sin-darkened world.

Your kingdom come: **Your will be done**

Heavenly Father, we pray that the leaders of the world learn to seek the ways of mercy and justice through which peace may be established, to negotiate and compromise instead of using force against opponents. We pray that the wars in Ukraine and Palestine will soon be ended and, indeed that other conflicts will be resolved. Lord, remember in your compassion, all victims of warfare, terrorism and oppression and grant them both healing in body, mind and spirit and the help they need to rebuild their lives in hope. Guide our leaders and us with your light to the true wisdom of justice and peace, of freedom and respect for every human life.

Your kingdom come: **Your will be done.**

Lord of power and might, guide those who govern us and their advisors that they may adopt policies that will bring us safely through these challenging times. Give them the courage and wisdom, so they do what is right, whether or not it is popular, to set aside self-interest for the wellbeing of all.

Lord, we ask your blessing upon the NHS as it faces the demands of winter and industrial disputes. Provide the resources and leadership it needs to keep us safe and healthy. We pray for care-workers in homes and the community, that they, too, can fulfil their duties and find satisfaction as they do so.

Your kingdom come: **Your will be done.**

Heavenly Father, hear our prayer for people who are sick in body, mind or spirit, for all who are suffering long-term effects of coronavirus and those who are living with a dementia, their families, friends and carers. May they receive the care and support they need and may they experience your presence in their need, so they find healing, peace of mind, renewed strength and comfort.

We pray for everybody who face unemployment, addictions, broken relationships, loneliness and especially bereavement. Help us to be sensitive to the needs of our neighbours, so we can offer friendship and practical support to them. In a time of

silence, we pray for everyone we know who needs your help.....  
Faithful Lord, hold them in the warmth of your love, so they experience your healing,  
comfort, hope and peace.

Your kingdom come: **Your will be done.**

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us, our families and our friends. Fill us with the love  
and grace of Christ Jesus, so that our thoughts, words and deeds offer peace, light and  
love to both friends and strangers and bring glory to your holy name. Amen.

**The Old Testament reading is Deuteronomy chapter 18 verses 15 to 20**

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own  
brothers. You must listen to him. For this is what you asked of the LORD your God at  
Horeb on the day of the assembly when you said,  
“Let us not hear the voice of the LORD our God nor see this great fire anymore, or we  
will die.”

The LORD said to me:

“What they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their  
brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command  
him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself  
will call him to account. But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I  
have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods,  
must be put to death.” Amen.

**Our Gospel reading is Mark chapter 1 verses 21 to 28**

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue  
and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them  
as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their  
synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out,

“What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know  
who you are—the Holy One of God!”

“Be quiet!” said Jesus sternly. “Come out of him!” The evil spirit shook the man violently  
and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each  
other,

“What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits  
and they obey him.” News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Amen.

*We continue with a hymn from the Iona Community which was co-written by  
John Bell and Graham Maule. Usually, their hymns are set to Scots folk tunes,  
but this is set to a French Carol. We shall sing 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 (1958 - 2019)

**Sermon: "What is this? A new teaching – and with authority!" Mark 1:27**

Mark's gospel is a voyage of discovery for its readers, because until chapter eight Jesus did not refer to himself as the Messiah; nor would he acknowledge such a title from those who attributed the name to him. The first half of the gospel is called "The Messianic Secret" by many commentators, for readers share the amazement and confusion of the disciples as they journeyed with the Lord, witnessing healings and miracles, listening to his teaching and his extraordinary outreach to the marginalised, the ceremonially unclean and Gentiles. Like the best authors, Mark doesn't bludgeon us with, "**This is Jesus, the Son of God and our Messiah**"; instead, he lets us work out for ourselves the nature of Christ Jesus, like the disciples, by presenting us with evidence that led Simon Peter to confess, "**You are the Christ.**" We then journey through Christ's rejection, passion, death and resurrection – and in the original text it ends with the women fleeing from the empty tomb, too afraid to speak about what they had seen and been told. Again, Mark presents us with the evidence and leaves us to draw our own conclusions about the nature and person of Jesus of Nazareth.

In our text from Deuteronomy, the Israelites had appealed at Horeb that God should no longer speak to them directly, because they feared his presence would overwhelm and destroy them. Consequently, Moses promised them that God would raise a prophet, who would act as his intercessor, speaking for him to the Israelites, guiding them to follow his precepts. Moses bade the Israelites to obey the prophet, or to face the consequences. The Hebrew Bible shows how God indeed fulfilled his promise with prophets who were mighty in both words and deeds: Elijah fed the widow of Zarephath and her son throughout a drought, even though she only possessed a handful of flour and a small amount of oil; Elijah and Elisha each raised a boy from the dead; Elisha healed Naaman of a severe skin disease – possibly leprosy. However, perhaps the prophet most in keeping with our reading was Micaiah, who contradicted the prophet Zedekiah, son of Kenaanah, after he predicted a victory for King Ahab at Ramoth Gilead. The furious Zedekiah struck and abused Micaiah, after which Micaiah was imprisoned by King Ahab on very basic rations for making his unfavourable prophecy. However, Micaiah was God’s mouthpiece, so both King Ahab and Zedekiah perished in the battle.

Time and time again, God provided prophets, only for the people to reject and ignore them, as a result of which the Northern kingdom fell in 721 BC, whilst Judea was conquered by the Babylonians, Jerusalem was destroyed, its people led into years of exile and the temple plundered and razed to the ground in 687BC. For more than five hundred years of suffering and strife, Jews looked for God’s anointed, the Messiah, and Mark’s gospel points to Jesus as the Messiah, demonstrating how Jesus not only performed miraculous healings and feedings, but had power over both evil and the natural elements, which made him greater than the greatest of the prophets. It also highlighted how Jesus revealed God’s nature and purpose in words and deeds.

Today’s passage from Mark related how, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was invited to preach by the ruler of the synagogue at Capernaum. Mark did not say what text Jesus used, but he recorded that he amazed his listeners because **‘he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law.’** In other words, Jesus interpreted the scriptures in his own right, rather than trying to declare his authority by quoting from the Talmud – a book of legal code and religious customs founded upon rabbinic teachings over many centuries – from the Midrash, which fills in gaps in Bible stories, or explains them. Jesus did not borrow others’ words, but used his own in a lively, challenging way. Jesus’ preaching was not dull quibbling about points from Torah; it was inspiring, unconventional and riveting – nobody would nod off in Christ’s sermons!

However, at this point, a man possessed by an evil spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” When I was a MHA Chaplain, I became used to interruptions when I led worship at Waterside House, which is a dementia care home, but nevertheless, I would be as perplexed as any other preacher if somebody from a congregation in church interrupted my sermon with a challenge like the disturbed man at Capernaum. However, Jesus recognized three significances of the interruption. The man had previously worshipped at the synagogue without his inner evil being challenged by the preaching of the Scribes and Pharisees, yet Jesus’ words shook his very soul. The evil within the man recognized that Jesus had come to break his power, for it knew Christ’s identity, though no one else there did. Therefore, the power of evil tried to trap Jesus by declaring him ‘the Holy One of God’ – had Jesus acknowledged the title as his, he would have been charged with blasphemy. Instead, Christ exclaimed,

**“Phimotheti!”**, sometimes translated as “Be quiet”, or “Hold your peace”, but is really a blunter, “Shut up!” for **“phimos”** means to muzzle, so it was a command, not a request. When Jesus ordered the evil spirit to leave the man, it convulsed him and left him prostrate, but otherwise unharmed.

It is hardly surprising that the congregation at the synagogue was filled with amazement and asked one another, “What is this? A new teaching – and with authority!” After all, his teaching was matched by his control over the forces of evil. News of Jesus spread throughout Galilee and gained the attention of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, which is why Scribes and Pharisees began to seek out, examine and oppose our Lord, because his teaching challenged the authority of the established order. Jesus didn’t indulge in legalistic quibbling over Torah, he differentiated between law and customs and he called listeners to repent, which means more than saying “Sorry”. Christ would have used the Hebrew, “Shub”, which means “return to God”, to turn one hundred and eighty degrees from the path towards sin to the straight and narrow path of righteousness. Repentance means changing our hearts and lifestyles from self-interest to selfless love, love that took Christ to Calvary to redeem sinners like us.

Discipleship is not guaranteed to be easy, for we face opposition from an increasingly secular society which often blames God for the woes of the world. Nonetheless, Jesus calls us to serve him wholeheartedly, defending kingdom values without being judgmental, caring for people less fortunate than ourselves and doing so as joyfully as possible, for if others can see something special about the way we speak and act, their curiosity will be aroused and they, too, may well ask, **“What is this?”** They will be open to hear the gospel message and turn to Christ Jesus in faith and love. Amen.

*Our final hymn was written and composed by Jacqueline Jones, a contemporary Christian singer-songwriter, originally from South Africa, but who now is a vicar’s wife in Christchurch, New Zealand! Hymn number 662, ‘Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?’*

**1. Have you heard God’s voice; has your heart been stirred?**

**Are you still prepared to follow?**

**Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
Though the way be rough and narrow? *Chorus:*  
*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
And embrace the pain and sorrow?***

***Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
The disciples of tomorrow?***

**2. Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
When the multitudes are silent?**

**Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
When the crowds are turning violent? *Chorus:***

**3. In your city streets will you be God’s heart?  
Will you listen to the voiceless?**

**Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,  
Will you share your faith with the faithless? *Chorus:***

**4. Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
And believe it could be different?**

**Will you share your views using words of grace?**

**Will you leave a thoughtful imprint? *Chorus:***

*We will walk the path that will cost us much*

*And embrace the pain and sorrow.*

*We will trust in One who entrusts to us*

*The disciples of tomorrow.*

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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 now and for evermore. Amen.