

18th April 2021 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship Psalm 92:1-2

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing psalms to your name, Most High, to declare your love in the morning and your faithfulness every night.

StF 331 King of Kings, Majesty

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1) King of Kings, majesty.
God of heaven living in me,
Gentle Saviour, closest friend,
Strong deliverer, beginning and end,
All within me falls at Your throne. | 2) Earth and heaven worship You,
Love eternal, faithful and true,
Who bought the nations, ransomed souls,
Brought this sinner near to Your throne;
All within me cries out in praise. |
|---|---|

Ch) *Your majesty, I can but bow.
I lay my all before You now.
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your majesty.*

Jarrold Cooper © 1996 Sovereign Lifestyle Music Ltd CCL No. 515642

Prayer of Adoration & Confession

Glory is due to you, O Lord, for you are a promise-keeping God. From ages past you spoke through the prophets and told of a Saviour who would come at the appointed time. This was fulfilled in your Son, Jesus Christ. In him you accompanied the disciples and were faithful to them. You lived on earth and showed us what love means. You forgave, healed, and taught. You reached out to the outsider and those from whom others averted their gaze. You gave your life in self-sacrifice and received it back again through the miracle of resurrection.

We stand in awe of your love for us, and your power made manifest. Accept our praise, worship, and adoration. We dedicate ourselves to you and ask that in thought, word, and deed we would live to your praise and glory. **Amen.**

You have given us in your Son a wonderful example of faith and trustworthiness. The Lord Jesus showed us how to rely on our heavenly Father's words and guidance and presence, and to minister to others in need.

When we fail to stand on your promises: Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

When we allow disappointment to turn into disillusionment and despair: Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

When we are so wrapped up in ourselves that we fail to care for others: Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

When we turn aside from that which you have called us to be and to do: Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

The Lord hears our prayers and forgives all our sins.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Introduction to the reading from Luke 24:

Last year I preached on the passage about the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: As the two people were on their journey, they found themselves accompanied by a third person, and they talked with him about the things that had just happened in Jerusalem, that Jesus of Nazareth had been handed over to the authorities and sentenced to death, but that there were now rumours that he was alive. When the stranger broke bread and offered it to them, they recognised that it was Jesus himself. He then disappeared from their sight.

Our Gospel reading describes what happened next and begins with those two disciples going back to Jerusalem

Reading: Luke24:33-48

³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Jesus Appears to the Disciples

³⁶ While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

³⁷ They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. ³⁸ He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

⁴⁰ When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. ⁴¹ And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, "Do you have anything here to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of broiled fish, ⁴³ and he took it and ate it in their presence.

⁴⁴ He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."

⁴⁵ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. ⁴⁶ He told them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things.

StF 311 The day of Resurrection

1) The day of resurrection,
Earth, tell it out abroad!
The passover of gladness,
The passover of God!
From death to life eternal,
From earth unto the sky,
Our Christ has brought us over
With hymns of victory.

2) Our hearts be pure from evil,
That we may see aright
The Lord in rays eternal
Of resurrection light;
And, listening to his accents,
May hear, so calm and plain,
His own 'All hail!' and, hearing,
May raise the victor strain.

3)

Now let the heavens be joyful,
Let earth her song begin,
The round world keep high triumph,
And all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen
Their notes of gladness blend,
For Christ the Lord is risen,
Our joy that has no end.

St John of Damascus translated by John Mason Neale CCL No. 515642

Reading: Isaiah 55:6-12

6 Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

8 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,"
declares the Lord.

9 "As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 As the rain and the snow
come down from heaven,
and do not return to it
without watering the earth
and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,

11 so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire
and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

12 You will go out in joy
and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills
will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.

Reflection

Jesus appeared in the midst of the disciples after his resurrection, but they had trouble believing that it really was him. Some versions of the Bible say that they thought it was too good to be true.

Do you ever find yourself saying that something is too good to be true? Let us examine what lies behind this. We might say it of some kind of transaction that seems too generous to be anything other than some kind of confidence trick. Years ago, I used to occasionally receive emails purporting to be from some African prince or princess who was asking for my help in getting vast sums of money to a relative in the UK, for which I would apparently be rewarded handsomely for my collaboration. This usually resulted in some amusement on my part followed by use of the delete button. There are times when a healthy scepticism is called for.

Sometimes, though, our scepticism has a more troublesome outcome. Many people have problems believing that good things will happen to them. A negative mind-set results. There may be legitimate reasons behind this. Perhaps the person has had a number of difficult experiences in life and has learnt to have low expectations. Maybe you have been let down time and time again, perhaps taken advantage of by others or mistreated by them. You have learnt to have low expectations of life, thinking that if you do not expect good things then you will not be disappointed if they do not happen. It is an attempt at self-protection yet can become self-fulfilling. Someone with such an attitude will not attempt great things because of fear of failure or will not trust others for fear of being hurt, again! It is using faith in a negative way. It even prevents God from blessing us as much as he wants to, because we are not receptive to his goodness. It can lead to cynicism, which can be very damaging. I am all for being realistic, but there is nothing realistic about carrying negative expectations around. God offers us something far, far better, and that IS for real!

The Bible tells us of a God who loves us and wills good things for our lives. It tells us (as in 1 Corinthians 2:9) of amazing things that are beyond our imagination, which God has prepared for those who love him. Sometimes the descriptions in the Bible of good things prepared for us seem out of this world, as if the writer is finding words inadequate to express the glory of it all. Read the first few chapters of Ephesians and you will see what I mean. Do not get me wrong though; the Bible is a very honest book and does not gloss over the fact that difficult things happen to people. It does not pretend that life is always rosy. Jesus does not promise an easy life even to those who follow him most closely. He says that in this world we will have trouble, BUT that he has conquered the world! The Bible is very open about the suffering and death of our Lord and gives us a sense of the bewilderment and confusion of the disciples afterwards yet leaves us in no doubt that our God is a God of resurrection and specialises in turning apparent defeat into victory.

Jesus goes on to describe how the things that had happened to him were foretold in the scriptures many years before, in the law of Moses and the prophets and psalms. He opened their minds to understand these teachings. They would have already known what these writings said but didn't up to that point have the understanding to apply them to what had happened. They had not so far made the link between the events that they had witnessed and the teachings of scripture that they already knew.

We too need to apply the scriptures to our lives and to the events in the world, and this cannot be done without the illumination that the Lord himself gives us. There are scriptures about Jesus in both testaments that he has not yet fulfilled. The outworking of them is still to come. There are prophecies that tell us that Jesus will return again, this time in power and glory, to reign from Jerusalem. There are also scriptures that give us the hope of a restored creation. In studying them we can make sense of the events going on in the world, and we can learn not to be afraid of them but to have trust in God's purpose and to live with confidence.

Isaiah reminds us that God's ways and thoughts are different from ours, and that his word is always fulfilled. It will succeed in the task for which it was sent. It is absolutely reliable!

There are plenty of other good reasons to study the scriptures, not least that (as the apostle Paul tells Timothy) they are useful for teaching us how to live right.

The scriptures re-program our minds and transform our thoughts into all that God wants them to be, so that we can live with strength and joy and understand our own purpose in life. Over time they gently divest us of the "too good to be true" mentality and a pattern of low expectations that masquerades as self-protection and realism but can all too easily prevent us moving forward. Scripture teaches us that the truth is very different. We serve a God who transforms any situation. He turns death into resurrection, despair into hope, and there are things beyond our imagining, all prepared by God for those who love him.

Our song echoes the words of Isaiah from our second reading:

StF 487 You shall go out with joy

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
And the mountains and the hills shall break
forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
And the trees of the field shall clap,
shall clap their hands,

And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
And you'll go out with joy.

Stuart Dauermann & Steffi Geiser Rubin © 1975 Lillenas Publishing Company

CCL No. 515642

Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Lord our God, you freely give life and forgiveness to all who accept it. You promise us good things that are so wonderful that we can barely begin to imagine them. We will be in your presence forever and we give you our thanks and praise. **Amen.**

Hear our prayers for the World, the Church, and each other.

We pray for our world and for all nations. May all governments and authorities work together to bring the world to a place of peace and prosperity for all. We pray for our natural environment, that the peoples of the world would exercise good stewardship in accordance with your plan from the creation of the world. We pray for health and freedom from illness for all peoples. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the nation, in particular the Queen and the Royal family in their time of loss. For our Government we ask wisdom in dealing with the issues that we face. We pray for an end to the

coronavirus, that the rollout of vaccines in our land and worldwide would help to achieve this. May the wealthy nations have the generosity to share the vaccines with those in poorer parts of the world. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

For your Church worldwide and in our nation, we pray for love, unity, and boldness to proclaim your glorious Good News. We pray for your Holy Spirit to work in all people and turn hearts to you, that there may be a revival of faith and dedication to you in our world and in our land. We ask that you bless our churches and Circuit, that we may hear your voice directing us in the way forward. Guide our District, Connexion, the URC Synod, and leaders of all branches of your Church family. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves and those known to us who need your help. Grant healing to the sick, rest to the dying, peace to the troubled, comfort to the bereaved, wisdom to those facing difficult circumstances or decisions, and blessing and the knowledge of your presence to. Lord, in your mercy **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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 148 Come, let us with our Lord arise

- 1) Come, let us with our Lord arise,
Our Lord, who made both earth and skies:
Who died to save the world he made,
And rose triumphant from the dead;
He rose, the Prince of life and peace,
And stamped the day for ever his.
- 2) This is the day the Lord has made,
That all may see his love displayed,
May feel his resurrection's power,
And rise again, to fall no more,
In perfect righteousness renewed,
And filled with all the life of God.
- 3) Then let us render him his own,
With solemn prayer approach his throne,
With meekness hear the gospel word,
With thanks his dying love record,
Our joyful hearts and voices raise,
And fill his courts with songs of praise.
- 4) Honour and praise to Jesus pay
Throughout his consecrated day;
Be all in Jesus' praise employed,
Nor leave a single moment void;
With utmost care the time improve,
And only breathe his praise and love.

Charles Wesley CCL No. 515642

Blessing

May the God of grace and wonder fill our hearts with faith and expectancy as we take his great and precious promises with us into our daily lives, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be amongst us and remain with us now and for ever. **Amen.**