

Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit

At Home Service for 24th January 2021

This is the day that the Lord has made – We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Singing the Faith 503 (with additional verse)

1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heav'n, to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art.
Visit us with thy salvation;
enter ev'ry trembling heart.

2 Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
into ev'ry troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit,
let us find the promised rest.
Take away the love of sinning;
Alpha and Omega be.
End of faith, as its beginning,
set our hearts at liberty.

3 Come, Almighty, to deliver,
let us all thy life receive.
Suddenly return, and never,
nevermore they temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

4 Finish, then, thy new creation;
true and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation
perfectly restored in thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav'n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

The Kingdom Glimpsed – A Prayer (*Liz Kam*)

Mysterious God,
Like a child on a balmy summers' day, watching a butterfly flit from fragrant flower to flower,
I glimpse your kingdom.
Wrought through transformation, writhing pupa, to Grace-full sprite.
It flits away.

Or, as in the oppressive darkness of a thunderstorm at night, when lightening cleaves the sky,
And all is revealed. Sharp, intense –
That which was there all along –
A distant town, a beautiful vision, then darkness returns and it disappears once more.

'Follow me' you say, your hand outstretched in invitation.

It's difficult to catch a butterfly, disruptive to resettle in another place,
But thank you that I can take your hand once more
And try again.
Amen.

[Taken from 'Conversations – The URC Prayer Handbook 2021]

Psalm 62:5-12 (New Revised Standard Version)

For God alone my soul waits in silence,
for my hope is from him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.
On God rests my deliverance and my honour;
my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

Trust in him at all times, O people;
pour out your heart before him;
God is a refuge for us.
Those of low estate are but a breath,
those of high estate are a delusion;

in the balances they go up;
they are together lighter than a breath.
Put no confidence in extortion,
and set no vain hopes on robbery;
if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

Once God has spoken;
twice have I heard this:
that power belongs to God,
and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord.
For you repay to all
according to their work.

Mark 1:14-20

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

"Follow Me" – A hymn by Ray Repp

Follow me, to the sea,
Where I first called your name.
We didn't know each other so,
But I called and you came.

Remember we promised our love wouldn't end,
We'd gather all people and love them as friends.
My spirit will be with you to light up your way,
I love you, what more can I say.

Even when you have doubt or have fear,
Remember I love you and know I am near.

I'd be willing to give up my life once again,
To show you that I am your friend.

So follow me, to the sea,
Where I first called your name.
We didn't know each other so,
But I called and you came.

Remember we promised our love wouldn't end,
We'd gather all people and love them as friends.
My spirit will be with you to light up your way,
I love you, what more can I say.

Reflection

Isn't it great when someone speaks with authority. When that happens, everyone feels more secure and relaxed. As long as we agree with what's being said. The clarity and strength of a good public speaker goes a long way to getting a point across. Most of us will have been at weddings when the unsure mumblings of the bride's father/mother are followed by the confident joy of the best man/woman; or visa versa. Much to the relief of a frustrated gathering of friends and family. In this Gospel story we can feel the relief (and astonishment) of those gathered at the Synagogue.

At last! Someone who seems to know what they're talking about. Someone with authority rather than the vague or over detailed mumblings of the scribes.

But what was Jesus saying? In detail, we don't know; but the basics are covered by the beginning of this passage. Jesus comes to Galilee proclaiming the good news of God, the kingdom is at hand and people are invited to rethink their relationship with God and believe they are part of it. For more detail we can read on into Mark's Gospel where Jesus speaks, always in stories, about the Kingdom. Given what Mark has already said, Jesus teaching is in line with the proclamations of John the Baptist. But since he has been arrested Jesus now steps forward to continue his work.

Simon, Andrew, James and John have heard Jesus authoritative teaching and jumped on board. Or rather jumped off board to get onboard... you take my meaning. This Good News changes lives: and in changing lives has the potential to change the world. This is something that those early disciples soon learn: Jesus' teaching is revolutionary. People must repent, turn around, change the way they think to grasp what God is doing. And what God is doing is what God has always done. Love. The change is for humanity to make. To believe that this good news is for them. God's love is for them. God's rule of peace, joy, faith, hope and love is not only promised to them but is also a reality in the here and now. It is at hand, graspable, ours for the taking.

Here is something that the scribes have not made clear and it unfolds as Jesus ministry develops. God's kingdom is not to be won. It is not to be gained by keeping rules, behaving properly according to tradition. The love of God does not come to us because we've ticked all the religious boxes, no. The kingdom is ours because God wants us to be part of it. It's that simple. We just need to pick it up and run with it. As Simon, Andrew, James and John do.

These four are so convinced of the nearness of God's Kingdom that they leave all they have known to walk with Jesus and share his life. Theirs is an act of faith. As the story progresses it becomes clear that they don't fully understand what they have committed themselves to. They struggle with Jesus teaching, his lifestyle and his commitment. But they learn, slowly. Throughout the Gospels they are inadequate and incomplete disciples. Yet they have caught a vision of a better way. A higher way. God's kingdom becoming a reality, God's love guiding all people. They are willing to take the risk and follow that vision, to find out more about Jesus, about the Kingdom and about love.

Today, the proclamation is still the same: 'The time is now, the kingdom of God is in your reach, rethink and have faith in the good news'. Are you ready to leave your boat? Not because you fully understand it but because you need to know more, to live more, to love more...

Prayer from a broken world (North West Baptist Association)

Ever present God,
We acknowledge that we come to you in a world of bewilderment and confusion.
Where solutions to our plight seem to generate as much harm as they seek to overcome.
Uncertainty, blame and conflicting expectations are rife,
And many are wearied by their relentless narrative.

We come as those who are affected by these realities no less than anyone else;
Those whose lives and health, whose futures and livelihoods are threatened.
We come, not knowing what kind of world will eventually emerge
Or when our circumstances might change.

We come with narratives of fear and recrimination echoing in our ears;
We come with no more certainty than anyone else about how our plight should be addressed.

But we come to you;
Our faithful and unchanging God,
Who does not promise us escape from our world,
But calls us to seek your face and discover your presence at it's very heart.

We come to a God who is above all and over all,
Yet can also be at the very centre of every human circumstance;
A God who is no less a companion
When we are isolated and locked down,
Than when we are free to pursue our lives as we choose.

So grant us the patience we need to endure these present realities;
The humility to listen for your voice in the midst of our struggles;
The hope of knowing that our future in eternity remains secure;
The grace to endure;
And the attitude of heart to still place the needs of others above our own.

Whatever these circumstances have taken from us,
Your loving presence will always be ours to know,
And the call to be heralds of your coming kingdom remains our life's purpose.

So through our words and our deeds, our attitudes and our priorities,
Help us to be light amidst the darkness.

Amen.

Singing the Faith 407

Hear the call of the Kingdom
Lift your eyes to the King
Let His song rise within you
As a fragrant offering
Of how God rich in mercy
Came in Christ to redeem
All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To be children of light
With the mercy of heaven
The humility of Christ
Walking justly before Him
Loving all that is right
That the life of Christ may shine through us

King of Heaven we will answer the call
We will follow bringing hope to the world
Filled with passion filled with power to proclaim
Salvation in Jesus' name

Hear the call of the Kingdom
To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

Songwriters: Keith Getty / Stuart Townend / Kristyn Getty
Hear The Call Of The Kingdom lyrics © Thank You Music Ltd.

Blessing

May you hear the Good News of God.
May you believe the call of his Word.
May you grasp his kingdom as your turn to his love.
And may the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
Be with you now and always.
Amen.