



Worship for Sunday  
22nd August  
With the Revd  
Naomi Cooke

## Welcome to Worship and Lighting the Candle

A very warm welcome to worship on behalf of the Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit. Today we are thinking about our call to journey with Christ into an unknown future.

Christ is our light. His Spirit is with us.

## Hymn STF 518 Father hear the prayer we offer

- 1 Father, hear the prayer we offer :  
not for ease that prayer shall be,  
but for strength that we may ever  
live our lives courageously.
- 2 Not for ever in green pastures  
do we ask our way to be ;  
but the steep and rugged pathway  
may we tread rejoicingly.
- 3 Not for ever by still waters  
would we idly rest and stay ;  
but would strike the living fountains  
from the rocks along our way.
- 4 Be our strength in hours of weakness,  
in our wanderings be our guide ;  
through endeavour, failure, danger,  
Father, be there at our side.

Love Maria Willis (1824–1908) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith*  
Electronic Words Edition, number 518

## Gathering Prayers

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful people, and kindle in us the fire of your love; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

*The response to the bidding Lord have mercy – is **Christ have mercy.** Friends, let us keep silence together.*  
*Silence*

God the Maker forgives us in Christ and heals us by the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness and confess our sins to God our redeemer. *Silence*

When we have forgotten that you are the Creator of all, the Beginning of everything:  
Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

When we have not recognised you in our sisters and brothers in Jesus;  
when we forget that we are Christ's body: Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

When we have forgotten that you live inside us, that we are home to the Holy Spirit:  
Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

When we have forgotten that Love is the most important thing in the world,  
and that you show us the wonder of Love as Creator, as Son and as Spirit.  
Lord, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

## **Declaration of Forgiveness**

There is now no condemnation for those who live in union with Christ Jesus; for the law of the Spirit of life has set us free from the law of sin and death.

**This is our salvation, this is our forgiveness. Let us live by this faith. Amen**

**Reading: Hebrews 11 v 1, 8-16, 12 v 1-2** Listen for the word of God!

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore, from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, ‘as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.’

All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

## **Reflection**

My recent Sabbatical involved lots of trips. I went to Manchester, to West Yorkshire, to the Midlands, Norfolk, Sussex and Devon to name but a few. Re-engaging with friends not seen in years. Wonderful times. After staying for a while in each place, I returned home.

Following a trip, you always come back. A trip is not a journey, though the two are often confused. A journey is intentional, purposeful, and has some destination in view. The destination itself may not be a place, or may not be clear, but one sets out on a journey in order to ultimately cease journeying and to arrive, and likely to stay. On a trip you always come back. On a journey you may not.

We have all experienced differences in our journeys of faith to get to this point. And in recent times, our faith has been tested as we have and continue to live through turbulent times when things will never be as they were, and we do not yet know what will transpire. And this makes life difficult for us, uncomfortable, fractious...we do not always agree with each other, which is natural, and we respond with fear, or aggression, or timidity. So I remind myself and each one of us to see with the eyes of Christ and in each encounter on the journey, to speak and act as if to Christ himself.

The men and women for whom Hebrews was written were also facing an uncertain future. The writer wanted to encourage them to be faithful to Christ at a time when discipleship would be costly, when the future looked bleak by all accounts, but was ultimately unknown. They are reminded that through Christ they possess the blessings of the new covenant, made real in bread and wine. They are reminded that they are the heirs to the *utterly reliable promise of God*. But they are weary. Weary of the turbulent times, of sustaining their commitment to Christ. That is why in chapter 10, the writer reminds them of their former witness and urges them not to throw away their boldness.

What then follows is a list of exemplary witnesses to an enduring faith; a demonstration that faith is essentially determined by hope. The writer maps out the life of Abraham and declares that throughout the history of salvation, approval from God has been based upon evidence of a living faith *which acts in complete trust of God's promises*, even when the realisation of those promises is not in sight. This is dynamic, living faith, moving beyond disappointment and suffering, not afraid of failure, nor afraid to let go of the past. This is faith which testifies *by example* to future generations, to our dear children and their children - the reality of belief in promised blessings.

Abraham lived in the highly civilised city of Ur, a rich and fertile place, watered annually by the flooding of the Euphrates, which stood alone within a vast desert. Yet Abraham took a huge risk, obeying God's call and stepping out into that wilderness. He left what he knew, what was safe, and all that gave him comfort and a sense of belonging. The details were unclear to Abraham, but the faith he had in the God who called him - compelled him to respond.

His pilgrimage led him to alien places, uncomfortable and new challenges. He became the stranger, the guest in other's lands. No matter – he believed in and anticipated the promise of God. "For he was *looking forward* with certainty to the city which has foundations because its designer and creator is God." Abraham left one city for another. He exchanged a life of settled comfort for an existence marked by hardship and wandering in pursuit of the promise of God.

This kind of faith is directed toward the future. The forward-looking capacity of faith enables a person, or a community to advance courageously and confidently into an unseen future, supported by the word of God and the Spirit of Jesus.

It's rarely been more crucial in the life and history of our church, to seek to see with the eyes of Jesus. To lift our gaze and watch in the moment for the certain call from God to promises in which we can utterly trust. The current Circuit visioning process places many challenges before us. The journey continues as different things come in and out of focus. The vision is not yet fully known. But one thing is certain. We have been changed by the last 18 months and we are called to discern what God is calling us to *now*.

We're on a journey together. We are to run the race – with perseverance. So let us take the time to pause and think and pray before we immediately respond and react. Let us remember to watch with the eyes of Jesus. Let us lift our gaze and fix our eyes *on* Jesus, imitating his faith and trusting in him. He is both pioneer and perfecter. He sits beside and simultaneously goes ahead. He leads the way and his enthronement in heaven secures the promises of God.

Faith boldly looks to the future, and acts in the here and now, trusting that the future is certain. It is guaranteed by the promise of the God who looks us in the eyes and who cannot lie.

### Hymn STF 161

1 Speak, O Lord, as we come to you  
to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us ;  
shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen  
today  
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all your purposes, for your glory.

2 Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
in the radiance of your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to  
see

your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail ;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

3 Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds ;  
help us grasp the heights of your plans for  
us.

Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on your  
promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with  
us.

Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built  
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (b.1974) and Stuart Townend (b.1963) .

## Prayers

Let us pray.

Gracious God, whose Spirit helps us in our weakness and guides us in our prayers, we pray for the church and for the world in the name of Jesus Christ.

Renew the life and faith of the church; strengthen our witness; and make us one in Christ. Grant that we and all who confess that Christ is Lord may be faithful in your service and filled with the Spirit, that the world may be turned to you.

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

Guide the nations in the ways of justice, liberty and peace; and help them to seek the unity and welfare of all people. Give to all in authority wisdom to know and strength to do what is right.

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

Comfort those in sorrow; heal the sick in body or in mind and deliver the oppressed. Grant us compassion for all who suffer, and help us so to carry one another's burdens that we may fulfil the law of Christ.

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

Receive our thanks and praise for all who have served you faithfully here on earth, and especially those who have revealed to us your grace in Christ. May we and all your people share the life and joy of your Kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **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 forever.  
Amen.**

## Hymn StF 611 Brother sister let me serve you

- 1 Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
let me be as Christ to you ;  
pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant too.
- 2 We are pilgrims on a journey,  
and companions on the road ;  
we are here to help each other  
walk the mile and bear the load.
- 3 I will hold the Christ-light for you  
in the night-time of your fear ;  
I will hold my hand out to you,  
speak the peace you long to hear.
- 4 I will weep when you are weeping ;  
when you laugh I'll laugh with you ;  
I will share your joy and sorrow  
till we've seen this journey through.

5 When we sing to God in heaven  
we shall find such harmony  
born of all we've known together  
of Christ's love and agony.

6 Brother, sister, let me serve you,  
let me be as Christ to you ;  
pray that I may have the grace  
to let you be my servant too.

Richard A. M. Gillard (*b.* 1953)

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## Blessing

May the God in whose image we are made, strengthen us in our struggle, embrace us in our weakness, and inspire us with hope for the future, as we work together for the kingdom flourishing. **Amen**

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