



Sunday 17th October 10.30am
At Home Worship
with the Revd Naomi Cooke

Call to Worship

Christ is our light. His Spirit is with us.

O Lord open thou our lips and our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

Hymn STF 57 Let all the world

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| <p>1 Let all the world in every corner sing :
my God and King !
The heavens are not too high,
his praise may thither fly ;
the earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing :
my God and King !</p> | <p>2 Let all the world in every corner sing :
my God and King !
The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out ;
but above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing :
my God and King !</p> |
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George Herbert (1593–1633)

Prayers

Gracious God, as we rejoice in the gift of this new day, may the light of your presence set our hearts on fire with love for you.

For blessed are you, Lord our God: in your love you create all things out of nothing through your eternal word. We glorify and adore you.

Blessed are you, Lord our God: in your love you redeemed the world through our Lord Jesus Christ. We glorify and adore you.

Blessed are you, Lord our God: in your love you empower your people through the gift of your Holy Spirit. We glorify and adore you. **Amen.**

A Collect for the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, you have taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do also for you. Give us the will to be servants of others as you were the servant of all; for you gave up your life and died for us, but live and reign with the Creator and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Prayer of Confession...

God the Maker forgives us in Christ and heals us by the Holy Spirit. Let us therefore put away all anger and bitterness and in the quietness of this moment, confess our sins.

Silence...

For our incapacity to feel the sufferings of others and our tendency to live comfortably with injustice, **God forgive us.**

For the self-righteousness which denies guilt, and the self-interest which strangles compassion, **God forgive us.**

For those who live their lives in careless unconcern, who cry 'peace, peace' when there is no peace, **we ask your mercy.**

For our failings in community, for our lack of understanding, **we ask your mercy.**

For our lack of forgiveness, openness, sensitivity, **God forgive us.**

For the times we are too eager to be better than others, when we are too rushed to care, when we are too tired to bother, when we don't really listen, when we are too quick to act from motives other than love, **God forgive us.**

Silence

Declaration of Forgiveness

People of faith, be deeply assured that God forgives you, Christ renews you and the Spirit enables you to grow in love and truth and grace. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Reading: Mark 10: 35-45 Listen for the word of God!

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, 'Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.' And he said to them, 'What is it you want me to do for you?' And they said to him, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.' But Jesus said to them, 'You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?' They replied, 'We are able.' Then Jesus said to them, 'The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.'



When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, 'You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.

But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.'

Reflection

Well, we have come to the end of the Party Conference season. There was a time when our engagement with such events was significant. Now many simply utter a sigh of relief, feeling that the trust we once had in our political leaders has eroded, replaced by suspicion and disbelief. We are pretty sure they are not being straight with us, we perceive a loss of integrity: is this the truth or are you just saying these things in order to try and secure my vote?

And there are those in every party who work in the background to help secure their leader's position and who know that if successful, they will be rewarded with promotions to already agreed positions of authority and power. Success so often rewarded with power, money and status. And that throws up the question of motive, why we do what we do. For principle, honour, for the human good? Or for power and reward and authority? The line, I'm sure, gets blurred. Our motives can be mixed.

I think it's very easy to read this story about James and John and to judge them, for their stupidity and selfishness. But I wonder what their motives were for asking Jesus if they could sit with him, one on his right and one on his left, when he enters his glory? Self-serving personal ambition? Or the desire to protect and uphold their leader? And we might join the rest of the disciples in their feelings of anger and unfairness, and not because we think James and John have got it wrong necessarily, but because they demand the position we all secretly want anyway. (It's just that they had the gall to get in there first and voice their desire).

Aren't James and John simply thinking and behaving the way we all do, for we are all products of a system, a society which incessantly promotes competition (from the moment you enter school), and judges success on winning, on status rather than role, on reward, wealth and ultimately the power we get to wield?

James and John ask Jesus the question we ask Jesus: 'will you do for me what I want you to do for me? And it's a good question really because it goes to *the heart of God's business*. Jesus said: 'the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.' To do for us what we want him to do...

And the one thing that is very clear in the Gospel is that Jesus is doing what God is doing. And if we want to know God, we have to look to Jesus: at what Jesus is doing and saying. James and John ask *our* question: 'will you give us what we most desire?'

And Jesus replies as he always does.... 'What do you *want* me to do for you?'

This exchange reminds me somewhat of my prayer life, especially my prayer life in the middle of the night when all the anxieties seem larger than life, and I want God to *do* something, to intervene on my behalf.

And sometimes it's as though God just isn't listening or won't take care of my problem. Sound familiar? When Jesus says to James and John 'you don't know what you are asking' we must take note. Because sometimes we ask for ridiculous things. Nonetheless God is present to us when we pray.

So perhaps we should be grateful to James and John for making this request because Jesus' response to them shows us that Jesus does not condemn, he just explains to them again that their request is misguided. They, like us, often do not understand, and so Jesus simply goes over the material one more time.

'You *know* that in the world those recognised as rulers, lord it over others, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not to be so among you; whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant....'

What does it mean to serve, not to be served? Jesus, in his life and teaching and suffering, has given us a clear picture. For Jesus the path to glory is through the valley of humiliation; before exaltation, comes the cup of suffering. He is not in it for reward. He is in it for the love of God, which promises him nothing but the opportunity to give himself away.

We too are invited to expose ourselves to the pain of others; to decline easy comfort; to turn our back on power for power's sake, that is, power which is not itself a vehicle to serve; and we are called to confront oppression and injustice wherever we see it, whether that's in our own backyard or in the high halls of political power. And we are called to pray. To be bathed in God's presence. Service and prayer go hand in hand.

Jesus tells us the truth. He pulls no punches. He is absolutely honest with James and John. He is absolutely honest with us. Following me is going to be hard. You are going to suffer as I am. There will be sacrifices to be made in bringing about this new world. For the Kingdom of God is not one of prime ministers and politicians, of generals and bankers, of competitive struggles for status and wealth and reward. The kingdom of God is not one of power being parcelled up right and left. In the Kingdom of God the values are turned upside down. In the kingdom of God the powerless are lifted up and the voiceless are given a voice. God isn't into the *trickle-down* effect. God reigns from the bottom up.

And if we dare to answer God's call, to become the least, there will be suffering, for folk like James and John and you and me and ultimately the places on the right and left of Jesus Christ will be occupied by two thieves struggling on crosses of their own.

We discover God when we *serve* each other, when we serve the community around us, the world around us. When we reach out our hands to bless, to soothe, to hold someone who is suffering; we do what Jesus did.

'What do you want me to do for you?'

'I want you to touch me, I don't want you to leave me, I want you to be present to me.'
What happens after that is God's business.

God calls us to turn up, to be present and to place our hands into God's service. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 272 From heaven you came helpless babe

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| 1 From heaven you came, helpless babe,
entered our world, your glory veiled,
not to be served but to serve,
and give your life that we might live.
<i>This is our God, the Servant King,
he calls us now to follow him,
to bring our lives as a daily offering
of worship to the Servant King.</i> | 2 There in the garden of tears
my heavy load he chose to bear ;
his heart with sorrow was torn,
'Yet not my will but yours,' he said. |
| 4 So let us learn how to serve
and in our lives enthrone him,
each other's needs to prefer,
for it is Christ we're serving. | 3 Come see his hands and his feet,
the scars that speak of sacrifice,
hands that flung stars into space
to cruel nails surrendered. |

Prayers

You may wish to look at your hands for a few moments of quiet and to remember times of service and of being served. Or, simply rest with own thoughts.

God of love, whose hands we see in Jesus, we offer our hands to you and all who we touch, that your compassion may be known through us, bringing wholeness, healing, peace and love.

When our neighbour is worried and doesn't know where to turn and we feel helpless,
Lord, hear us and show us a way to help.

When our friend is overwhelmed with sadness and we feel helpless,
Lord, hear us and show us a way to help.

When we see people homeless on the street and we feel helpless,
Lord, hear us and show us a way to help.

When we see pictures of children who are dying for want of food and we feel helpless,
Lord, hear us and show us a way to help.

God of love we remember your Church throughout the world as it seeks to serve those in need. Renew it by your Holy Spirit for mission and for service.

God of love we pray for our country and for those who have authority and influence. That all may serve one another in wisdom, honesty and compassion.

God of love we pray for all in sorrow, need, anxiety or sickness. That in their weakness they may find your strength, and in despair find hope.

God of love, whose hands we see in Jesus, we offer our hands to you and all who we touch, that your compassion may be known through us, bringing wholeness, healing, peace and love. **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 forever. Amen.

Hymn STF 701 Heaven shall not wait

1 Heaven shall not wait
for the poor to lose their patience,
the scorned to smile, the despised to find
a friend:
Jesus is Lord ;
he has championed the unwanted ;
in him injustice confronts its timely end.

2 Heaven shall not wait
for the rich to share their fortunes,
the proud to fall, the élite to tend the
least :
Jesus is Lord ;
he has shown the master's privilege —
to kneel and wash servants' feet before
they feast.

3 Heaven shall not wait
for the dawn of great ideas,
thoughts of compassion divorced from
cries of pain :
Jesus is Lord ;
he has married word and action ;
his cross and company make his purpose
plain.

4 Heaven shall not wait
for triumphant Hallelujahs,
when earth has passed and we reach
another shore :
Jesus is Lord
in our present imperfection ;
his power and love are for now, and then
for evermore.

John L. Bell (*b.* 1949) and Graham Maule (*b.* 1958)

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Blessing

May the God who guides our journey, the Christ who bears the suffering of the world, the Spirit who empowers us with the gifts of life, fill us with courage, wisdom and joy. **Amen.**

Go in the power of the Holy Spirit, to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen.**

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