

Whosoever Will

Welcome

Hello, to everyone who is watching this video – whoever, wherever and whenever you are.

This video has been produced by the Gloucestershire Circuit of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, and I'm Alan Jackson, a local preacher in this Circuit. Welcome again to all of you. We are delighted to be sharing in worship with you.

But let's begin with a very well-known hymn by Charles Wesley: "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise".

Hymn StF 364 – O for a thousand tongues to sing

O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim,
to spread through all the earth abroad the honours of your name.

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.

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

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

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.

In Christ, our Head, you then shall know, shall feel, your sins forgiven,
anticipate your heaven below, and own that love is heaven.

Prayer

We say together:

Blessed are you, Lord our God, Giver of Life, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; at the opening of this day you call us out of darkness into your marvellous light; Blessed are you for ever and ever. Amen.

The world belongs to God,
The earth and all its people.

How good it is, how wonderful,
To live together in unity.

Love and faith come together,
Justice and peace join hands.

If Christ's disciples keep silent
These stones would shout aloud.

Open our lips, O God,
And our mouths shall proclaim your praise.

With the whole church

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We affirm that we are made in God's image, befriended by Christ, empowered by the Spirit.

With people everywhere

We affirm God's goodness at the heart of humanity, planted more deeply than all that is wrong.

With all creation

We celebrate the miracle and wonder of life; the unfolding purposes of God, forever at work in ourselves and the world.

We say together with the whole church, in whatever language or version is nearest to our hearts

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.

Psalm 34 v1-8

I will extol the Lord at all times; his praise will always be on my lips.

I will glory in the Lord; let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

Glorify the Lord with me: let us exalt his name together.

I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.

Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.

This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles.

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.

Talk A - Basics

Preachers are generally expected to follow a sequence of set readings for each Sunday. Fine.

But it can be difficult sometimes to understand why the weekly set readings fit together, and this week is a good example – but this is Michaelmas, so let's look at the basics.

First, though, we read from the Letter to the Hebrews a passage that is all about the basics.

Reading: Heb 7:23-28

Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.

Such a high priest truly meets our need – one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect for ever.

Talk B – So?

It's Who I am – and therefore, What I Can Do

I planted a tree in lockdown. A quince tree. And I planted it myself.

Well, more or less. I had to read the instructions, and the label, and I had to look on the internet for more help, and Alison held it up for me while I carefully scooped handfuls of earth back round the roots. But it worked! It has survived! And this year even produced a few flowers – though I haven't let them produce fruit, not yet.

A real gardener wouldn't have done any of that, of course. Just dug a hole, put the tree in it, put the soil back, stamped everything down, and that would be it. It would have flourished. In fact, I'm pretty sure a real gardener could just push a stick into the earth, and it would grow – it wouldn't dare do anything else! And certainly a real gardener wouldn't be all proud about having merely planted a tree – whereas I'm as proud as a peacock.

Now with computers it's the other way round. I've known people take a new computer carefully and gently out of its box – in fact co-opting someone else to help do it; read the manual twice or three times; plug in all the leads in the correct order, carefully lay the leads out around the back of the desk, check everything twice or three times, and finally switch it on and – it doesn't work. Whereas I turn the box upside down and dump the computer on the floor, drop it where it ought to go, stick all the leads in more or less right and anywhere they want to go and switch on, and everything works perfectly every time. Computers know who's boss, you know, and give them an inch and they'll take an ell. But not with me – they know who I am, and they don't try it on with me!

It's Who Jesus Is – and therefore, What Jesus Can Do

Jesus is able to actually achieve something on his own – he doesn't need a manual, he doesn't need guidance, he won't run out of strength, or commitment, or time.

In particular he doesn't need our help; he can do the sacrificing, he can do the legal stuff, he can do it all, he doesn't need us to do anything

Which is all very nice, but why does it matter? How does it change what we do?

Well, first, let's remember what we do – and remember that we can now understand that this at least has no limits. Our prayers of intercession – and there will be generous silences for us to add our own prayers to these.

Prayers of Intercession

Christ, exalted in the lowest and the least,
give us humility.

Christ, forsaken and hungry,
take strength from our spare loaves and fishes.

Christ, thirsting even for polluted water,
drink from our selfseeking purity.

Christ, homeless, hopeless, friendless,
come in through our closed doors.

Christ, degraded by pimps and whoremasters
dress yourself in our respectable clothes.

Christ, ill, frightened and in pain,
be comforted by our presence.

Christ, condemned and locked away,
come and share our cell.

Christ, dead, buried and forgotten,
resurrect our love.

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Christ, exalted in the lowest and the least,
exalt us with you
Amen.

And a modern hymn from the Iona Community on much the same theme

Hymn StF 701 – Heaven shall not wait

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.

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.

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.

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.

We still haven't joined the dots. Maybe the Gospel reading will help?

Reading: Mark 10:46-52

Then they came to Jericho. As Jesus and his disciples, together with a large crowd, were leaving the city, a blind man, Bartimaeus (which means 'son of Timaeus'), was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!'

Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him.'

So they called to the blind man, 'Cheer up! On your feet! He's calling you.' Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.

'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asked him.

The blind man said, 'Rabbi, I want to see.'

'Go,' said Jesus, 'your faith has healed you.' Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

Talk C – Whosoever will

His faith? Really? He's heard of this Jesus bloke who does healings, and he gives it a go – gives it his best shot. After all, what's he got to lose!

How can such a shallow, self-centred response to Jesus be called faith! Surely salvation needs more than that? If we allow scum like him in, who knows where it will stop!

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I mean, would we allow in, say, an extortioner, a thief, a terrorist, a sceptic, a bully – oh sorry, wrong list; that's Jesus's apostles. I meant – er – well, I'm not sure who I meant, but we certainly wouldn't want them getting saved, would we!

Are we really going to allow anyone in unconditionally – surely they need to do something as well?

Er, well, no. That's the point of the earlier bit we read from Hebrews – they – we – don't need to do anything; Jesus can do it all. And yes, we are really going to allow anyone in – or at least, Jesus is. That is our calling: to love God and to love our neighbour – whoever he – she – they – is; to show everyone that the way to God is wide open for our neighbour – for all our neighbours –

And even for ourselves.

Confession Absolution & Commitment

This is the day that God has made

We will rejoice and be glad in it

We will not offer to God

Offerings that cost us nothing

Before God, with the people of God, I confess to my brokenness: to the ways I wound my life, the lives of others, and the life of the world.

May God forgive you, Christ renew you, and the spirit enable you to grow in love.

Amen.

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Amen

O Ruler of the high heavens, O Christ of the deep earth, O Spirit of the flowing waters, O Trinity of love, You have offered your love to us, and here we pledge our love to you, and to all those you love.

Strengthen us in our desire, and breathe into our bodies your glory, your love, your fire. We pray this in the name of Jesus, to whom we commit ourselves.

It is a holy door that I walk out of

It is a holy road I drive along

It is a holy land where I work

It is a holy dwelling I return to

It is a holy food that I eat

It is a holy bed that I sleep in

For a holy God is there, my Maker, my Friend, my Protector

In all I do

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Amen.

Our closing hymn – a summary of much that we have already said.

Hymn - Hymn StF 416 – There's a wideness in God's mercy

There's a wideness in God's mercy Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice Which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members In the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations In that upper home of bliss.

For the love of God is broader Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow By false limits of our own;
And we magnify his strictness With a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be illumined By the presence of our Lord.

Well, thank you again for joining with us in worship, whoever, wherever, whenever you are.

We are delighted to have been here with you.

And let us close by blessing one another in the words of the Grace, saying:

The Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore AMEN

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