



Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit
Worship at Home for Sunday 5th September 2021
Rev Andrew Biggs

Welcome to worship with members of the Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit

Call to Worship:

Jesus, lead us to the Father,
by your Spirit, help us draw near.

As we come with awe and gladness,
help us draw near.

Alleluia, alleluia,
help us draw near.

Words & Music © Sam Hargreaves / RESOUNDworship.org, Administered by The Jubilate Group
4 Thorne Park Road, Torquay TQ2 6RX, UK copyrightmanager@jubilate.co.uk

Hymn: STF 56 King of Glory, King of Peace

King of Glory, King of Peace,
I will love thee ;
and that love may never cease
I will move thee.
Thou hast granted my request,
thou hast heard me ;
thou didst note my working breast,
thou hast spared me.

Wherefore with my utmost art
I will sing thee,
and the cream of all my heart
I will bring thee.

Though my sins against me cried,
thou didst clear me ;
and alone, when they replied,
thou didst hear me.

Seven whole days, not one in seven,
I will praise thee ;
in my heart, though not in heaven,
I can raise thee.
Small it is, in this poor sort
to enrol thee :
e'en eternity's too short
to extol thee.

George Herbert (1593–1633)
Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 56 .

Let us pray together

Lord God, we praise your holy name and come before you with awe and wonder. You bless us in many different ways and for that, we give you thanks and praise. We have not always appreciated your gifts and have often abused them. In your mercy, forgive us Lord. We pray that you will help us to keep to your paths and to resist those things that would lead us astray, for you are the rock of our salvation. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen.

Readings: Proverbs 22: 1-2, 8-9, 22-23 and Mark 7 24-37

Reflection:

Wisdom & Reputation

This week have a birthday! Does that mean that I am now a bit wiser than I was a year ago? People talk about being “older and wiser” don’t they? I think I just feel older!

Our Old Testament reading for today is taken from a part of the Bible which is often referred to as “Wisdom” literature - the book of Proverbs. What is a proverb? A proverb is: ‘a well known short saying which conveys a general truth or a piece of advice’. This particular collection of ‘wisdom’ sayings were probably assimilated by the people of ancient Israel through close contact with other

cultures such as the world of Greek philosophy. We can see some similarities with texts used to teach the children of ancient Egyptian princes and officials.

Most cultures have similar wisdom sayings which offer advice or counsel on various aspects of life. Not necessarily religious in character – can you think of any which we use in our culture today? One that comes immediately to my mind is: “a stitch in time saves nine” (It means that it’s best to make a minor repair sooner than to be faced with a much bigger one later when the tear has grown and it will need much more work). Sometimes we find that sayings of this kind seem to be contradictory, for example: “Too many cooks spoil the broth” but “many hands make light work”. Can they both be right? Well, yes because one is about working together as a team, but the other is about leadership and decision making.

I’m sure you can think of some more such sayings - but where do they come from? Often we don’t know their origin but they are used to pass on the experience and wisdom of elders from one generation to another. However, those sayings chosen for inclusion in the book of Proverbs are based firmly on the Covenant between Israel and God, with the ethics rooted firmly in the goodness and justice of God.

The first saying in our reading today tells us that “a good name is to be desired above riches” and “a good reputation is valuable for both rich and poor”. In other words reputation is important for everyone regardless of status - in the eyes of God all people are equally loved and valued. The proverb tells us that a good reputation is a valuable commodity and once lost is not easily regained. We can see from various examples in common life how this is so. Take the example of those in the public eye for whom reputation is important:– media celebrities, politicians, sports personalities. Think, for example, of the Olympic athlete who fails a drugs test. Will they ever be really trusted again?

Building trust can take a long time, many years even, but it can be undone so easily. As our verse from Proverbs says: “A good name is more to be desired than great riches, esteem is better than silver or gold”.

What then of our reputation - as individuals, as disciples of Jesus or as members Christ’s church? How are we regarded by people we meet, live and work with? Do they see us as judgmental, holding to views and rules that are outdated in today’s society. Or do they regard us as people who embody the love of Christ visible in the way we live and work?

As disciples of Christ we are his body on earth now. Jesus cannot do anything except through us - we are his hands, his feet, his eyes and ears. But to able to act effectively for him we need to be trusted, we need to have a good reputation. Andrew Baughen, in his book ‘The because approach. Innovating church for all’ , speaks of a visit to a motorway service station¹:

“I don’t normally learn many new things about evangelism from visits to motorway service stations”, he says, “But I did the time I visited a friend who works for a car manufacturer. We were walking through the car park when he started pointing enthusiastically at something. ‘Look over there! That’s one of our most effective forms of advertising’, he said. I looked in the direction he was pointing, expecting to see some sort of all singing, all dancing billboard - but all I saw was souped up version of a very ordinary family car with fancy paintwork - a tea tray on the back and a skirt round the front. ‘Is that it’?, I asked. ‘Yes’, he said, ‘ that car has been highly crafted with top of the range parts. In fact it’s so expensive to adapt a sports edition like that from an ordinary car that we make a big loss on each one we sell. But it’s worth every penny, because they are out of the ordinary versions of something very ordinary. They act as moving billboards for our company’.

He goes on to say: *“Christians should be the same - out of the ordinary grace filled versions of humanity. People who act as moving billboards for God. Being an advertisement for God 24 hours a day is a privilege, but also a responsibility - the Bible tells me to ‘conduct myself in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27).”*

¹The because approach. Innovating Church for all. p73 2005 Authentic Media

We want to bring people we meet to know Jesus for themselves, to put their faith in him, to know what he has done for them. In order to do this we need to start from how we represent him. If we are respected as Christians, then others may want to be like us. This respect is generally not built through extravagant acts or events but through the way in which people observe Christians living and behaving and relating.

Our reputation as disciples of Christ is built upon the way in which we live following in the footsteps of our Saviour Jesus Christ. For example, in the passage from Mark's gospel Jesus heals those considered "unclean" in response to need. He breaks down barriers of race and religion and ignores cultural and social conventions in order to serve others in love. He responds to human need without any thought of result other than to declare the love of God. This is the good news.

Jesus came to serve, to show God's love and compassion for his people and he calls upon us to continue that work as members of his body. Every Christian is to reflect His love and compassion and if we do that in our relationships, in our families, in our work, in our meetings and in our outreach work then others will see the difference that Christ makes in our lives and will begin to want it for themselves.

We are reminded of this time and again in the scriptures of the New Testament, for example:

1 Peter 2: (1Pe 2:9) But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (1Pe 2:12) Conduct yourselves honourably among unbelievers, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honourable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge.

So our conduct as Christians matters, because we have a responsibility not to create or put up barriers that would serve to keep people from the gospel. If, through the way we live life in Christ, we draw people to us then we will draw them to Christ through us.

So let us this week reflect on our "Good name which is to be desired above all riches", on ways in which we might need to change in order to gain 'the good name' through living and serving in the redeeming and all embracing love of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

Amen.

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.

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

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 701

Words and Music: From *Heaven Shall Not Wait* © 1987, WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland.
<www.wrgg.co.uk>

A time of prayer

God of compassion and mercy, we come before you in our prayers as we bring to you the needs of the world and ourselves. We often feel overwhelmed by the needs around us but you are a great God and we put our trust in you. Show us what we can do to make this world a better place. Where there is poverty, may we share our riches.

Where there is war, may we bring peace.
Where there is division, may we bring unity.
Where there is despair, may we bring hope.
Where there is apathy, may we challenge and stimulate people to action.
Where there is hatred, may we show love.
We bring before you those known to us personally who have suffered loss and hardship. Visit them and give them all that they need to comfort and sustain them in their time of need.
Strengthen and guide us as we seek to do your will and make this world a better place in which to live for all people everywhere. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: STF 636 O Love that wilt not let me go

O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee ;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee :
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.

O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee :
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.

George Matheson (1842–1906)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 636 .

A prayer of blessing

Bless our worship today and may that which we have received enrich and bless our lives in the coming days. To that end, may the peace and blessing of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

Song:

Send us out in the power of your Spirit,
to shine your light in the way we live.
Send us out in the power of your Spirit,
as we've received, may we freely give.

*Send us out,
send us out,
send us out for your glory.
Let all we do
be praise to you;
send us out for your glory*

Send us out in the power of your Spirit
to show your love everywhere we go.

Send us out in the power of your Spirit,
Lord, fill us up so we overflow.

We're laying down our lives,
a living sacrifice,
we're living for your glory and your
praise.
We're taking up our cross,
we've counted up the cost,
we're living for your glory and your
praise.

CCLI Song No. 7088230. Words & Music © Matt
Osgood / RESOUNDworship.org
Administered by Jubilate Hymns Ltd.
copyrightmanager@jubilatehymns.co.uk

CCLI Licence 176885
Original Materials by John Roughley