

SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 6TH SEPTEMBER 2020.

CALL TO WORSHIP.

*But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love,
will enter your house.*

*I will bow down toward your holy temple
in the fear of you.*

*Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness
because of my enemies;
make your way straight before me.—Psalm 5:7–8*

HYMN: StF 370.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what thou dost love,
And do what thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure:
Until with thee I have one will
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with thee the perfect life
Of thine eternity

Edwin Hatch (1835-1889)

PRAYERS.

Oh God our Creator, when we look at the world you have created and its place in our universe, we know we cannot hope to comprehend you. Our astronomers tell us how vast and timeless our universe is and we glimpse eternity. Our biologists tell us how infinitely varied our plant life is in colour, shape and texture and we glimpse the infinite variety of your mind. Our zoologists tell us how curious, how intricate and how delicate our animal life is and we glimpse your humour, your intelligence, your diversity. Our scientists tell us how balanced, how efficient and how orderly our world is and we glimpse your consistency and symmetry. Through our artists, poets and writers we glimpse your creativity. Through the teaching of Jesus, we glimpse your overwhelming love for us. And so, we stand in awe of you, struggling to understand the unfathomable, the immeasurable, the profound, the all-loving.

Yet we are made in your image, incomplete and misshapen without you, and thus we come to worship you.

As we come to worship you, we are reminded of those things we have done wrong. The times when our actions have separated us from your love.

Unclutter our lives, Lord
we have too much,
consume too much,
expect too much.

Grant us perspective;
to see this world
through others' eyes
than just our own.

Grant us compassion:
where there is need
encourage us to play our part
and not turn aside.

Grant us gratitude
for what we have,
our daily bread
the gift of life.

Unclutter our lives, Lord,
give us space,
simplicity
and thankful hearts.

Bring to our sinfulness
the cleansing waters of your forgiveness
that having washed
we might know refreshment and release.

Amen.

Reading:- 1 Corinthians 15:1-11.

MESSAGE.

Paul had a unique ability to wrap up profound truth in only a few words. What would take paragraphs to explain in some places, he can pointedly communicate in a brief and concentrated sentence in other places. Verse 10 of 1 Corinthians 15 is an example of a profound sentence.

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them – yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me”.

Since his conversion experience on the road to Damascus, Paul has done all he could to spread the Gospel message far and wide. He is someone that has suffered for his faith in Christ which he speaks of in 2 Corinthians 11:23-33:-

²³ Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death

again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. ²⁷ I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. ²⁸ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

In these words Paul is speaking about more than his own personal story. He is proclaiming the core of the Christian faith: Grace from God! This is not a huff-and-puff religion in which we expend our own efforts to impress God and achieve salvation. This is religion that is built on the generosity of the heart of God as he looks at sinners and exclaims, "I know you don't deserve it, but I'll love you anyway!" Illustrations from the pages of Scripture or from our own lives illustrate this well such as an angry Moses, deceitful Jacob, adulterous David, or denying Peter.

I am reminded of two brothers when I was working as a prison chaplain. One brother was inside the prison walls serving an eighteen-month sentence for robbery and sadly this was the latest of a number of relatively short sentences. The other brother was outside of the prison walls and I got to know him because he would visit the prison weekly to see his sibling.

Both brothers had experienced a dreadful childhood and from an early age they had been abused by parents who were dysfunctional. Although the boys had both suffered to a great extent that was where the similarity ended. One brother had slipped into a life of crime and when asked why he continued to break the law; he would blame his past. His anger and resentment were understandable, but he felt that the world 'owed him' because of his dreadful childhood. The brother who visited had taken a quite different road. He had decided that unlike his dysfunctional parents he was going to lead his life differently. His faith in Christ guided him and through God's grace he had become a victor rather than a victim.

Grace is, by its very nature, surprising and without reason! Grace is so often undeserved.

But Grace isn't cheap it is very expensive! Grace is expensive to God because it cost him his only begotten Son, and it is expensive to Christ because he gave his life for us. But we must not overlook the fact that it also has a cost for us. We must relinquish control of our life and give it over to our Sovereign Master. Grace saves lives every day and it is there for the taking. The only thing we have to do is invite God into our lives. It will mean change which isn't always comfortable but that is because God loves each one of us too much to leave us where we are.

Grace makes a way for God to bless you in life regardless of your merits. Grace will give you what you did not earn. Grace will qualify you for what you don't qualify for. Grace will give you what you don't deserve.

It is exactly because I don't deserve love or forgiveness that I stand in awe that God still counted me worth not only His ultimate sacrifice, but His daily reminders of His love.

Our final hymn based on John Wesley's final words says: -

"Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed."

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION AND LORD'S PRAYER.

Almighty God, we thank you that through your promise to hear us when we pray together, so we gather now as one, bringing our concerns to you.

Everlasting God, we acknowledge that there are many places in the world which do not have the same privilege as us to freely worship you, and we ask for protection on those who are in real danger of persecution or imprisonment for their faith. We pray too for believers who have been rejected by family and friends. We ask that they may be surrounded by people who love and support them, that they may have a safe place to live and access to a Bible. Fill them with renewed hope to live faithfully and shine brightly in a dark world and may we stand with them as they suffer in your name.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Almighty God, we pray for this troubled world. We know that your heart breaks when any part of your creation suffers and we too weep when we are aware of injustice and inequality, war and destruction. We pray for those in positions of power throughout the world, that their eyes may be opened to find new ways to restore hope and dignity for the good of all.

Especially we pray for the racial tensions in America, that hostilities do not escalate further and that justice will prevail.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Loving God, we pray for those on the margins, for whom hunger, homelessness, or exploitation are a reality. We pray for those refugees arriving in small boats exposed to danger, poverty, and hostility. We ask you to strengthen those working to uphold their right to claim asylum and their struggle for dignity. We ask you, Lord, to help us all to work together for a changing world where we can be more welcoming and truly love our neighbours as ourselves.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Father God, we pray for our children as they return back to schools, colleges and universities. As they enjoy being back with their friends and adjust to new layouts and new ways of learning, may they thrive and flourish as they are nurtured and equipped for all they need in life. We especially pray for their teachers, that as they use their many skills in these difficult times to create a safe place for their pupils, they may be strengthened and find encouragement in all that they do.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Loving God, we pray for all who are not at peace. We pray for the broken-hearted and the broken in spirit, for those who are being destroyed by hatred or revenge, remembering all who have suffered from the violence of others. We know that in this time of lockdown, there has been an increase of tensions in relationships, domestic conflict and abuse. We pray for your peace to flow through those homes and bring protection to those most at risk.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, calm the mental and emotional storm of those who live with anxiety about not being able to return to normality, or dread the return to work or school, dread the thought of socialising and keeping up appearances. Bring perseverance and hope to those who have no job or fear losing their livelihood, to those struggling to buy food and pay the bills. Remind us that we are all called to help and support one another where there is need.

In a moment of silence, we name before our Heavenly Father, those known to us who are suffering in any kind of way in body, mind or spirit.....

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Loving God, we pray for all those departed this life and for those who are bereaved by their passing. Help us to be sympathetic, caring and loving with the bereaved and always ready to help in a practical way and to be committed to praying for them in their time of greatest need.

Lord in your mercy: **Hear our prayer**

Father God, we pray that you will give us the courage to live faithfully and pick up our crosses and walk with you as we go about our daily life this week.

**Merciful father: accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen**

THE LORD'S PRAYER.

HYMN: StF 317

1 At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,

every tongue confess him King of glory now.

'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,

who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

2 Humbled for a season to receive a name

from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,

faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious, when from death he passed.

3 Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

4 In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown him as your Captain in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

5 For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory, with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of glory now.

HYMN: StF 610

Best of all is God is with us,
God will hold and never fail.
Keep that truth when storms are raging,
God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us,
life goes on and needs are met,
God is strongest in our weakness.
Love renews, will not forget.

Best of all is God is with us,
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,
grace received and hope reformed.

Best of all is God is with us,
in our joy and through our pain,
till that final acclamation:

'life is Christ, and death is gain'.

Best of all is God is with us
as we scale eternal heights,
love grows stronger, undiminished;
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Words by Andrew Pratt © 2008.