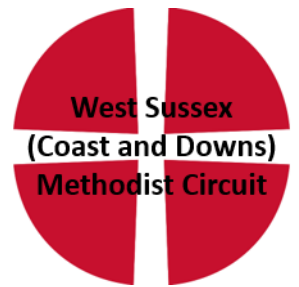


Worshipping Together

West Sussex Coast and Downs Circuit

June 6th – July 4th



Worshipping Together is an offering from the circuit to you, and has been collated by local preachers, ministers and worship leaders from across the circuit.

If you are well enough, we invite you use this resource each week, at a time to suit you, and spend a few moments with God, knowing that you are **Worshipping Together** with other people who are also sharing in this act of worship with you.

Share these resources with others to use in their own way as we worship and grow together despite the pandemic.

Also available at: www.westsussexcoastanddownscircuit.co.uk

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep and a time to throw away.

Ecclesiastes 3:1,5b,6



As we come to worship, you may like to prepare with a period of quiet, or light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Gathering Words

Anyone who belongs to Christ is a new person. The past is forgotten, and everything is new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

Song, Pray and Praise: [As the deer pants for the water²](#) [LINK](#)

1. As the deer pants for the water

So my soul longs after You

You alone are my heart's desire

And I long to worship You

You alone my strength my shield

To you alone may my spirit yield

You alone are my heart's desire

And I long to worship You

2. I want you more than gold or silver

Only you can satisfy

You alone are the real joy giver

And the apple of my eye.

3. You're my friend and You are my brother

Even though you are a King

I love you more than any other

So much more than anything

Prayers of approach³

God of all the world, we praise you for calling us into your family,

for choosing us even though we are imperfect,

for trusting us even though we make mistakes,

for not giving up on us even when we give up on ourselves,

for offering so much more – even when we would settle for less

God of all the world, for drawing us into a deeper relationship with you and one another, we praise you. Amen.

God of truth and mercy

Where we break down – you build up

¹ Worship prepared by Joyce Stroud, original material by Joyce Stroud.

² As the deer by Martin Nystrom, © 1983 Restoration Music Ltd, StF544

³ Prayers of adoration – Roots for churches Ltd

Where we damage – you repair
Where we blaspheme – you bless
Where we isolate – you include
Where we go wrong – you put us right
Where we confess – you forgive
Where we begin again – you are with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We share in the prayer that Jesus taught us. ***Our Father***

RECEIVING

Reading: Psalm 130

This is one of the Psalms that predicts the coming of the Messiah and the redemption that is promised, as well as charting the psalmist's own journey from the darkness of despair into the light of plenteous grace. The psalmist is reassured that God provides forgiveness without keeping a record of wrongs. We have an open line of communication to God. There is an emphasis on waiting on God rather than assuming that forgiveness can be taken for granted. The promise is for plentiful redemption and unfailing love.

Many of us might share the psalmist's despair and a feeling of being unworthy. We do well to follow their example of waiting on God and trusting in his promises. This time of pandemic feels like a long time of waiting. Sometimes it feels like 2 steps forward and 1 step back. One thing we can learn from a number of the psalms is that even things seem at their darkest not to give up and to keep on giving thanks for what we have.

One of the people from the New Testament that can encourage us is the Apostle Peter. He denied knowing Jesus three times when he was on trial. We can only imagine how Peter felt after this but he goes on to have a special encounter with Jesus, who asks him three times 'do you love me?' and then entrusts Peter with more responsibilities. In some of the healings Jesus carried out, he tells the individuals that their sins are forgiven to enable the person to be freed from whatever is holding them back.

Unlike the psalmist, we have the advantage of knowing that Jesus came to be our Saviour giving us the reassurance of forgiveness when we are ready to repent and make a new start. A piece of scripture that I find very reassuring is from Luke

chapter 1, where Zechariah (the father of John of the Baptist) prophesies about the future roles of John and Jesus. At the end of this passage known as the Benedictus we read:

⁷⁷You will tell his people that they can be saved when their sins are forgiven.

⁷⁸God's love and kindness will shine upon us like the sun that rises in the sky.

*⁷⁹On us who live in the dark shadow of death this light will shine
to guide us into a life of peace.*

After the dark night of waiting, we can come out into the new day knowing the unfailing love of God.

Points for reflection



1. What does to mean to you to know the forgiveness and plenteous grace of God?
2. How can this help you to come alongside others who feel that they are in lost the darkness?

RESPONDING

Sing/Read/Proclaim: There's a wideness in God's mercy⁴ [LINK](#)

1. There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.

There's a kindness in God's justice,
which is more than liberty.

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

3. There is grace enough for thousands
Of new worlds as great as this
There is room for fresh creations
In that Upper Room of bliss.

4. For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind,
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

5. But we make God's love too narrow
by false limits of our own,
and we magnify its strictness
with a zeal God will not own.

6. If our love were but more simple,
we should rest upon God's word,
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Prayers for ourselves and others

Generous God, we bring our prayers for those who find it hard to forgive themselves – may they know your peace and the opportunity of a new start.

⁴ Theres a wideness in God's mercy by Frederick William Faber, StF416

We pray for those we should forgive but find it difficult

– help us to see Jesus in each person we meet.

We pray for situations where there is conflict.

Guide and strengthen those helping to find ways forward.

We pray for those who are ill or anxious at home or in hospital, also for those whose lives are filled with fear and despair.

Draw near with your saving love and bring healing and hope.

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

Sing/Read/Proclaim: When I survey⁵ [LINK](#)

1. When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all forever more. **Amen**

⁵ When I survey by Isaac Watts, StF287



As we come to worship, you may like to prepare with a period of quiet, or light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

The Challenges

The challenges faced by all of us over this last year have been enormous. One of the issues that has affected so many older people in particular has been that of loneliness and isolation. The theme for MHA Sunday 2021 is 'relieving isolation and bringing hope', inspired by the story in Mark 5:1-20 which shows us how Jesus reacted when he came alongside someone who had been truly excluded from his community. MHA, together with the wider church, can continue to help reduce isolation and bring hope to all those in later life.

Sing/Read/Proclaim: God is love, his the care⁷

1. God is love: his the care, tending each, everywhere.

God is love — all is there! Jesus came to show him, that we all might know him:

Sing aloud, loud, loud! Sing aloud, loud, loud!

God is good! God is truth! God is beauty! Praise him!

2. None can see God above; neighbours here we can love;

thus may we Godward move, finding him in others, sisters all, and brothers:

3. Jesus came, lived and died, for our sake, crucified,

rose again, glorified; he was born to save us, by the truth he gave us:

4. To our Lord praise we sing - light and life, friend and king,

coming down, love to bring, pattern for our duty, showing God in beauty:



⁶ Worship prepared by Lynne James

⁷ God is love, his the care by Percy Dearmer, StF403

Prayer of Thanks

Great God, creator of all, we thank and praise you for showing your love for us through your son, Jesus Christ, and through the world around us, full of beauty, kindness and hope. We pray that we can find that beautiful world in our daily lives and that we can bring it to others who are unable to see it for themselves.

We give thanks for the staff of MHA who try so hard to bring the message of your love to their residents and to show them that hope and kindness surround them. We give thanks for the patience of all care workers dealing with the elderly especially as they have had to overcome so many obstacles during this pandemic. May the isolation now be over at last and may we once more visit the elderly in your name and befriend them as Jesus taught us through his stories and his final sacrifice.

Amen

RECEIVING

Reading: Mark 5:1-20

At first sight this seems a strange choice of a passage for MHA Sunday. A madman, too strong to be restrained, living alone and isolated among the tombs, comes up to Jesus for no apparent reason and recognises him loudly and publicly as the Son of the most high God. He has been self-harming, but he begs Jesus not to torture him, for in recognising Jesus, he has recognised the one being who can subdue him, not with force and chains but with the words of Holy Spirit. The poor man is so strong because he is possessed by many demons at once: a legion of Roman soldiers is 6000 men! The story takes a strange turn here because when the demons are transferred to the pigs and cast over the cliff into the lake, rural folk would know that pigs can swim! Perhaps this reinforces the image of power over demons that Jesus is projecting here.

The audience must have been non-Jewish, for the Jews would not have had a large herd of the 'unclean' pigs. So, we must try to imagine this as a piece of drama played out for the benefit of Gentiles, with dramatic licence to boost its effect. Not only is the wild, possessed man now calm and sane, but the pigs are all dead. Wonder of wonders! They begged Jesus to leave their region - in case he killed any more pigs because it would have been a serious loss of profit for the owners! This is such a good story to tell for years to come! Adding even more emphasis to the tale, the saved man is himself told to stay and tell his news to everyone so that all could see how God's mercy had worked.

So, why did MHA choose this passage? It reveals an extreme case of isolation and despair. Families with loved ones in care homes during Covid will know the feelings well. How does one explain lockdown and lack of visitors to anyone with even the slightest hint of dementia? Yet, it does not just apply to the present crisis. How many times have we all seen desperate people sleeping rough, self-harming, isolated by mental illness and shunned by society? It happens less than it used to, but it does still happen. We have no excuse for turning our backs on anyone who needs help and hope. Not if we are true followers of Jesus. It is not enough for the MHA to offer care. We are all in it together. We need to question our actions everyday in the light of the teachings of Jesus. Do we show the love and mercy of God to all we meet? It's a tall order, but Jesus made a huge sacrifice to show us how to live his way, not our way.

RESPONDING

Sing & Pray: I will offer up my life⁸

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth,
Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to you.
In surrender, I must give my every part:
Lord, receive the sacrifice of a broken heart.

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend, to so loving a king?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of your name for the things you have done?
O, my words could not tell, not even in part,
Of the debt of love owed by this thankful heart.*

You deserve my every breath for you've paid the great cost;
Giving up your life to death, even death on a cross.
You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin,
Opened up the gates of Heaven and have beckoned me in.

Prayers for others and the Lord's Prayer:

Beloved God, you have said we may always come to you with our petitions. So, we remember today all those who are living in fear: fear from tyranny, from Covid, from starvation, or from natural disasters. Many people also are afraid without knowing

⁸ I will offer up my life, by Matt Redman © Thankyou music 1994, StF446

why. They feel insecure and alone, especially, but not only, the elderly. Help us to find ways to protect the innocent and comfort the sick and lonely.

We bring before you in our hearts the names of those known to us in special need of your loving care.....

We pray for political prisoners such as Nanazine Zagari Ratcliffe and Navalny, and those who are imprisoned only because they will not renounce their faith.

We pray for the people of St Vincent as they seek to restore their beautiful island after the ravages of the volcano. There are so many 'hot spots' around the world today where violence could erupt at any time, especially in connection with China and Russia. Be with our political leaders as they look for ways to ease the tension.

We bring our prayers together as we share in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

Our Father

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore. Amen



Beach at Bognor Regis, © Dan Balsdon

As we come to worship, you may like to prepare with a period of quiet, or light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Gathering Words

Come! Jesus is calling us to be together so that we can worship our God. Let us give thanks and praise his name in the certain knowledge that He is here with us. Amen

Sing, Pray or Reflect: Father we love you¹⁰

Father, we love You.

We worship and adore You.

Glorify Your name in all the earth.

Glorify Your name

Glorify Your name

Glorify Your name in all the earth.

Jesus, we love You.

We worship and adore You.

Glorify Your name...

Spirit, we love You.

We worship and adore You.

Glorify Your name...

Reading: Mark 4:35-40



We Pray

Creator God, we praise and adore you that you have given us our world, with its wonder and its beauty. We thank you for the wind, the waves, the flowers, and the trees. We acknowledge and give thanks that you have given us everything we need in

order to live, our food, our water, the minerals we use and the air we breathe.

Lord, we thank you for being there when it feels like we are sinking, when our faith slips, when our hearts sink, and our courage fails. We know that you are there in the roar of the waves, in the sound of the wind as well as in the calm and in the silences, so we thank you that we can come trusting in you, we can share our concerns with the knowledge that you will never abandon us, never ignore us. We thank you that you are our God of love.

Yet we come knowing that we have not listened to you. We have instead listened to the voice of our own needs. We have thought only of ourselves and ignored the

⁹ Worship prepared by Malcolm Lindo

¹⁰ Father we love you by Donna Adkins © 1976 CCCM Music, StF6

sounds of others who are struggling in their own storms. We have ignored their cries and stood afar on the shore. Forgiving Lord, we dare this morning to come and ask that we may be forgiven because we know that you sent Jesus to die on the Cross so that our sins may be forgiven.

In this moment and at this time, we pray that you will forgive us, and save us. Amen

RECEIVING

I am sure that many of you will know that story of the storm on Lake Galilee and how Jesus calmed the winds. Certainly, the image of the disciples being swamped by the waves while Jesus is asleep in the bows is one that I have known since I was a child. It is also an image which brings back special memories because when my wife and I went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, one of the many things we did was to cross the Lake and we got caught in a very heavy storm.

Our Guide had warned us before we boarded the boat that we were likely to get wet, because when the warm winds come through the Galilean hills, they meet the violent winds coming over the Golan Heights just above the cool waters of the Lake. The resulting storms can be very dramatic to anyone on the Lake at the time.

But the message of the story is not necessarily about the miracle of how Jesus calmed the storm, but how our feelings can be distorted in a way that effects the way we think and act. The words of the disciples, *“Master, do you not care that we are perishing?”* indicate just how their fear had made them forget the promise that Jesus had made that their God would be there for them and He would always care for them.

Just as, at that moment of crisis, when they feared that the boat might sink, their faith failed, so I know that my faith has faltered and that I have failed to hear the reassuring words of Jesus saying, *“do not be afraid”*. Perhaps you have also faced difficult times, when you fear what is going to happen next, what tomorrow will bring. Perhaps only for a fleeting moment, you have also lost the faith that our God is a loving God, one who has promised to care and protect us. Somehow, something has caused an obstacle, so there is the barrier between God and us. Something which prevents us from understanding that whatever is happening, whatever we think is going to happen, God is always there, and He is caring for us.

There is a story about a man called Fred. One day there was a terrible storm and all around his house the river levels rose and began flood into ground floor of his house. Fred was determined to ride out the storm, so he went upstairs and watched the water rise from his bedroom. After some time, he saw his neighbour paddle up in a canoe and shout to him *“c’mon Fred climb in and I get you to dry land”*. Fred waved his neighbour away and said, *“I am alright, God will not let anything happen to me, he will save me”*.

The rain kept falling and the water continued to rise and started to cover his bedroom floor, so Fred climbed out onto the roof. He then saw a helicopter come and try to rescue him. But again, Fred waved it away and muttered *“How could God let this happen? I know he is going to save me.”*



The water continued to rise and eventually it covered Fred and he drowned. When he got to heaven, Fred said to God, *“how could you let me drown, why didn’t you save me?”* God looked at Fred and said, *“I sent a canoe and I sent you a helicopter. Why didn’t you trust me enough to get in?”*

Are we like Fred? Do we wait for the dramatic gesture; do we wait for Jesus to wake up and calm the storm with a wave of his arm. Do we simply ignore or do we not understand that the kind gentle acts of our friends and neighbours are gifts from God? Do we do not realize that it is through the little insignificant acts of people around us that God shows his love for us, and it is in those acts for others that we also pass on God’s love and care for them.

RESPONDING

Song, Read, Proclaim: One more step along the world¹¹

1. One more step along the world I go,
One more step along the world I go.
From the old things to the new,
Keep me travelling along with you:
And it's from the old I travel to the new.
Keep me travelling along with you.

2. Round the corners of the world I turn,
More and more about the world I learn.
All the new things that I see.
You'll be looking at along with me.

¹¹ One more step along the world I go, by Sydney Carter, © 1971 Stainer & Bell Ltd, StF No.476

3.As I travel through the bad and good,
Keep me travelling the way I should.
Where I see no way to go,
Keep me travelling along with you.

4.Give me courage when the world is rough,
Keep me loving though the world is tough.
Leap and sing in all I do,
Keep me travelling along with you:

5.You are older than the world can be,
You are younger than the life in me.
Ever old and ever new,
Keep me travelling along with you:

Prayers of Intercession

Almighty God, we pray for the needs of the people and events which are happening in the world around us. We pray for the people and situations that play on our minds, that frighten and confuse us, that bewilder and perplex us.

We pray for people we don't understand or comprehend, for those who make us ashamed because of their words and deeds. We pray for those who carry the scars of prejudice and injustice, for those who are abused, neglected, and cast aside and we pray for those who see no way to change their future.

We pray for those who carry the burdens of illness and injury, for those empty with grief and bereft without the one they loved and for those who feel unloved, uncared for, unwanted, and unknown. We pray for those who see no hope, who share no love, and who know no love?

And, for a moment in silence, we think not only for those people, but also those known to us, who we know by name, and who are in need of your love this day. Almighty God, may your love, reach out to all these people. Amen

We pray together... ***Our Father...***

Blessing

Go out into the world rejoicing,
for God is waiting to meet you.
Go and walk with him
in the light of his love
and show the world
that God is with us and with them. Amen



As we come to worship, you may like to prepare with a period of quiet, or light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Today is Conference Sunday. The Methodist Conference meets once a year with the first one being held in 1744. It is a mix of presbyters, deacons and lay people from each Methodist District plus a number of ex officio members and visitors from the World Church. Together they will worship, listen to each other and make decisions on the future direction of the Methodist Church.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’ *Isaiah 6:8*

Sing, pray & proclaim: Ye servants of God¹³

1. Ye servants of God,
your Master proclaim,
and publish abroad
his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious
of Jesus extol;
his kingdom is glorious,
and rules over all.

2. God ruleth on high,
almighty to save;
and still he is nigh,
his presence we have;
the great congregation
his triumph shall sing,
ascribing salvation
to Jesus our King.

3. ‘Salvation to God
who sits on the throne!’
Let all cry aloud,
and honour the Son;
the praises of Jesus
the angels proclaim,
fall down on their faces,
and worship the Lamb.

4. Then let us adore,
and give him his right;
all glory and power
all wisdom and might,
all honour and blessing,
with angels above,
and thanks never-ceasing,
and infinite love.



¹² Worship prepared by Shelagh Morgan

¹³ Ye servants of God by Charles Wesley, StF340

Prayers of Adoration and Confession¹⁴

Lord of the morning and of all our days we praise you for this new day. We thank you for your gifts and praise you for all your care. For you are the Maker of all we see and know. Giver of all good gifts, and Lover of us all.

You are Friend in all our lives, reaching out your hand to the stranger, to embrace with strength and hope.

You are Guide for all our days, giving us wisdom, showing us the way to be.

Lord of the morning and of all our days and nights, we praise you for this new day.

Merciful God, we confess that we find it difficult to live Christian lives. We are full of good intentions but are easily swayed from doing and saying what we know we should. We are distracted by busyness and self-interest, and handicapped by lack of confidence, and insensitivity to others.

Help us to turn our minds away from ourselves and our inadequacies and to focus on you and your forgiving and accepting love, for only you have the power to make us holy. And you, almighty God, will do it. Thanks be to God. **Amen**

RECEIVING

Readings: Isaiah 6:1-8 & Mark 1:14-20

Sunday at Conference is special. It is the day when presbyters and deacons who have completed their formal training for ministry are received into full Connexion, plus deacons are welcomed into the diaconate. The reception takes place in the morning worship, and then in the afternoon ordination services take place in churches in the area where Conference is being held.

These two readings are two of many which record individuals responding to a call. Peter, Andrew, James and John had spent their lives up to this point as fishermen – probably in the family business since they were very young. And then they hear this invitation which involves leaving everything they have known – their work, family, security. John the Baptist has been put in prison and Jesus knows that the time has arrived – the time to tell the good news that God is doing something new. He needs to get his message out to as many people as possible and he cannot do it alone.

¹⁴ Prayers by Donald Hilton, The Word in the World

Over the centuries from that first call to the four fishermen, men and women have responded to God's call. Some will recall a dramatic event when this happened, others will tell of a quiet voice persistently nudging.

We may not have been called to full time presbyteral or diaconal ministry as those who are being ordained today have but we still have our part to play. Ministry is fundamentally about the participation of the whole Church in the life of Christ. It is never an individualistic enterprise. The ministry of the Church is exercised as Christians together respond to God's call and discover and use the gifts which the Holy Spirit has given them.

Since March last year our lives have been different. That has meant that the ministry of both ordained and lay people has changed. We have seen so many examples of ministry during this period – the use of technology to enable people to worship together, the putting together of this booklet to enable those who do not have access to a computer to be able to worship and feel part of the circuit, telephone calls to individuals who live alone and have been housebound, shopping and collecting medication, prayer groups meeting regularly on-line and you will know of other examples.

We now have hope that our lives will be gradually changing over the next few months. Each one of us will make up our own minds how we will do this and as we make our decisions I ask you to include ministry in your deliberations and prayerfully ask yourself:

What are the gifts God has given me?

***How can I use these in the months to come
to minister to those I know and those I do not know?***

RESPONDING

Prayer¹⁵

Almighty God, you call us to shine like stars in the world,
to shed light like a lamp set upon a lampstand.

Help us, and all your Church, to fulfil at least a little of that calling –
through our words, our actions, our living, and our loving,
to share something of what we have received from you.

Where there is darkness, let us bring light.

¹⁵ Prayers by Nick Fawcett, Prayers for all seasons

Teach us to speak openly and honestly of our faith,
not falling into the language of jargon or cliché,
but testifying in our own words to what Jesus means to us.

Where there is darkness, let us bring light.

Teach us to work with our fellow Christians of all denominations and none,
recognising the need to learn from one another.

And working together in the cause of the Gospel.

Where there is darkness, let us bring light.

Teach us to love those around us, not simply other believers, not merely in words,
but all people, and through actions that speak unmistakably of our sincerity.

Where there is darkness, let us bring light.

Almighty God,

it is easy to talk of being your people; much harder to live as though we are.

Equip us and enable us to respond to that challenge,

and reach out in love to the world.

Where there is darkness, let us bring light, To the glory of your name. Amen

Sing, Pray & Praise: Called by Christ to be disciples¹⁶

1. Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we serve a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.

2. Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue;
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce,
college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning
may we see your kingdom come.

3. Hard decisions may confront us, urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword – make us strong and make us wide!
Secular is turned to sacred, made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned in submission to our King.

¹⁶ Called by Christ to be disciples by Martin Leckebusch, © Kevin Mayhew, StF660

As we come to worship, you may like to prepare with a period of quiet, or light a candle. Let us remember that wherever we are, God is with us.

Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised! *Psalm 48:1a*

Sing, pray & proclaim: Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise¹⁸

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise,
the city of our God, the holy place,
the joy of the whole earth.
Great is the Lord in whom we have the victory,
he aids us against the enemy,
we bow down on our knees.

*And Lord, we want to lift your name on high,
and Lord, we want to thank you,
for the works you've done in our lives;
and Lord, we trust in your unfailing love,
for you alone are God eternal,
throughout earth and heaven above.*

Prayer

Gracious God, we rejoice in the gift of this new day.
For your creativity we praise you,
for your love for us, we adore you,
for the community of faith you call us into, we thank you.

Saving God, we celebrate the gift of salvation we are offered through Christ,
We acknowledge the imperfections of our humanity,
we come before you recognising our need of forgiveness,
and come in thankfulness that you declare to us, 'your sins are forgiven'.

As we live in your forgiving and saving love,
and participate in this, your community of faith,
fill us with the blessing and joy of your Holy Spirit poured upon us. Amen.

¹⁷ Worship prepared by Rev Dan Balsdon

¹⁸ Great is the Lord by Steve MeEwan, © 1985 Body Songs, StF50

Reading: Psalm 48

There is a consensus among those who study culture that western culture has become increasingly focused on success and individualism, and that this contributed to a growing culture of immediacy – and so we struggle to wait.

We have spent so much time waiting over the last 16 months. Looking back on our uncertain waiting through the pandemic, we can perhaps see this struggle with waiting that the country, and indeed all the world has had to cope with. Perhaps we can recognise the struggle to wait in our lives too.

I think there is a danger within a success driven, individualistic culture that we focus so much on activity and what we need to do to achieve our desired results that we can neglect to marvel at the journey, celebrate the moment and notice the joys around us in the moment. Reading Psalm 48 one verse jumped out at me:

We ponder your steadfast love, O God, in the midst of your temple.(48:9)

Pondering, it seems to me, has nuance that means it is different to thinking or studying. Pondering, it seems to me, is to think about something carefully, to perhaps consider it in depth – but at the same time, can also be seen to muse and think about something that perhaps doesn't have a significant bearing on our own results, success or the task at hand. To ponder could be to think about something that will have no impact at all on our earthly success, but that enables us to reflect and go deeper, perhaps for nothing but our own pleasure.

It is that sort of pondering on the steadfast, unchanging love of God that I have been left pondering after reading this verse. Pondering not for the benefit of my purpose, successes or ministry (though in sharing here I hope it may be!), but pondering for my own joy, my own well-being, my own relationship with God, my own sense of certainty and assurance that despite my anxieties, misgivings and doubts, God's love for me is steadfast and sure.

In the coming hours and days, I encourage you to take time out of the activity of your day, your working week, and ponder. Ponder on your journey with God. Ponder on moments, words, experiences of God that give you assurance of God's love for you. Giving thanks, and celebrating the moment.

Prayers

Living God, as we ponder your love for us,
as we experience your presence in our lives
and experience the certainty of eternity to come,
we also recognise the reality of need in our world today,
and so we pray for the needs among human life on earth.

For those who seek fair and just use of the world's resources...

For those who strive for justice and peace...

For those who mourn...

For those who suffer as victims of violence and injustice...

For the church throughout the world...

We bring all our prayers together with the Lord's Prayer: ***Our Father...***

Sing, Pray & Praise: Love divine all loves excelling¹⁹

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

2. Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

3. Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation, perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise!

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore. Amen

Acknowledgements

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¹⁹ Love Divine by Charles Wesley, StF503