

A service for Sunday 26th July 2020

Bible Reading: Psalm 128

Hymn: To God be the glory, great thing he has done! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-15v9iworAU>

1. To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life in atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

O Come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;

and Give Him the glory - great things He has done!

2. O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God!
The vilest offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord

3. Great things He has taught us, great things He has done
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our worship, when Jesus we see

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord

Prayers:

Creator God, we gather in the knowledge and vision of your love.

In the Risen Christ, Jesus' disciples were filled with new hope and they saw that you called them to speak your message of renewal, commitment, forgiveness, and freedom. We thank you that you have called us to share that hope, even in the uncertainty that we often feel.

You dwell with us; your love enfolds us and we find peace in your presence.

We thank you that Jesus brings new insights into the world and that through his life, death, and resurrection you continue to speak with us today. Jesus reached out his hands in healing, in friendship and in blessing; may we do the same in his name today.

We thank you that you continue to reach out into the life of the world; that in our deepest uncertainty you bring the certainty of your love; in the place of deepest darkness you bring your light and into our lives you bring your forgiveness.

Creator God, we pray that you continue to inform our compassion, be our vision and bring light, hope, and peace to us and to all the world.

Amen

Old Testament Reading Genesis 29: 15-28

During the time of the Coronavirus lockdown, I have somehow managed to fall into the trap of creating a common liturgy in my weekly services and have had some fascinating conversations with people responding to the question I have asked to prompt us to think a little about the passages of scripture. The problem I have is that I have been using the lectionary to start my thought process, which is fine until you end up with a Sunday like today.

I have to confess that this reading makes me feel quite uncomfortable. What I find really challenging about this reading is the way that the daughters of Laban appear to be traded like a commodity. We might well console ourselves by saying "but this was happening in land far away a long time ago when things were very different" and maybe we'd be right, however, bear in mind that trading slaves in this country was acceptable behaviour until 1833 when the abolition of slavery act came into play. That didn't necessarily end people treating one another as commodities and even today people are under the control of others through no fault of their own.

Consider:

- *Reflecting for a moment of the two sisters Leah and Rachel, how do you feel about the way they being treat, by Laban, their father? By Jacob, who appears to be effectively purchasing a wife?*
- *What does this tell you about the role of men in the time of Jacob? And the role of women? Given that centuries of enlightenment have now past, have those views been completely eradicated?*
- *We would possibly like to believe that people are no longer traded as commodities today, can you think of any people who would feel to be under the control of others?*

Hymn: **God of Justice, saviour to all** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3NelRb1LY4>

1. God of Justice, Saviour to all,
came to rescue the weak and the poor;
chose to serve and not be served.
Jesus, you have called us.
Freely we've received, now freely we will give.

*We must go, live to feed the hungry
stand beside the broken, we must go.
Stepping forward, keep us from just singing,
Move us into action, we must go.*

2. To act justly every day,
Loving mercy in every way,
walking humbly before you, God.

You have shown us what you require.
Freely we've received, now freely we will give.

Refrain (sung twice)

Fill us up, send us out,
fill us up, send us out,
fill us up, send us out, Lord
Fill us up, send us out,
fill us up, send us out,
fill us up, send us out, Lord

Refrain

Epistle **Romans 8: 26-39**

One of the books I had to read in preparation for my application for the ministry was Brian Keenan's book "An Evil Cradling" the book is both gruelling and inspiring as Keenan tells his story of being kidnapped and held by fundamentalist Shi'ite militiamen in the suburbs of Beirut for four and half years. Keenan was not an overtly religious man and the book tells of his struggles and torments. We might never find ourselves in the situation Brian Keenan did and for me, I have found eighteen weeks quite difficult.

In a sharp contrast to our previous reading, I love this passage from St Paul's letter to the Romans and I frequently turn to it when I find that I am experiencing some of the tougher times in my life's journey. Paul reminds us that in our times of struggle and discomfort, even agonising pain, God never leaves our side. I often quote this passage in funeral services "nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ and I cling to that Word.

Consider:

- *Imagine how it must have felt as a slave working for hard task masters, simply seeing you as a commodity, rather than another human being and certainly not an equal, to know that in all your experiences, nothing would separate you from God's love.*
- *Can you think of times in your life when you have been far away from God's love? As though God had forsaken you, forgotten you or was ignoring your pain and suffering? Do these words give you hope?*
- *Paul states that in our sufferings, distress, and persecutions we become more than conquerors, because it is then that we know the depth of God's love for us. Can you think of times in your own life when your faith has been deepened during times of adversity?*

Take a time to sit quietly and pray:

We pray for the world around us; for the environment; for peace where there is conflict; for racial and social justice to be seen throughout the world.

We pray for our communities; for those who are shielding; for those who are fearful, for those working for the good of others in many different ways in our community. We pray for all who work in the NHS and for all key workers and those on whom we rely. We pray for our church community as we seek new ways of fulfilling our calling as the Church in these times. We pray for our families, friends, and neighbors. We pray for those who are ill and for those who are struggling financially or emotionally at this time. We pray for those who are grieving as we remember those who have died.

In the stillness we take a moment we bring our prayers to God...

The Lord's Prayer:

Hymn **Have faith in God, My heart** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uBbrwRImEBk>

1. Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
each promise he has made.
2. Have faith in God, my mind,
for when your light burns low;
god's mercy holds a wiser plan
then you can fully know.
3. Have faith in God, my soul;
his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.
4. Lord Jesus, make me whole;
Grant me no resting place,
Until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,
The captive of your grace.

Gospel **Matthew 13: 31-33, 44-52**

Many moons ago when I first started working, I spent the first ten years of my career working for clothing wholesaler and there was a simple rule in pricing that I still remember all these years on. The manufacturer would take the production cost of a garment and mark it up, giving themselves a thirty percent profit margin, wholesalers, like us would get a twenty five percent mark up and retailers a further thirty percent, so everybody was selling at a similar price. By the time I left working in the clothing industry in 2005 our buyers would come into our office and ask "what would you pay for that?" and as a retailer, we would buy brilliant quality men's suits from China at about fifteen quid and mark them up at £199.99, shameful in my opinion.

Today's reading causes me to think "what price would we pay for our faith?" The man in the parable Jesus tell, wants the pearl he finds so much that he will give everything he has to own it. Last Sunday at Elmsett Mike played the song "It is well with my soul" a beautiful hymn written by Horatio G Spafford. I have reflected on this in my Thought for today on the Circuit website www.Methodistic.org.uk also on Facebook and share how when Horatio Spafford had lost almost everything, he still maintained his faith.

Consider:

- *If we truly believe that Christ died on the cross for us and for our salvation, then what price are we prepared to pay?*
- *Maybe today as we move on as Churches the time is right to reflect again on the Methodist Church covenant prayer.*

I am no longer my own but yours. Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will; put me to doing, put me to suffering; let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you, exalted for you, or brought low for you; let me be full, let me be empty, let me have all things, let me have nothing: I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen

- *Often when we think of worship, we think about what we want to receive from God, does worship look different if we consider what we can offer to God?*

Hymn: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kQkzHwz2eLE>

1. 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 this 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?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart
This thankful heart This thankful heart*

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

*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?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart*

We'll bring an offering, unto You an offering
What can I, what can I, what can I sing as an offering, Lord?
I want to please Your heart
What can I give, what can I bring, what can I sing as an offering, Lord?
What can I give, what can I bring, what can I sing as an offering, Lord?
What can I bring to the King of kings?
Oh, what can I give, what can I bring, what can I sing as an offering, Lord?

Simply this 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 this sacrifice of a broken heart
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart

A prayer of blessing

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be upon us, now and always. Amen.