



Opening Prayer

This I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. **Lamentations 3 vv. 21-23**

Hymn: StF 564 O Thou who camest from above <https://youtu.be/fSqcy4JyU7E>

O thou who camest from above
the pure celestial fire to impart,
kindle a flame of sacred love
on the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for thy glory burn
with inextinguishable blaze,
and trembling to its source return,
in humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
to work, and speak, and think for thee;
still let me guard the holy fire,
and still stir up thy gift in me --

Ready for all thy perfect will,
my acts of faith and love repeat,
till death thy endless mercies seal,
and make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Let us pray together

Great God, Weaver of galaxies, Forger of stars, You do not slumber or sleep.

We praise you for Your sustaining love.

Lord Jesus, You shared our human life of work and rest, You loved us to the end and fashioned our salvation from the wood of the cross.

We praise You for your tireless love.

Generous and transforming Spirit, at work in our communities and churches and our lives. We praise You for Your inexhaustible love.

As we lift our hearts to You, we know that we are part of a great multitude, whose voice of prayer is never silent, whose song of praise never dies away. Faithful One, grant us to know Your presence with us now. Amen.

When we have taken You and Your care for granted, *Lord have mercy.*

When we have not responded to Your voice in the need of our neighbour, *Christ have mercy.*

When we have turned away from Your loving and redemptive purpose, *Lord have mercy.*

God sent His Son not to condemn the world but to save it. With joy we receive the gracious word that all our sins are forgiven. May our souls praise our merciful Lord who crowns us with love and compassion. Amen

Today's Reading from the New Testament 2 Timothy 1:1-14

Today's Gospel Reading: Luke 17:5-10

Reflection:

Years ago, we spotted a crane from our lounge window one evening which looked a bit out of place, I went up to the bedroom window to get a better view and realized that the crane was in a local pub carpark and was lifting passengers high into the air in a small cage and people were bungee jumping from the cage, it was my first, and only experience of this activity and was perhaps the point that I decided that anybody paying to do this had serious problems. I'm not particularly good with heights and even the thought of being lifted so high in the air makes my stomach turn. The thought of then plummeting headfirst, at high speed towards a tarmac car park with just an elasticated cord between me and almost certain death is most definitely not my idea of fun, and people were paying for this!!!!

Leaving aside the fear of being suspended from a crane jib in a small cage maybe sixty to eighty feet above ground level, on balance there are just too many uncertainties surrounding this practice that strike fear into me. What happens if somebody hasn't secured the rope correctly? What if they misjudge my height weight ratio and instead of springing back into the air seconds before colliding with an unforgiving surface, the inevitable happens? What if my heart, which so far hasn't let me down, can't cope with the sudden adrenalin rush? Thankfully, I have never had to struggle too long with these thoughts, because common sense always prevails.

I have several friends who have parted with their hard earned cash and put themselves through the agony and they all seem to say the same thing, that moments before jumping, they are more terrified than they have ever been before, yet the moment they relax, the experience is one of the most exhilarating that they have ever felt and when the experience is over, their immediate response was that they wanted to do it again. I worked with a colleague during the mid-nineties whose family gave him a bungee jump experience for his sixty-fifth birthday as present. I didn't see it as being the most generous present ever and asked if they'd recently increased his insurance policy. In all honesty he said to me "the trouble with you is that you don't have enough faith in others" I have reflected on that often since then, how much faith do I have in others? How much faith do I have in God?

We are living through an incredibly difficult period at the moment, living with the fall out of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, people are only just starting to recognise the true impact of the climate crisis, Sterling almost flatlined against the US dollar yesterday, the government is borrowing at an alarming rate, and we face times of inflation and record fuel costs. Church life can be equally depressing, week by week I learn of Church closures, Churches, and circuits on the verge of bankruptcy, having to sell property to make ends meet, not enough ministers to go around and too few people in local churches to be able to fill roles. We have members of our community who haven't returned since the pandemic and if we are not careful, the picture can look bleak.

St Paul is imprisoned because of his faith, he has nailed his colours to the mast, been a good apostle and proclaimed the message of the risen Christ and rather than turning the world to Christ, he is now paying the price by having his liberty taken away from him. What does he do? He sits down in his prison cell and writes to the young disciple Timothy, who is clearly finding the work of his calling challenging and painful, he encourages Timothy through his prayers and his gracious words, reminding the young man of the depth of his faith and the faith of his family around him. Timothy isn't simply doing his important work in his own strength, but in the strength of the God who has called him and who has given him the example through Christ Jesus.

These are challenging days and if we're not careful the future can look incredibly bleak, I make a point of trying to thank people for the work they do in the life of the Church. I am truly thankful that as God has called me to give up my life in the world of business and train for the ministry, I don't stand alone in this role, but am surrounded by some of the most creative and imaginative people I could ever want to work with. I meet people almost on a daily basis who have faith in God, more than sufficient to keep the Church alive. I see people working tirelessly, negotiation their way through some of the most challenging times we have experienced in generations, I see people stepping out in faith to explore new and creative models of ministry and rather than seeing a Church that is dying, I see a Church that is alive and proclaiming the Gospel in fresh ways.

Whenever we are reading from the Bible, I believe that we should always set a particular passage within its context. Jesus has been teaching the disciples during the previous chapters in today's gospel story and the message has been tough for people to deal with, maybe that is why the disciples appear to feel totally inadequate and ask Jesus to increase their faith. Humility is perhaps one of the greatest gifts the Christian should have in our toolboxes. In a world where we are surrounded by people who are full of their own self-importance, enjoy bragging about how clever they are, and swagger around expecting folk to worship the ground they walk on, I believe that the Christian needs to be very different.

In the reading from Luke, Jesus reminds the disciple's that the true Christian is a servant to others. I remember one minister who used to preach frequently at our Church back in Bradford during the days when I was a Church steward. I used to hate being on duty when he was preaching, he would sweat profusely in the vestry, would physically shake, and would make me feel nervous as the time to set off into the Church got closer. I used to wonder why he put himself through the agony. Once in the pulpit, he was brilliant and was perhaps one of our best preachers, although I guess he never saw himself in that light. Since becoming a minister, myself, I wish that I had got in touch after his services and told him how much I appreciated his preaching, I never did. I understand now, what I didn't back then, worship was of paramount importance to him, and I guess that he never felt worthy enough to stand before a congregation and proclaim the gospel message.

Humility and service are so often seen today as being signs of inferiority and even weakness, but like the disciples of old, it is in our weakness and insecurity that we can only turn to God and put our trust in him. There are so many occasions in our lives when we put our faith in others, trusting them to look after our best interests and the problem we have is that bitter experience has shown us over and over again that we can be let down and rather than being interested in us, their primary objective is to look after themselves. God is different, he always has our interests at heart and all he asks of us is to have faith in him.

To Ponder:

- Can you remember times in your own life when you have been forced to rely completely on God, maybe a time when you have stepped out to tackle something that you feel unprepared for, maybe when you have found your back against the wall. How did this make you feel?
- When did you last thank somebody properly for something they did for you? How easily do you show your appreciation for others, more than just a cursory word?
- How do you structure your prayers? Do you reel off a long list of demands on God? Do you focus on what you want God to do for you? How often do you thank him for what he has done for you? Or tell him how much he means to you?

A time of prayer

Let us hold in prayer our world, created in beauty, redeemed at measureless cost, touched and transformed by God's Spirit.

May God give wisdom to all in authority that they may serve the welfare of people and planet, uphold justice and defend the vulnerable.

May God give deliverance to those whose lives are broken by war and oppression, poverty and disaster.

May God give guidance and hope to all who seek a way forward in their lives, the lives of their communities and the life of the Church.

May God give comfort and healing to broken hearts and bodies.

May God give us assurance of God's presence all our days, renew our faith, hope and love and sustain us and all God's faithful people until we see God face to face. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn StF 661 Give me the faith <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3aHhmjngk8>

Give me the faith which can remove
And sink the mountain to a plain;
Give me the childlike praying love,
Which longs to build thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'er-power,
And all my simple soul devour.

I would the precious time redeem,
And longer live for this along,
To spend and to be spent for them
Who have not yet my Saviour known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe, to breathe thy love.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
Into thy blessed hands receive;
And let me live to preach thy word,
And let me to thy glory live;
My every sacred moment spend
In publishing the sinner's Friend.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless charity divine,
So shall I all my strength exert,
And love them with a zeal like thine,
And lead them to thy open side,
The sheep for whom the Shepherd died.

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

A prayer of blessing

May God surround you, sustain you and renew you. In your waiting and working, may God increase in you faith, hope and love and assure you that you are never alone, **Amen.**