



## Call to Worship

Today we reflect on a reading that contains one of the best known texts, and another that is a source of comfort and stability.

Let us worship God, Let us give thanks to God, Let us rejoice in God, Let us be exceedingly glad.

**Hymn - How pleased and blest was I** Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ra92hWTkaME>

How pleased and blest was I  
To hear the people cry,  
Come, let us seek our God today!  
Yes, with a cheerful zeal  
We haste to Zion's hill,  
And there our vows and honours pay.

Zion, thrice happy place,  
Adorned with wondrous grace,  
And walls of strength embrace thee round;  
In thee our tribes appear,  
To pray, and praise, and hear  
The sacred gospel's joyful sound.

There David's greater Son  
Has fixed his royal throne,  
He sits for grace and judgement there;  
He bids the saint be glad,

*Isaac Watts (1674–1748) from Psalm 122 Hymns and Psalms 497*

## Prayer

Lord God, we are both pleased and blessed, Glad to worship,  
Glad to be a part of your permanence,  
Strengthened and loved.

We pray that as we read and pray, As well as finding comfort,  
We may be disturbed by your Spirit,  
Fired up for service and life.

We confess that we like stability, Disturbance is hard.  
We confess that we can be resistance to change,  
Unless it is our idea.

As we repent of our selfish ways, Forgive us,  
Help us find other ways, new ways, better ways,  
Fulness of life in you.

## Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not in to temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

### **Hymn - I look towards the hills**

I look towards the hills;  
can they bring help to birth?  
My help comes from the Lord himself,  
who made the heaven and earth.

The Lord will keep you safe,  
the Lord will be your shade.  
Of sun or moon or deadly curse  
you need not be afraid.

He will not let you slide,  
your keeper will not sleep,  
for Israel's Lord will never tire,  
who has us in his keep.

The Lord will keep your soul,  
from evil at your door.  
The Lord will keep you day by day,  
both now and evermore.

*Adam Carlill (born 1966) based on Psalm 121 © 2018 Adam Carlill  
Psalms for the Common Era 224b*

### **Reading – Psalm 121 A song of ascents.**

I lift up my eyes to the mountains – where does my help come from?  
My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.  
He will not let your foot slip – he who watches over you will not slumber;  
indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord watches over you – the Lord is your shade at your right hand;  
the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.  
The Lord will keep you from all harm – he will watch over your life;  
the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and for evermore.

### **Reading - John 3:1-17 Jesus teaches Nicodemus**

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.' Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. 'Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!'

Jesus answered, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' 'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked. 'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things? <sup>11</sup>Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven – the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.' For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

### **Hymn - *Breathe on me breath of God* Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afJqt09ujyg>**

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,  
till I am wholly thine;  
until this earthly part of me  
glows with thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,  
until my heart is pure;  
until with thee I will one will,  
to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God:  
so shall I never die,  
but live with thee the perfect life  
of thine eternity.

## Sermon

**John 3:8 – The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it came from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.**

There is a fine line between spontaneity and erratic behaviour.

In our faith many of us will greatly value the stability that we find in God in a world where daily life can feel precarious and unstable.

### **Background and illustration**

I recently travelled to Scotland for work. The train journey is one of the best and the times all fitted together perfectly, until storm Otto intervened and made the journey back something of a trial. So often in life there is an overlay of disturbance on plans that are solid.

If you type 'which is the best known verse in the Bible' into an internet browser, the answer returned may well be 'John 3:16'.

John 3:16 is comforting because of what it says about God's love for us and the gift of His Son as Redeemer. The solid plan for the future.

We read Psalm 121. One of the Songs of Ascent, the first two verses are intensely personal:

*I will lift my eyes...  
My help comes from there...*

The in verse three, the style become reassuringly second person and refers to you, the nation and the protection offered from the risks around. The solid plan for protection.

### **When the wind blows**

Jesus's words to the Disciples were so true.

We know the general direction of the wind by watching a weathervane or the movement of trees. We can also tell a north easterly wind by its edge or a south-westerly by its warmth and moist feel but that is about as far as it goes.

The wind can swing round suddenly if the weather is changeable, it can come and go in strength and when it really gets up speed, it is untameable and dangerous.

We can use the wind to our advantage and make it our friend, or we can resist it and risk being frustrated or even hurt by it.

The word in Greek that is used in the verse we are focused on means both wind and spirit.

People have experiences of God that tell us that if we go with the flow we can be greatly blessed and gain energy that is not from within ourselves; if we resist we spend ourselves until exhaustion takes over and we are drained.

The Reformation Study Bible notes, in respect of this verse, that the key is the priority and sovereignty of God in Salvation, but the reality of human response is still the overlay that can disrupt God's disruption.

### **Question**

Are we too predictable in our routines and responses or is there space for the disruptive overlay of God on the solid base of the assurances he has given?

Is he sovereign in our Salvation or are we constantly trying to mould God to our terms?

If you aren't sure of the answer ask yourself whether your life for Christ is exciting and energising or exhausting and draining – your response may give you a clue about whether you are with the wind or trying to withstand it.

*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it came from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*

**Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession**

God of the covenant,  
you call us to be fruitful servants within creation,  
and to offer our lives  
as the foundation of your realm.  
We lay before you the desires of our hearts,  
that we may be transformed by their fulfilment.

*In quiet, think about the things that are on your mind*

- *Disaster zones in the world*
- *War zones in the world*
- *What is going on around you in the community*
- *People in your family*
- *Your own life and the development of your faith*

Grant, O God, that the prayers we offer  
may be your channel for new and abundant life  
not only hoped for,  
but worked for,  
through faithful word and deed. **Amen.**

*Reprinted from Revised Common Lectionary Prayers, copyright © 2002 Consultation on Common Texts*

**Hymn - To God be the glory** watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SusuTxyFW-A>

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,  
Who 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!*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,  
To every believer the promise of God!  
And every offender who truly believes,  
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives:  
Chorus

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 rapture, when Jesus we see:  
Chorus

*Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820–1915) Singing the Faith 94*

### **The Grace**

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