



### Opening Prayer

“Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord” (Psalm 150 v 6)

### Hymn: Let all the world in every corner sing (StF57)

<https://youtu.be/PfXldoDnvq4>

Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!  
The heavens are not too high,  
his praise may thither fly;  
the earth is not too low,  
his praises there may grow.  
Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!

Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!  
The Church with psalms must shout,  
no door can keep them out;  
but above all, the heart  
must bear the longest part.  
Let all the world in every corner sing:  
my God and King!

*George Herbert (1593-1633)*

### Let us pray together.

#### **Read Psalm 150, followed by these prayers of adoration and confession.**

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise for the works of your creation in all its wonder and richness of diversity, a window for us to see who you are. Majestic, awe-inspiring, beyond understanding, the source of being. We wonder at you, as we wonder at your world. We especially give you praise and thanks for your son, Jesus. We wonder at how you revealed yourself in him and went through the agony of death on the cross that we can know you. We wonder also at the many talents and different characteristics that you have bestowed on each of us today through your Spirit, which lead to acts of amazing creativity and kindness. You have shown us how there can be such strength in both togetherness and diversity, just as there is within the Trinity. Forgive us then when we fail to use the gifts you have given us, when we deny those talents in others and prevent them becoming the people you intended, when we fail to work together with others to achieve your purposes. Help us to know the freedom of forgiveness and to be open channels of your love and grace to others. Amen

**Read Psalm 150 again, this time out loud with rising gusto if you can!**

#### **Reading Acts 8: 26-40**

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian<sup>[a]</sup> eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.” The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of

the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

### **Reflection:**

*About twenty years ago, our local Church decided to spend a year preaching through the Acts of the Apostles and the thing that never ceases to amaze me how courageous the early disciples were and this little story about Philip is one such occurrence. I am always impressed that Philip does as the angel instructs, ridiculous as it sounds, how with wisdom he reveals scripture to the stranger and baptizes the man. I wonder how many of us would be so obedient to God's calling? In this reading Philip becomes an evangelist.*

### **Consider:**

- *What springs to your mind when you hear the word "evangelist? Is it the bloke in the town centre spouting Bible passages? Is it one of the great evangelical preachers like Billy Graham or J John?*
- *Who do you believe is responsible for evangelism in your local Church? Is it the responsibility of the minister? There has been an attitude in the past that if we have a decent minister, the Church will grow. Phillip gets alongside the man and reveals scripture to him.*
- *Reflect for a moment how you witness your faith to others. Do you speak about your faith? Do you try to mirror the life of Christ in the things you do?*

### **Hymn: We have a Gospel to proclaim (StF 418)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-SPYAgCtkw>

We have a gospel to proclaim,  
good news for all throughout the earth;  
the Gospel of a Saviour's name:  
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem,  
not in a royal house or hall,  
but in a stable dark and dim,  
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary:  
Hated by those he came to save,  
In lonely suffering on the cross,  
For all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:  
Empty the tomb, for he was free.  
He broke the power of death and hell  
That we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,  
By all creation glorified.  
He sends his Spirit on his Church  
To live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:  
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.  
This gospel message we proclaim:  
We sing his glory, tell his worth.

### **Bible Reading: John 15: 1-8**

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes<sup>[a]</sup> so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

## Reflection

*When I come across a familiar passage of scripture like this, I often find that it is helpful to ask the question “what was Jesus trying to teach his disciples?” The most common approach to the story of the vine and the branches is to talk about relationships, being connected to one another and to God and I have preached on that theme myself many times over the years. But as I look at this afresh, the key theme is that being nourished by the Father, our purpose is to bear much fruit. This brings us back to the whole issue of Evangelism again.*

*I grew up attending a village Chapel with my parents and brother. About the same time as I was born, the second Chapel closed, and the two societies joined together. There were over a hundred children in the Sunday School and a Church membership well in excess of a hundred people. Like the majority of Churches across our land, that Church is facing the very real threat of closure.*

## Consider:

- *What went wrong? I guess that with the exception of two or three of us, the majority of children in that West Yorkshire Methodist Chapel don't go anywhere near a church anymore? Why do you think that the Church has been steadily haemorrhaging members for the last fifty years?*
- *I'm not intending to take you on a guilt trip, the world has changed dramatically over those fifty years, try to think about the outside influences that have had a massive impact on Church life.*
- *Is the Church beyond the point of no return in your view? If we are called to be evangelists, how do we make that work in our own time and place? The Church is in a time of transition as we start to recover from Covid, this is our opportunity to prayerfully shape a Church, to be fit for the next fifty years. How can we be that Church?*

## Prayers of concern

Loving, Lord God, help each of us to abide in you and produce fruit, not any old fruit, but the best fruit we can. Prune us back, remove those areas of our lives that get in the way of each other and help us to concentrate on the things you have truly called us to do. Help us to realize the gifts you have given us and how best to use them for your Kingdom.

Loving, Lord God may your Church be a window to you, that the world may see your love for all people in action. Bring an end to bickering, nit-picking and in-fighting. Unite your Church, give it a voice to challenge injustice and act with kindness. Make it a safe space, where people can reach their potential and work together. Help it to grow in love and produce rich fruit in abundance.

Loving, Lord God, we bring our world and local communities to you. So much conflict, hurt and suffering. We think of those mourning loved ones, those who feel isolated and cut off from family and friends due to the pandemic, those who live in fear for whatever reason. Bring the fruit of healing and peace to their place of need and instill in us a desire to be the answer to that prayer today. Amen.

## The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father .....*

## Hymn: O thou who camest from above – StF564

<https://youtu.be/PfDJL2CGQ9w>

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)*

## Blessing

May the Lord bless you and make his face to shine upon you; may he water you with his love, that you grow in him and bless others with rich fruitful lives. **Amen.**