



Call to Worship – Come let us worship God, the Holy Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

Hymn - STF 32 - Meet and right it is to sing in every time and place Watch on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N30zxMWUWUDU>

Meet and right it is to sing,
in every time and place,
glory to our heavenly King,
the God of truth and grace :
join we then with sweet accord,
all in one thanksgiving join ;
holy, holy, holy Lord,
eternal praise be thine.

Thee the first-born sons of light,
in choral symphonies,
praise by day, day without night,
and never, never cease ;
angels and archangels all
praise the mystic Three in One,
sing, and stop, and gaze, and fall
o'erwhelmed before thy throne.

Charles Wesley (1707–1788)

Vying with that happy choir,
who chant thy praise above,
we on eagles' wings aspire,
the wings of faith and love :
thee they sing with glory crowned,
we extol the slaughtered Lamb ;
lower if our voices sound,
our subject is the same.

Father, God, thy love we praise,
which gave thy Son to die ;
Jesus, full of truth and grace,
alike we glorify ;
Spirit, Comforter divine,
praise by all to thee be given ;
till we in full chorus join,
and earth is turned to heaven.

Prayer

Almighty God, we come before you in gratitude for all that you have done for us; we thank you for your many blessings. We do not pray as if we were magicians, seeking a mysterious power; for we know you, God, through your Son; in him we raise to you all our concerns, and know that you will deal with them. Bless us now, as we gather before you. **Amen.**

Lord, forgive us for being selfish in prayer; for thinking only of our own concerns; for failing to thank you before we ask for more; for asking the wrong things, in the wrong way, so many times. We confess our unworthiness to receive any answer, and yet we know that you will hear us. **Amen.**

Scripture: Mark 9: 38 – 50

“Teacher,” said John, “we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us.” “Do not stop him,” Jesus said. “For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, for whoever is not against us is for us. Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward. “If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.’ Everyone will be salted with fire. “Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other.”

Reflection - Whoever is not against us is for us

John, who was one of the three apostles that was with Jesus when he was transfigured, reported: “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us (Mark 9:38).” Jesus was not interested in stopping those outside his inner circle from doing great works. “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us (Mark 9:39-40).” It is important to know that this passage follows a larger discussion about which disciple is the greatest (9:33-37). Jesus said that, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all (Mark 9:35).” He then took up a child in his

arms. Children were not valued as they are today – they gained value as they grew able to work. Children did not have first access to resources. But Jesus took this marginalized member of society and said, “Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me (9:37).”

Having described a situation in which servanthood and acceptance of the marginalized are the true hallmarks of a disciple, can there be any wonder that in the context of this story Jesus would expect his disciples to abandon jealousy and rivalry for inclusion and acceptance?

When the disciples told Jesus they had stopped an outsider from healing others in the name of Jesus, Jesus responded, “Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward (9:40-41).” A cup of cold water in the name of Jesus just like Matthew 25, where Jesus at the last judgment told those who fed, clothed, visited or gave a drink to the least of these did it for Jesus. That is the living word of God, which we find in the Bible.

There was a time when everyone assumed their own denomination was the one true church and everyone else in every Christian denomination was going to hell. Now during that same period, a whole generation was inspired to take the gospel throughout the world. Young people became missionaries and preached about Jesus in different countries, far from home, far from the comforts of those homes, far from family and friends.

For the most part, the missionaries didn’t take their denominational bickering to the front lines of evangelism. They worked together because they recognized far from home that the things that separated them were not as important as they were led to believe! They realized they were one in Christ.

It’s the same when we’re engaged in ecumenical ministries like soup kitchens, domestic violence shelters, community programs for children, and the like. At a time like that, we have to say, as Jesus did, that whoever is not against us is for us. We don’t ask for a litmus test, and thank heavens, the needs are so great that no one asks us if we measure up either. We’re simply broken people helping other broken people, sharing a cup of cold water in the name of Jesus. People outside our church, even outside our faith, may be doing God’s work, and we should not stop it. The front lines of ministry are no place for protecting what we imagine is our territory. We’ll leave it for God to decide who’s saved. After all, the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.

But Jesus has more to say in this passage and it is stark.

“If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched (9:42-48).”

Jesus is using this example not only for children, the most vulnerable members of society, but also the most vulnerable in our communities. That includes people with post-traumatic stress disorder, degenerative diseases, emotional handicaps, senior citizens, those unable to make reasoned choices, leaving them vulnerable to those who want to take advantage of them — you make your own list. People who prey upon others must heed that warning about a giant millstone. These are the people who need to hear that whoever is not for Jesus is against him, so they know when they harm the vulnerable, they show they are against Jesus.

These verses are not for those who are suffering, who can’t make sense of their lives, who need to know that despite their confusion, if they are not against Jesus, Jesus already takes their side.

Finally, Jesus talks about salt — salt is both a seasoning and a preservative. It was connected with rites of purification and ritual offerings in Leviticus. We are salted by the obstacles we have encountered and sometimes overcome. We are salted by our service in the name of Christ, and in our offerings. “Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another” (Mark 9:50) Jesus tells us. Know that we are all salted, all broken in different ways, and yet in our suffering and struggles we are on the side of Jesus, and we are fit for service in his name.

Don’t worry about the small stuff that separates us as believers from one another. We are on a great team! We are part of the Lord’s people. We are one in Christ. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercession

God of our salvation, we pray for the members of Christ's body, the church, asking your help for those who are in any kind of trouble: who are anxious or have been bereaved; whose relationships are in difficulties, or who have financial problems; for those bowed down by guilt or regret; for those being punished for serving you.

We pray for ...

Loving God: hear our prayers for one another.

God of our salvation, we pray for the members of Christ's body, the church, asking your healing for those who are ill: some unable to be with us; some with a long-term illness; for those who are in hospital; for those facing treatment; for those terminally ill; for those sick in mind or spirit.

We pray for... .

Loving God: hear our prayers for one another.

God of our salvation, we pray for the members of Christ's body, the church, asking for the gift of your Spirit for those finding the Christian life hard: who are questioning their own faith and beliefs or are afraid to wholly commit themselves; who are distracted by other priorities or feel their religion has gone flat; for those unable to get along with one another; for those in danger of falling away.

We pray for ...

Loving God: hear our prayers for one another.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Our Father, who art in heaven

STF 611 - Brother, sister, let me serve you – Watch on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO92Lw9v8PE>

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road ;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear ;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping ;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you ;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you ;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

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Blessing

The blessing of Almighty God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be with you and those you love, this day and for ever more. **Amen**