



Call to Worship - Jeremiah 17:7-8

'But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.'

Hymn STF455 : All my hope on God is founded Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3LCGh02Vew>

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,

beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.

Joachim Neander (1650-1680) paraphrased Robert Bridges (1844-1930)

Prayer : *For Day 16 from the Methodist Church Prayer Handbook, Praise and Protest.*

We give thanks to God - Father Son and Holy Spirit – who is always on the move, always going ahead of us, at work in this world, restoring, renewing and transforming lives.

We confess that we are often blind to the work of God, too preoccupied with our own circumstances and perspectives to see God's bigger picture. We are thankful that, through the victory of Jesus on the cross, our sight can be restored and our lives transformed. We pray for the strength to live as transformed people and church communities in our everyday lives, showing and sharing the grace of God to those around us.

We pray especially for the Methodist Church in Ireland as it continues to serve its neighbours in a society and culture which understands less and less of the gospel story. We pray for courage and creative risk taking as we plant new communities of faith among those who know least about the good news of Jesus. We pray the church will work for reconciliation, to bring hope and justice to those in society who are in greatest need. We pray for its work among children and young people especially as it seeks to reach the next generation.

May each of us carry the gospel of Jesus as a treasure in an ordinary clay jar, all to the glory of God. Amen.

John Alderdice, President, Methodist Church in Ireland © The Methodist Church

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 into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Responsive Reading – Psalm 1

Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers.

Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Introduction to theme - Appearances

In a time of drought, even in temperate Suffolk, we start to worry about the shrubs in the garden wilting and worry that we may lose them. In my experience many are more resistant than we think. They appear to be drought stressed. Any plant growing near fresh water which is never without the moisture it needs always appears to be thriving. In our service today we are reminding ourselves what lies at the heart of what we believe; the running water that allows us to thrive even in otherwise adverse circumstances.

Hymn STF617 : O blessed spring, where word and sign Watch on YouTube <https://youtu.be/4r7YVJdKhl8?si=EoZTnWJVSc2mACF>

O blessed spring, where Word and sign
Embrace us into Christ the Vine:
Here Christ enjoins each one to be
A branch of this life-giving Tree.

Through summer heat of youthful years,
Uncertain faith, rebellious tears,
Sustained by Christ's infusing rain,
The boughs will shout for joy again.

When autumn cools and youth is cold,
When limbs their heavy harvest hold,

Then through us, warm, the Christ will move
With gifts of beauty, wisdom, love.

As winter comes, as winters must,
We breathe our last, return to dust;
Still held in Christ, our souls take wing
And trust the promise of the spring.

Christ, holy Vine, Christ, living Tree,
Be praised for this blest mystery:
That Word and water thus revive
And join us to your Tree of Life.

Readings - 1 Corinthians 15:12-20 and Luke 6:17-26

Hymn STF244 : Blessed are the pure in heart Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8h3fvk9wGY>

Blest are the pure in heart,
for they shall see our God:
the secret of the Lord is theirs;
their soul is Christ's abode.

The Lord who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,
to dwell on earth in lowliness,
our pattern and our king.

Still to the lowly soul
he doth himself impart,
and for his dwelling and his throne
chooses the pure in heart.

Lord, we your presence seek,
a vision of your face;
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple of your grace.

v 1 and 3 John Keble (1792-1866) and vv 2 and 4 William John Hall (1793-1861)

Sermon - No resurrection? (1 Corinthians 15:13)

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised.

In our service today we are reminding ourselves what lies at the heart of what we believe; the running water that allows us to thrive even in otherwise adverse circumstances. That imagery has its roots in the words of Jeremiah that were our call to worship, and Psalm 1 that we read together. The Psalmist likens the law of the Lord to that running water.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul unpacks a similar theme but centres it on core belief in the resurrection of the dead. Without that, he writes, what point is there to Christianity? Why would anyone, ever have suffered hardship

voluntarily in the cause of the Church? Why would anyone have a sense that bereavement is about separation, not an ending? There is no sense in living by different values now if tomorrow is a myth.

When I was in my early twenties the Right Reverend David Jenkins was consecrated as Bishop of Durham. David Jenkins had rocked the boat by questioning how we see the Resurrection (of Jesus). He argued that it was more symbolic than literal. A veritable storm blew up and then, when York Minster roof suffered a fire shortly after the bishop had been enthroned, it was interpreted as a sign of judgement on the individual and the church for allowing such heresy.

For people at the time this appeared to be a challenge to the reality of Jesus, a challenge to the hope of an afterlife and unacceptable – the wave of popular commentary lost sight of the many ordinary people who may well see much of what is handed down as symbolic. Those who troubled to read and listen to more of what David Jenkins wrote and said found that he did believe in the Living God and did witness to his power among us, but not in the same literal way as some popular opinion thought that he should.

Ironically, a by-product of the storm in the Durham teacup and the fire in roof of York Minster was that it got people talking about the Resurrection of Jesus, many of whom who may not have thought about it before. Paul writes, if there is no resurrection of the dead, then even Christ has not been raised and goes onto argue that all of faith is empty and pointless. Jesus was a dead man and faithful people are deluded. 1984 is a long time ago. What do you believe now?

People in Corinth far further back argued that there was no resurrection of the dead. Paul countered by making clear that this was contrary to the proclamation that Christ was raised. 1 Corinthians 15 is the classic chapter about the Resurrection. Paul heard what was said and went on to:

- 1) Cite eyewitnesses, including his own experience, of the real existence of Christ; and
- 2) Argue the validity of the resurrection of all believers from the fact of the resurrection of Christ.

We who preach Christ Crucified (for our sake) must acknowledge that without the Resurrection, the Crucifixion was powerless, with it, the Crucifixion is the most powerful act of God in human history. This is something about which it is difficult to be ambivalent.

In the Gospel reading, Luke's record of the Sermon on the Plain contains teachings about being blessed in adversity and needing to worry about luxury. That is an oversimplification of some wonderful sayings of Jesus and their deep meaning for us, but in this context, it seems reasonable to extend Paul's line to say that without a Resurrection why bother with any of it? So why do we bother?

In a typical summer the garden stays green, the colours in the hedgerows are as they should be and the trees bear their leaves for the full season. I remember years of significant drought as well; 1976 is etched on my memory as the year I took my 'O' levels and the year in which the seasons went adrift. The prolonged drought that began in mid-1975 led to a poor harvest, brown grass, wilted shrubs and premature autumn leaf loss. That year illustrated the Psalmist's point that when there is a ready water supply, leaves remain green for the right time.

Thus can life be illustrated. For so much of the time the days come and they go, things happen and all is normal, however normal is defined. Then there are the other times, the ones when everything seems to be falling apart whether because of physical illness, relationships, mental health. The more our mortality is brought into focus the greater the desire to find a solution to the fear that surrounds it and dries us up.

When we face the big crises of life, we realise that no amount of hyperbole, no self-gratification, nothing can keep the leaves green on the tree because there is a drought. Poor, hungry, weeping, hated and rejected people find a new blessing in God, Jesus said. There is a rebalancing to come which means it is not those enjoying the excess, the hyperbole and the self-gratification of daily life stay fresh but those who have found a deeper water source.

That alternative source is founded in the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the point, basis and meaning of faith. Look around at appearances. Notice the people who seem to remain alive even when all the odds of mortality are against them. That in our context is what this means – just because there is a spiritual drought prevailing generally not everyone must gasp for life.

Are your roots in the water of life, ever fresh because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?

Amen.

Hymn STF639 : Through the love of God our Saviour Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gQSNZ92NV7o>

Through the love of God our Saviour
all will be well.

Free and changeless is his favour;
all, all is well.

Precious is the blood that healed us,
perfect is the grace that sealed us,
strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;
all must be well.

Though we pass through tribulation,
all will be well.

Ours is such a full salvation,
all, all is well.

Happy still in God confiding,
fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
all must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;
all will be well.

Faith can sing through days of sorrow
All, all is well.

On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
or in living or in dying,
all must be well.

Mary Peters (1813-1856)

Prayers of Intercession : God, you root those who trust in you by streams of healing water. Release us from the bonds of disease, free us from the power of evil, and turn us from falsehood and illusion, that we may find the blessing of new life in you through the power of Christ. Amen. *Revised Common Lectionary, Copyright © 1992 Consultation on Common Texts. Used by permission.*

Using your own words, pray for the people of your fellowship, your community and your family.

In silence, reflect on the news headlines today and the needs of the people behind the stories.

Pray for the mission, outreach and pastoral care of your church and ask God to bless your part in it, each person individually.

Rooted in God

Holy God, Source of all life, Keep us rooted in you. May we draw deeply from the stream of your Word; May we be nourished by your love and guidance; May we bear good fruits as a blessing to others; May we offer shelter and healing. Let us not be led astray by easy answers Or shallow arguments; Let us not be tempted by idle amusement Or distracted by too much comfort.

When we are in distress, or worried about the future, Remind us of your promise of hope. When we are happy and fulfilled, Remind us of our need of each other and of you.

Holy God, Source of all life, Keep us rooted in you, Now and always. *Sue McCoan ©The United Reformed Church*

Hymn STF351 : In Christ alone! Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_063OI38RQ

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

There in the ground His body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am His and He is mine -
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied -
for every sin on Him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from His hand;
till He returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Stuart Townend (born 1963) and Keith Getty (born 1974)

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.