



### **Call to Worship**

Eternal God, source of all blessing, help us to worship you with all our heart and mind and strength; for you alone are God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

**Hymn - STF 57** - Let all the world in every corner sing:

Watch on YouTube : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfXldoDnvq4&list=RDPfXldoDnvq4&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfXldoDnvq4&list=RDPfXldoDnvq4&start_radio=1)

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)*

### **Prayers of Adoration & Thanksgiving**

God of grace and growth, in this season of Lent and with spring blossoming all around us, we bring to you in word, music and prayer, our desire to change for the better – trusting in your patience, rooting ourselves in your Scriptures, believing in your love, appreciating the limitations of time, and celebrating the gift of life and all that there is to look forward to.

God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, you nurture and nourish the soil of our lives, you watch over us patiently and expectantly, you fill us with the nutrients we need in order to grow, and you rejoice when we too, nurture, protect and watch over others. We praise you, living God, that through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus, we have the chance to begin again, as we learn from his words; we have the opportunity to flourish, as we follow in his footsteps; we have the calling to serve, as we grow in his likeness; we have the time to do what is ours to do, as we trust his promises – slowly but surely, day by day. **Amen..**

**Scripture:** Luke 13: 1 - 9

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.”

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. So, he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’

“‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”

## Reflection - Luke 13 : 1 – 9 God Doesn't Ask A Fig Tree To Produce Bananas

A man borrowed a book from a friend. As he read through it, he was intrigued to find parts of the book underlined with the letters YBH written in the margin. When he returned the book to the owner, he asked what the YBH meant. The owner replied that the underlined paragraphs were sections of the book that he basically agreed with. They gave him hints on how to improve himself and pointed out truths that he wished to incorporate into his life. However, the letters YBH stood for "Yes, but how?"

Those three letters could be written on the margins of our souls: "I ought to know how to take better care of myself, but how?" "I know I ought to spend more time in scripture reading and prayer, but how?" "I know I ought to be more sensitive to others, more loving of my wife, more understanding of the weaknesses of others, but how?" These are all good qualities and we know that, but how can we acquire them? As Christian people we know the kind of life we ought to live, and most of us have the best of intentions to do so, but how? We are afraid because we know where the road paved with only good intentions leads!

This morning, we hear Jesus' parable of the fig tree, telling us to repent and bear good fruit. We know what the Christian life requires of us and yet, if we are honest with ourselves, we also know how far short we fall. So, the question that confronts us this morning is: "Yes, but how?"

"Repent," Jesus says. "Acknowledge your sinfulness." That's the first step in beginning to live the Christian life. None of us is without fault. And yet how difficult it is for us to admit that. We know better than to openly admit our wrongs. If we want to get ahead in this world and be accepted by others, it's generally better to conceal our shortcomings and put on a good front for others.

Who goes into a job interview and declares, "I have to tell you. I have a habit of missing work, of criticizing my supervisors and others, and I enjoy listening to office gossip?" Who goes on a date and confesses to the other person, "Listen. I have to tell you I tend to be difficult to live with and I can be a real bore at times"? However imperfect we may be, we've learned from life around us that it's better not to parade our imperfections out in public. As the little girl said to her classmate who had to sit in the corner, "To err is human, but to admit it is just plain stupid!"

How ironic it is then, that Jesus would tell us to repent. Instead of offering a word of support and understanding for our all-too-human tendency to cover up our wrongdoings, Jesus tells us to disclose the evil within us, to admit that we have failed. The apostle John tells us the same thing very clearly when he writes, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Whoever we are, whatever we do, we all share one thing in common and that is that we are sinful. Saint Augustine once wrote, "Whatever we are, we are not what we ought to be." Mark Twain, with his characteristic sense of humour, tells us how he understands that when he wrote, "Man was made at the end of the week, when God was tired."

Repent, Jesus says, for that's the first step in the Christian life. Confess your sins before God and receive God's forgiveness. In that sense, confession is good for the soul, true confession, not the kind of glib admission that says, "Sure I've sinned. Who hasn't?" True confession that begins with a heartfelt remorse, a feeling of failure to live up to God's love and a desire to reform. "Blessed are those who mourn," Jesus said, and part of what he was speaking about is those who feel the pain of a guilty conscience and grieve in the awareness that we have failed to live up to the expectations of God and those around us.

Confession is good for the soul -- yes, we know that -- but how can we develop a true sense of heartfelt remorse for our sinfulness and a real desire to change our ways? Most of us are willing to confess our sins as long as we don't have to change. We are willing to admit to a blemish or two on our moral complexion but nothing that cannot be cosmetically covered up with a coating of good manners. None of us wants to admit that our sinfulness may require reconstructive surgery!

The truth of our moral and spiritual condition becomes evident only when we compare ourselves to Jesus. In the light of his life, our lives look awful! Sure, terrible wrongdoing, grisly crimes, sins of passion and violence may not be part of our personal history -- but what about our neglect of the poor, our passive acceptance of injustice toward others, our silence in the face of hurtful gossip, our failure to reverence God as we ought? When we look at our lives in the light of Jesus' love, even our best, our righteousness is, as the Scriptures tell us, like "filthy rags."

Confession is good for the soul, we know that, and it is the first step in beginning to live the Christian life, and the recognition that without God we are incomplete. We need to repent of our sinfulness, receive God's forgiveness, and produce the fruit that God desires. We need the spiritual strength and renewal the confession can give us.

Remember, Jesus is not demanding anything that we cannot produce. He doesn't ask the fig tree to produce bananas. He doesn't expect the fig tree to grow as tall as an oak or be fragrant as a cedar. He is only asking it to be what it is, to do what it ought: produce figs. You and I have differing gifts. Some have wonderful singing voices. Others have graceful bodies. Some are artists, others are good with numbers, and others still are good with people. Each of us has our own unique gifts. And the miracle that happens is that through repentance and forgiveness, those gifts are released for the good of God and others around us.

When we acknowledge our sinfulness and receive God's forgiveness, God releases us from the power of sin. And only when we are free from sin do we have the possibility to become who God has created us to be -- children of God, young and old, each able to produce the fruits of faith.

So, what's the answer to our question, "Yes, but how?" How do we live the life of faith we are called to live as followers of Christ? How can we do what we ought to do? The key to living the life "worthy of our calling" as children of God is to remember that God has already set us free! In Christ Jesus I am free! I am free to be who God has made me to be. It is up to me to get on with it. I only need allow Christ to live in me and take control of my life.

Sometimes we think that when we give up control of our lives to Christ, we are no longer responsible for them. But just the opposite is true. When we turn our lives over to God, allow Christ to direct us, then we become truly responsible for ourselves.

Jesus' parable of the fig tree calls us to take responsibility for ourselves, for God gives us the key. Repent, Jesus says. Confess your sins and allow the power of God to live within you. Allow God to enable us to live as we ought. Let Jesus take possession of us and live in him.

When our hearts and minds are tied to the Spirit of Christ, when we have been released from sin by repentance and forgiveness, when we hold steady the example of Jesus in our lives, our hearts and minds will move to the melody of God's love. The key, however, begins with repentance and confession. For there we receive the release we need, there we are filled with the power of forgiveness, there we find the answer to the question that plagues us, "Yes, but how?" In Jesus' name, of course. Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Loving Lord, in the days when you walked as a man upon earth life was hard and people suffered.

Your land was occupied, peace was just a dream. You knew about trouble.

So, Lord, we bring our troubled world to you now. You are the Lord of all, the gardener of creation. Teach the world's leaders how they best may tend the trees of healing and righteousness. Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven, **restore your creation to wholeness.**

We have made our world a garden of damaged trees and bitter fruit. Lord, we pray for those places where there is hurt, anger and war, for lands where children have never known peace, for peoples brutalised by suffering.

Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven, **restore your creation to wholeness.**

Lord, we pray for all those who suffer pain and persecution, especially those who suffer at the hands of others.

We pray too for those who have grown so far away from knowing you that they cause hurt, or carry out persecution. Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven, **restore your creation to wholeness.**

We pray for those who are dying or recently bereaved: may they know you are with them on their journey. Comfort all those who are frightened or lonely: may their sadness give way to joy as they feel the warmth of your love. Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven, **restore your creation to wholeness.**

Lord, we pray for those who particularly need our prayers today .....

We pray that they may feel your presence with them comforting, restoring and healing them.

Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven, **restore your creation to wholeness.**

God of all things, we pray for the ravaged earth. We ask your forgiveness for our carelessness with your gifts.

We ask you to show us how to be better gardeners, better stewards, better custodians of the world around us.

Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven, **restore your creation to wholeness. Amen.**

**The 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.

**STF 748** - Glorious things of thee are spoken

Watch on YouTube : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNQOcpEck4A&list=RDSNQOcpEck4A&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNQOcpEck4A&list=RDSNQOcpEck4A&start_radio=1)

Glorious things of thee are spoken,  
Zion, city of our God ;  
he whose word cannot be broken  
formed thee for his own abode.  
On the Rock of Ages founded,  
what can shake thy sure repose ?  
With salvation's walls surrounded,  
thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

See ! The streams of living waters,  
springing from eternal love,  
well supply thy sons and daughters,  
and all fear of want remove ;

John Newton (1725–1807)

### **Blessing**

Loving Lord Jesus, in this season of Lent we give you thanks that you set your eyes and heart on the journey to Jerusalem, even though you knew where it would lead. We thank you that through this journey you showed us the true path of servanthood. We thank you that we, too, can journey with you during this time of Lent, to Jerusalem, there to see the lengths to which you went to enable all humanity to be reconciled with God and with each other.

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**

who can faint, while such a river  
ever flows their thirst to assuage —  
grace which, like the Lord, the giver,  
never fails from age to age ?

Saviour, if of Zion's city  
I, through grace, a member am,  
let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in thy name.  
Fading are our worldly pleasures,  
all their boasted pomp and show ;  
solid joys and lasting treasures  
none but Zion's children know.