



Call to Worship - Psalm 12:1-2

Help, Lord, for no one is faithful anymore; those who are loyal have vanished from the human race. Everyone lies to their neighbour; they flatter with their lips but harbour deception in their hearts.

Hymn- STF520 - Give to me. Lord, a thankful heart

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pptcgQ4QJig&list=RDpptcgQ4QJig&start_radio=1

Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart
and a discerning mind:
give, as I play the Christian's part,
the strength to finish what I start
and act on what I find.

By your divine and urgent claim
and by your human face
kindle our sinking hearts to flame
and as you teach the world your name
let it become your place.

When, in the rush of days, my will
is habit-bound and slow
help me to keep in vision still
what love and power and peace can fill
a life that trusts in you.

Jesus, with all your Church I long
to see your kingdom come:
show me your way of righting wrong
and turning sorrow into song
until you bring me home.

Caryl Micklem (1925-2003) © C. Micklem

Prayer

Eternal God, We worship you, We magnify your name, We honour your place in our lives.

Creating God, We thank you, We are overwhelmed By the good things in our lives.

Listening God, We come to you, We feel insecure By the things happening to our lives.

Loving God, We pause with you, As we reflect At the impact of our lives.

Jesus, we want to see your kingdom come, But first we must give ourselves to your kingdom ways, Starting with repentance, now, for our sins.

As we confess, we look cross-wards, We trust because we know the truth, Our sins are forgiven in Jesus's name.

May we truly believe it. May we openly live it. May our worship express it.

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.

Hymn - STF3 - Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pptcgQ4QJig&list=RDpptcgQ4QJig&start_radio=1

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory
Cascades through life in overflowing grace,
To tell creation's meaning in the story
Of love evolving love from time and space.

You nurture strength to follow Christ our brother,
As full-grown children, confident and sure.

Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious,
In you, deserted, scorned and crucified,
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness,
And flawed humanity is glorified.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;
Love which commands, enables and obeys:
You give yourself, in boundless joy, creating
One vast increasing harmony of praise.

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother,
Embracing us in love serene and pure:

We ask you now, complete your image in us;
This love of yours, our source and guide and goal.
May love in us, seek love and serve love's purpose,
Till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Readings - Isaiah 43:16-21 , Philippians 3:4b-14 and John 12:1-8.

Hymn - STF54 - I will worship with all my heart

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZ3lZ2Ozby0&list=RDVZ3lZ2Ozby0&start_radio=1

I will worship (I will worship)
With all of my heart; (with all of my heart)
I will praise You (I will praise You)
With all of my strength. (all my strength)
I will seek You (I will seek You)
All of my days. (all of my days)
I will follow (I will follow)
All of Your ways. (all Your ways)

*I will give You all my worship,
I will give you all my praise.*

*You alone I long to worship,
You alone are worthy of my praise.*

I will bow down, (I will bow down)
Hail You as King, (hail You as King)
I will serve You, (I will serve You)
Give You everything (give You everything)
I will lift up (I will lift up)
My eyes to Your throne, (my eyes to Your throne)
I will trust You, (I will trust You)
I will trust You alone. (trust You alone)

Chorus

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Sermon - Pragmatism (Isaiah 43:19) *See, I am doing a new thing!*

Well, not so much doing a new thing as thinking in a new way – at least, that is my aim in the next few minutes as we share thoughts together.

That God is constantly about to do new things is undisputed. Isaiah saw God working in his own generation and in the future with the coming of a Messiah. Jesus was constantly doing new things in his Ministry, and not always popular because of them. The biggest new thing lay beyond Good Friday.

This Lent as we reflect on the Methodist Church theme of Soul Food, what do you think about? Ever new ways to be refreshed, fulfilled, satisfied, gratified or pacified? When you read bible passages like those set for today in the Lectionary, how do you respond?

The Psalmist asked, ‘are there any faithful people anymore?’ That could be a word for today when people are easily pessimistic about the future look of the church, or at least, they are if future prospect is based on past experience.

Past experience was Saint Paul’s starting point for his reflection in Philippians 4:4b-14. He set out his impressive Jewish credentials before declaring them to be beside the point. Outsiders looking in were pessimistic about the riskiness of getting close to a man who had set out his stall as a disrupter and destroyer of the new church.

Optimistic Isaiah reflected that God who could bring the Israelites out of danger by enabling them to cross the Red Sea could most certainly do a new thing and give a new sense of purpose to jackals, owls, wildernesses and wastelands. Great metaphors for the limitless possibilities for change when God drives the agenda and takes charge.

Optimistic Paul looked at the lonely Christ on the cross and saw through the disfigured man he believed dead, to the voice of the man who, beyond resurrection had spoken to him and caused him to rethink. Optimistic Paul came to believe that all his achievement in his past devoted service were irrelevant, nothing he was doing now was as significant as the future hope of the main prize, life in and with Christ in glory.

The realistic Psalmist fuelled his pessimism as he listens to people lying to each other. Realistic Jesus weighed Judas Iscariot’s concern about the cost of wasted perfume when there were so many people needing food and help. Realistic Jesus also saw the need for Mary to express her love and devotion to Jesus, after all, he had recently restored her brother Lazarus to life when all thought him dead.

The world is a mess. There is war and there are leaders we think useless and yet oddly we are not in their shoes. Society is a mess. People are poor and living on food banks and other charity while no one seems capable of developing a fair benefits system and yet oddly none of us can see how to do it either.

Years ago a pragmatic friend gave me good advice. When everything is overwhelming and today's to-do list is so long that it stretches into next week, do the one thing properly that will otherwise follow you home tonight. I have tried to apply that principle at work and elsewhere. How much more could we do. Pragmatically, to focus on the changes we can make now, the gifts we can give and the prayers we can offer today. Fretting about tomorrow and lamenting yesterday are a waste of energy.

Pragmatism is the sometimes-evasive gift of dealing with things sensibly and realistically in a way that is based on practical rather than theoretical considerations. Theoretically I know the welfare system needs reform but practically I can put a tin in the food pantry.

Theoretically I know I should take the gospel to the ends of the earth but practically I tell a friend about Jesus or visit one in hospital or give a helping hand when it is inconvenient to me but vital for another person.

Much of this derives as much from mindset as it does from the capacity to 'do.' Pragmatic Old Testament people kept turning from God, regretting it and turning back. The cycle of sin and repentance. Saul met Jesus, changed, worked hard in growing church while waiting for the ultimate prize.

Pragmatic Jesus bade Judas let Mary spend her money on perfume as a short-term expediency for her sake. It seems callous to dismiss the poor as 'always with us,' but the pragmatic point is that to support the constant needs of the gritty real world there is the need to worship and adore on a higher plane. Jesus could see Mary's need but Judas only saw grit.

The challenge is to broaden how we see things that go on and how we think about them. It is not over optimistic to believe God can go new things, it is pragmatic based on the evidence of lives lived and experiences shared. While we focus on doing what we can where we are, God will keep on doing new things – that is how it is – the realistic truth of experience.

Amen.

Hymn - 433- Out of the depths I cry to thee

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RENZjwkBSwo&list=RDRENZjwkBSwo&start_radio=1

Out of the depths I cry to thee,
Lord God! O hear my prayer!
Incline a gracious ear to me,
And bid me not despair:
If thou rememberest each misdeed,
If each should have its rightful need,
Lord, who shall stand before thee?

'Tis through thy love alone we gain
The pardon of our sin;
The strictest life is but in vain,
Our works can nothing win;
That none should boast himself of aught,
But own in fear thy grace hath wrought
What in him seemeth righteous.

Wherefore my hope is in the Lord,
My works I count but dust;
I build not there, but on his word,
And in his goodness trust.

Up to his care myself I yield,
He is my tower, my rock, my shield,
And for his help I tarry.

And though it linger till the night,
And round again till morn,
My heart shall ne'er mistrust thy might,
Nor count itself forlorn.
Do thus, O ye of Israel's seed,
Ye of the Spirit born indeed,
Wait for your God's appearing.

Though great our sins and sore our wounds,
And deep and dark our fall,
His helping mercy hath no bounds,
His love surpasseth all:
Our trusty loving Shepherd, he
Who shall at last set Israel free
From all their sin and sorrow.

Aus tiefer Noth schrei ich zu dir, Martin Luther (1483–1546) after *Psalms 130* translated Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878)

Prayers of Intercession : Let us open hearts to change and call the Holy Spirit in, that change may be for good.

God, who in Christ affirms the beauty of compassion, who accepts and blesses what is offered in love; we bring and offer the best things from our hearts, the treasures of our affections and concerns for the world's healing, which is also our own.

We pray that we may be strengthened for the good of all, to make known, in warnings and in songs of love, Your Good News: God, at work for justice, renewing the life of Earth, in whom You delight.

We consider the ugliness of wars and conflicts continuing without concern for life and beauty. The corners people have felt backed into, responding so desperately with violence. Help us to re-examine what we have thought would make for peace.

We consider [*name some issues arising from this week*]

We consider the blessing that is the world-wide Church – divided, preoccupied, fallible, but still Your people, called.

Help us to be what Church needs to be – called to love extravagantly in our response to need, our pursuit of peace, and our love of the Earth.

We consider [*name some issues arising from this week*]

And pour over the hurts of our own immediate lives and communities, may the precious oil you have saved for this day, this church, this life be the balm.

Guide us in prayer for those we haven't loved, for those dealing with decisions and anniversaries and show us how Your grace can make what we do offer - a blessing for Your beloved world.

Amen

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Hymn - STF566 - Take my life, and let it be

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf11rReeWIs&list=RDGf11rReeWIs&start_radio=1

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold;
Take my intellect, and use
Every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of thy love;
Take my feet, and let them be
Swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my will, and make it thine;
It shall be no longer mine;
Take my heart—it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.

Take my voice, and let me sing
Always, only, for my King;
Take my lips, and let them be
Filled with messages from thee.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour
At thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for thee.

Frances R Havergal (1836–1879)

Benediction

Send us out to witness to the pain of the Passion that was absorbed for us; Send us to talk of the hope of the Salvation bought for us; Send us out to keep fixed on the Resurrection, our hope. May the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon us and remain with us now and for evermore. Amen.