



Call to Worship - Psalm 119:97-100 : Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all day long. Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your decrees are my meditation. I understand more than the aged, for I keep your precepts.

Hymn - 436 - What shall I do, my God, to love

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EwLu8gu-ew&list=RD7EwLu8gu-ew&start_radio=1

What shall I do my God to love,
 My loving God to praise?
 The length, and breadth, and
 height to prove,
 And depth of sovereign grace?

Throughout the world its breadth
 is known,
 Wide as infinity;
 So wide it never passed by one,
 Or it had passed by me.

The depth of all-redeeming love
 What angel tongue can tell?
 O may I to the utmost prove
 The gift unspeakable!

Thy sovereign grace to all
 extends,
 Immense and unconfined;
 From age to age it never ends;
 It reaches all mankind.

My trespass was grown up to
 heaven;
 But, far above the skies,
 In Christ abundantly forgiven,
 I see thy mercies rise.

Come quickly, gracious Lord, and
 take
 Possession of thine own;
 My longing heart vouchsafe to
 make
 Thine everlasting throne

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayer :

God our creator, we come to you in worship; You have called us and you lead us, Your have cared for us and you watch over us; You are worthy of all praise.

Kind God

Dear Heavenly Father, who transcends time and space. As you formed the earth in six days and rested on the seventh, May we not be too proud to recognise the sacred nature of rest. Often our disobedience causes us to neglect these Holy orders, Causing us to become overworked, at times bitter and resentful.

As the world continues to chase this fleeting earthly success, may we heed your instruction to rest. Rest on you. Trusting that while we do this, You are rejuvenating our body, mind and spirit, in Your time, through appropriate reverence for You and Your commandments. Heeding Your instructions leads us to cultivate joy and peace.

Things the world often promises through monetary or physical things but can never deliver, thank You, Jehovah Jireh, for providing for providing for us according to Your riches and glory, despite our inevitable disobedience.

Your kindness calls us to repentance time and again. Thank you.

Samantha Oguna @The United Reformed Church

We pause in confession. *Silence*

We repent in hope. *Silence*

We pray for the blessed assurance of knowing our sins are forgiven, not because words say it but because deep in our hearts you enable us to feel 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.

Introduction to theme - Accountability

To what extent do we feel responsible for the course of our lives and how much do we allow things to happen and circumstances to be dictated by the surrounding environment and influence of other people?

Inevitably we are in and part of society in the broadest sense. We live alongside others and we are influenced and impacted by others' but we are individuals as well.

We are accountable for decisions we make. That accountability is the theme of today's reading from Jeremiah, ably illustrated by a real-life scenario from the gospel and advice given by Saint Paul to Timothy.

Hymn - 544 - as the deer pants for the water

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBppKZ0eJIQ&list=RDFBppKZ0eJIQ&start_radio=1

As the deer pants for the water,
so my soul longs after You.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship You.
*You alone are my strength, my shield,
to You alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship You.*

I want You more than gold or silver,
only You can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver
and the apple of my eye. *Chorus*

You're my Friend and You're my Brother,
even though You are a king.
I love You more than any other,
so much more than anything. *Chorus.*

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Readings - Jeremiah 31:27-34, 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5 and Luke 18:1-8

Hymn - 463 - Deep in the shadows of the past

Watch on YouTube : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OfBnZOC8Tj4&list=RD0fBnZOC8Tj4&start_radio=1

Deep in the shadows of the past,
far out from settled lands,
some nomads travelled with their God
across the desert sands.
The dawning hope of humankind
by them was sensed and shown:
a promise calling them ahead,
a future yet unknown.

From Exodus to Pentecost
the promise changed and grew,
while some, remembering the past,
recorded what they knew,
or with their letters and laments,
their prophecy and praise,
recovered, kindled and expressed
new hope for changing days.

While others bowed to changeless gods
they met a mystery,
invisible, without a name:
"I AM WHAT I WILL BE";
and by their tents, around their fires,
in story, song and law,
they praised, remembered, handed on
a past that promised more.

For all the writings that survived,
for leaders long ago,
who sifted, copied, and preserved
the Bible that we know,
give thanks, and find its story yet
our promise, strength and call,
the model of emerging faith,
alive with hope for all.

Brian Wren (born 1936) © 1975, 1995 Stainer & Bell Ltd

Sermon - Choose carefully (Jeremiah 31:29)

In those days they shall no longer say: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

Introduction

If you have lived in a house where a mother is breast-feeding an infant, or you have been such a mother, you may well be familiar with the problem of the effect of the adult's diet on the digestion of the suckled child. In our case, peas had a bad effect, but brussels sprouts are notorious too, along with anything with a strong flavour. The mother can easily upset the child by eating what may suit her but does not suit the baby.

Paul wrote to Timothy to urge him to stick to what he knew was good for him. Whatever others may be listening to and believing, Paul urged his friend to remember that he was grounded in faith in Jesus and he knew that the place to find instruction was scripture, not the fashions of the moment.

Jeremiah had been delivering a hard message to Israel and Judah. Their way of life and disobedience was destroying them and destruction would be manifest in the form of continued threat from the Babylonian invaders. At the lowest point and with the moment of greatest peril looming, Jeremiah softened his preaching to give hope in the future and to define a new way of being the people of God.

The influence of others had always been significant. Moses had pointed out the connectedness of the generations, his position being summarised well in Numbers 14:18: 'the Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.'

Jeremiah chapters 30 to 33 comprise his prophesy of the restoration of the remnant of the people, with the renewal of the covenant. There are key points that we should remember for they remind us that there is a lot of baggage around this message.

Previously God had led his people by the hand, especially out of slavery, but they broke the Covenant. The people previously taught each other about God and what he wanted.

The new Covenant would work differently and from within each individual who would know their own call.

They would all know God, from the least to the greatest.
God would forgive and not remember sins.

This moment of hope in Jeremiah's messaging comes as the people have been broken and promised regeneration.

Whatever is going on, Paul said to Timothy, remember where you started and where to go for truth. God's call is to the single soul, not to the solid mass of sinful crowd-pleasing humanity. The crowd may influence but it is the soul that must be accountable, so choose carefully.

Which Way?

When God reminded the people that they had been led by the hand there was more than one meaning in the words. The way to go is about paths, divergences, convergences, junctions and diversions. Routes are rough or smooth, level or uphill and down dale. The way to go also means the metaphorical direction of life, decisions about style and choices of fashion and much more. For people of my age, flared trousers were the way to go; not anymore.

The route taken by the people was a decision of the masses and a decision for the masses. They went a particular route from Egypt to Canaan; they developed ways of living together and rules to aid the cohesion of the mass. When they wandered from God and when they returned to God that too was done en-bloc.

When things went wrong, they went wrong for all and everyone was affected for the long term, hence the reference to the generations.

In the newly envisaged relationship with God, all decisions are to be individual. We are not obliged to all go the same way. Modern society reflects this insofar as we respect freedom of choice and where it is denied that denial is seen as unacceptable. The extent to which we question our grasp of the significance of our individuality depends on our appetite for choice. Indeed, some of us choose to be followers thus complicating the picture.

Every time we are faced with the question, 'which way?' we are living out the New Covenant. If we listen to our inner souls, God will give us guidance according to our calling. And, as Timothy was reminded, we can refer to scripture.

The challenge alongside this is to separate the mundane decisions that are irrelevant to faith from those that are not. It may make no difference what route we take between two places, but God may have something to say when we are deciding what to do with our time.

When the voice of conscience provokes a specific decision then the voice of God has spoken. Sometimes, as individuals, God speaks to us together through our councils, like Church Meetings, and thus guides us in our corporate lives. Playing our part in those lives, or not, remains our choice, our calling.

Which Truth?

"What is truth?" Pontius Pilate asked that question at the moment of his judgement of Jesus Christ. Theologians, Philosophers, Preachers, and Teachers wrestle with the question, and however forcibly we make our points, none of us can say we are able to define absolute truth.

Observers of public life know that truth can be hard to discover, even when it is something factually based that should be clearcut. A new term, 'my truth' is in use now and seems to mean that truth is 'what I define it to be'. If that definition is carried too far, public life descends into anarchy. There must be a basis for truth.

Jeremiah implies that the basis is the voice of God in the human heart, and Paul goes further to write to Timothy, 'you know how you have been brought up, talk to Jesus Christ and refer to scripture'. That is where the 'my truth' fashion fails for me; truth cannot be something I define, it must come from God, even if discernment of it is a lifelong hunt.

Pontius Pilate declared himself unhappy with the process that led to Jesus's death. Corporate hysteria lost sight of God and yet Pilate heard God's voice in his heart and closed his ear to it for political expediency.

Truth was not to be suppressed and later revealed itself in resurrection. No wonder Paul wrote as he did.

Do we ask others which truth to believe, or do we go with ours, rooted in God's voice?

Which God?

But there is a further question. Do we still rely on others for descriptions of the nature of God, and ask 'which God'?

Jesus told the story of the unjust judge and the persistent widow. The story was told to encourage persistence in prayer because God knows about our prayers and responds when the time and way are right.

In ancient times the question of which God to worship was resolved by our God with the challenge to worshippers of human creations in wood, stone, iron and bronze; can they hear?

Modern Gods of money, celebrity and rank are no more responsive. The God who responds is the God who is within and who speaks to the human heart from within the human heart.

Summary

If you turn these questions around you can answer whether you are making the right choices. Whether you have truly moved on from the need always to have someone to blame for all that goes wrong. Whether you have found your own sense of peace and relationship with God.

Are you aware of the voice of conscience at junctions? Do you sense the voice of conscience in discerning truth? Do you feel the peace of God who is alive?

Answer yes, yes and yes and your teeth are not set on edge because your diet is the peace of God that passes all understanding. Amen.

Hymn - 466 - Have faith in God, my heart

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

Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every part
each promise he has made.

Have faith in God, my soul,
his cross for ever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.

Have faith in God, my mind,
though oft your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan
than you can fully know.

Lord Jesus, make me whole;
grant me no resting place,
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,
the captive of your grace.

Bryn Austin Rees (1911-1983) © Alexander Scott

Dedication of Offering : God, as we bring our gifts we respond to our calling; As we respond to our calling we serve your church; As we serve your church may others be blessed, For Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

God who calls and gives us new hearts, We thank you for all the ways in which are able to serve you, To respond to you and to live for you.

We pray for your blessing on all each of our lives and ask that we may reflect on the message we have heard from scripture.

May we be aware of the voice of conscience at life's junctions. May we sense the voice of conscience, discerning truth when faced with dilemmas. May we feel the peace of God who is alive and makes us able to live in a new way.

Silent reflection

We pray for those in active work – presbyters, deacons, lay workers – all who bear the burden of others' troubles, or are weighed down with a multitude of tasks, and seek to bring the good news of Jesus to an unreceptive world.

Give them the joy of a new song to the Lord. A song of his goodness, mercy and love, of peace and hope. A song of the rich complexity of life, past and present, of birth, friendship, love and loss. A song to sing through everything, that God is faithful and just, God is love and that love endures for ever.

Rachel Larkinson, supernumerary presbyter, Berkshire and Hampshire Borders Circuit © The Methodist Church

We name those people who fit those categories and are known to us. *Silent prayer*

We lift to God the concerns of the world as headlined in today's news...

At war, After natural disasters, In the tragedy of loss, In human pain and human inhumanity

We pray for the people of our churches and the mission and outreach of our churches as together we seek to be Church:

Caring pastorally, Witnessing faithfully, Preaching boldly

We commend to God the needs of people all around us in their;

Joy and celebration, Pain and loss, Illness and disease, Death and bereavement

God of power and justice, like Jeremiah you weep over those who wander from you, turn aside to other gods, and enter into chaos and destruction. By your tears and through your mercy, teach us your ways and write them on our hearts so that we may follow faithfully the path you show us. Amen.

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Hymn - 503 - Love divine, all loves excelling

Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LUhE6pBM2IE&list=RDLUhE6pBM2IE&start_radio=1

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come
down:
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,
Let us all thy life receive;
Suddenly return, and never,
Never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always
blessing,
Serve thee as thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise thee, without
ceasing,
Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,
Pure and spotless may we be;
Let us see thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heaven we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before
thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!
Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Benediction

Let us go into the world with God in our choices, God in hearts, ready to answer for the choices we make. 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.