



Call to Worship - Isaiah 58:8 : Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Hymn - 106 - God whose almighty word

God, whose almighty word,
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight,
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light!

Christ, you have come to bring
on your redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
O to all humankind
let there be light!

John Marriott (1780-1825)

Prayer

God of light and God of justice, As we come in worship we come from so many different backgrounds. We may be full of light and we may feel as though all is gloom and darkness.

God of light and God of creation, Whatever the circumstances of our lives and the things on our minds, You are consistent, unchanging and are not affected by shadows or fading.

God of light and our hope, We worship and adore you, just because you are. You alone and good, righteous and true. We bow before you.

Heavenly Father, as we consider how you have brought life and order, beauty and efficiency out of chaos and nothingness, we thank you for all the blessings we enjoy. Thank you that we have life itself and the opportunity to be your people.

You have called and invited us to serve and follow you, to walk with you and trust you.

We confess that our following and serving are not always up to much for we are distracted, we can be disloyal and fickle. We repent of our poor choices and wrong judgements and ask that you will forgive us.

May we know that we are forgiven if we pray in faith and live as though we are assured people. May our time of worship today be a time of blessing and time in which we come closer to you, God.

William Glasse

Loving God, Fill us with your grace, so we can: know the way and walk in it, hear your word and respond to it, see injustice and address it, be attentive to pain and alleviate it, seek transformation and bring it, through your empowering Spirit. Amen.

Andrew Charlesworth, Chair, Wales Synod Cymru © The Methodist Church

Lord's Prayer : Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are yours. Now and forever Amen.

Responsive Reading – Psalm 112 : Blessed are those who fear the Lord, who find great delight in his commands. Their children will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed.

Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures for ever. Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for those who are gracious and compassionate and righteous.

Good will come to those who are generous and lend freely, who conduct their affairs with justice. Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered for ever.

They will have no fear of bad news; their hearts are steadfast, trusting in the Lord. Their hearts are secure, they will have no fear; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes.

They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor, their righteousness endures for ever; their horn will be lifted high in honour.

The wicked will see and be vexed, they will gnash their teeth and waste away; the longings of the wicked will come to nothing.

Introduction to theme – Light : Light is vital to life, and without light humans can barely function. From early times we have developed ways of producing light where we need it and it is not available naturally. My grandparents referred to the electric light to differentiate it from the oil lamps of their younger lives. Now we have moved to digital forms of lighting.

Apart from the natural light of the sun, most of the other forms of light we use are developed to be appropriate for the job they are to do. Our scripture readings will use light metaphorically and one of them (1 Corinthians 2) will not use the term at all and get give us one of Saint Paul's illuminating discourses on the place of the cross and the revelation of new and ever more remarkable truth.

Hymn - 700 - God weeps at love withheld

God weeps
at love withheld,
at strength misused,
at children's innocence abused,
and till we change the way we love,
God weeps.

God bleeds
at anger's fist,
at trust betrayed,
at women battered and afraid,
and till we change the way we win,
God bleeds.

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQ3f0NdHbBc&t=6s>
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God cries
at hungry mouths,
at running sores,
at creatures dying without cause,
and till we change the way we care,
God cries.

God waits
for stones to melt,
for peace to seed,
for hearts to hold each other's need,
and till we understand the Christ,
God waits.

Readings : 1 Corinthians 2:1-12 and Matthew 5:13-20

Hymn - 665 - Make us your prophets Lord

Make us your prophets, Lord,
who truly hear your word,
which fires us with your Spirit's
inspiration.
In all we say and do
prove that your love is true,
the hope and source of peace for
every nation.

And when we fail to love
or set ourselves above
our neighbours with their different
ways of seeing,
bring us with all our pride
where Jesus, crucified,

Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3X6Ox0fP_mk&t=2s
for love of all committed his whole
being.

Give us his love that shares
our neighbours' pain, and dares
to suffer enmity and
condemnation.
Whether we live or die
help us to prophesy,
proclaiming peace and
reconciliation.

Though we live quietly,
with no authority,
yet feeble faith in us may show

your goodness;
and though we may not see
how crucial it may be,
our faltering love may show your
loving kindness.

In faith and hope we pray,
use us to serve that day
when bigotry and hatred are
defeated,
when perfect peace is won
and lasting justice done,
with love's eternal promises
completed.

Sermon - The right light (Isaiah 58:8)

By way of introducing the theme of light today I wrote: Light is vital to life, and without light humans can barely function. From early times we have developed ways of producing light where we need it and it is not available naturally. My grandparents referred to the electric light to differentiate it from the oil lamps of their younger lives. Now we have moved to digital forms of lighting. Apart from the natural light of the sun, most of the other forms of light we use are developed to be appropriate for the job they are to do.

Two of our scripture readings used light metaphorically (The Psalm and Matthew's gospel) and one of them (1 Corinthians 2) did not use the term at all and yet gave us one of Saint Paul's typically illuminating discourses on the place of the cross and the revelation of new and ever more remarkable truth.

Isaiah was forthright in the verse that was our call to worship and is our text (58:8)

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

There is debate about whether Isaiah could have foreseen the work of Jesus and the outcome of his ministry or whether he was referring to chronologically closer events that also illustrated the point that God's presence is a blessing. In the NIV Bible Handbook, Alistair McGrath writes: 'Human sin is a barrier to God's blessing. Yet the Lord will remain faithful to his covenant, and provide both a redeemer for his people, and the gift of the Holy Spirit'.

Jesus overrides any debate we may have about the target of Isaiah when he tells his followers that their role is as lights in the world. If the analogy of light fails then use salt instead. He goes on to explain how by using light differently the Old Testament laws are given a new dimension not seen before.

What is the right light for us now? What sort of light should we be?

In the old children's story Goldilocks and the three bears, the hungry little girl tries three bowls of porridge. One is too hot, one is too cold but the other is just right.

If you are one of those car drivers who finds that oncoming lights make night driving tiring and risky because of dazzling you are in good company. Modern car headlights are very bright but from the point of view of the driver, they are a big improvement on the old ones that were inadequate and cast shadows. I remember a phase of yellow headlights too but they have disappeared, illegal in the UK since 1989.

Dazzling was not only a problem for modern car drivers; in Exodus we can read that the face of God was too bright to be seen by the Israelites. Even Moses only had a quick glimpse of the light going away from him. In other places, human sin is seen as part of darkness. We need light, but the right light, and we need to be light, the right light for the occasion.

The Psalmist (112) writes, as I interpret it, that blessings accrue where people delight in God's will, ways or commands. Does this mean if people are good followers, or does it mean if people are focused on trying to understand what God wants for and from them? In that case this seems easier to relate to; light for the upright, for the good and compassionate so they do not fear seems more relatable than some sort of picture of unachievable purity. The corollary that those not even trying are wound up when those who do try are blessed is a realistic picture.

My alternative spin on Psalm 112 helps me with another way of understanding what Paul was writing about to the Corinthians in our passage. When he refers to the inappropriateness of human eloquence and single-minded focus on Christ Crucified he puts a bulb into the light that shines into the darkest night of our fears, failings and frailties. He is saying, let everything else take a place in the shadows until you understand that the cross is real, is for you and is for now.

And Paul moves on to say that once this core point is understood then other lights will come on meaningfully whereas before they simply added to the dazzling and confusing problem of trying to understand what faith means in the world we live in. The world mature has always confused me a little, but now I think of it as meaning those who are used to the light of Christ in their lives it takes on a new meaning. Once folk get used to the light then more new things become visible as encouragement.

Jesus says, then, those who have found light themselves become lights themselves, lights that cannot be put out and once light of that sort comes for you then so will come more understanding than will emerge from any amount of learning and formality.

So, to revert to Isaiah's image.

Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Dawn means a new day, a fresh start and renewal. Healing means health is restored, spiritually if not physically. Righteous means put back into line with God's purposes, even if there is constant need for confession. The glory at the rear is the constant watching of your back by God as Jesus with you and where blessings accrue then all know who you are and that you are part of God's family.

What sort of light am I to be? With the help of the Spirit of God I am to be not too bright and not too dull, but just right. Like Goldilocks' porridge, too bright is too hot to handle. Too cold is leaden and dull. Just right means enabling others to see what is just right for them and their stage.

We praise God who in Jesus gives us what is just right and through the Holy Spirit constantly reveals new truths.

Amen.

Hymn - 712 - Put peace into each other's hands Watch on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5VI_sd5A-h8

Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it,
protect it like a candle-flame,
with tenderness enfold it.

Put peace into each other's hands
with loving expectation;
be gentle in your words and ways,

in touch with God's creation.
Put peace into each other's hands
like bread we break for sharing;
look people warmly in the eye:
our life is meant for caring.

As at communion, shape your hands
into a waiting cradle;

the gift of Christ receive, revere,
united round the table.

Put Christ into each other's hands,
he is love's deepest measure;
in love make peace, give peace a
chance
and share it like a treasure.

Fred Kaan (1929-2009) © 1989 Stainer & Bell Ltd

Dedication of Offering : Lord, we dedicate to you the gifts we bring and put in the plate, the money we pay into the bank and all the things we do. Take us and through us keep the wheels turning so your great church moves on as you desire, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

We pray for ourselves and those we love: We give thanks for times of grace and contentment and we bring to You Times of anxiety, loneliness, ill-health and loss. (pause)

As we navigate our daily living 'May we have the mind of Christ.' **'May we have the mind of Christ.'**

We pray for our church, local and national. We pray for neighbours of all faiths and none. We pray for those needing welcome needing a home hungry, and anxious for tomorrow. (pause)

As we play our part in community 'May we have the mind of Christ.'
'May we have the mind of Christ.'

We pray for our country, and for our leaders. We pray for those tasked with upholding justice and keeping peace and those who are carers and educators (pause)

We pray for business leaders and trade unionists as we pray for unity and a hopeful future 'May we have the mind of Christ.'

'May we have the mind of Christ.'

We pray for our world, conscious of gross inequality that millions toil without justice and scarce pay for our comfort and convenience. We cry out against the mountain of debt which keeps countries from caring for their people. We pray for our planet itself exploited and abused groaning and damaged. (pause)

As we pray for Your kingdom of justice and wholeness as we seek to live Your way 'May we have the mind of Christ.'

'May we have the mind of Christ.'

These and all our prayers we make in the name of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

God be in our heads, and in our understanding; God be in our eyes and in our looking; God be in our mouths and in our speaking; God be in our heart, and in our thinking; God be at our end, and at our departing. And the blessing of God Creator, Redeemer and ever-present Spirit Be with us now and always. AMEN.

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Hymn - 706 - Longing for light

Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kt3Qc04uIOM>

Longing for light, we wait in
darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy
people,
light for the world to see.

*Christ be our light! Shine in our
hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ be our light!
Shine in your church gathered
today.*

Longing for peace, our world is
troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has pow'r to save
us.
Make us your living voice.
Chorus

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for
others,
shared until all are fed.
Chorus

Longing for shelter, many are
homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering
others,
walls made of living stones.
Chorus

Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to
belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
Making your kingdom come.
Chorus

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Dismissal

God of compassion, comfort our loneliness. God of tenderness, confirm our faith. God of the Cross, strengthen our endurance. Amen.

Prayer of a Ugandan Christian © The Methodist Church

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.