



Call to Worship - Psalm 86:8-9 : There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours. All the nations you have made shall come and bow down before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.

Hymn - STF50 - Great is the Lord Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dF5adgjO0pM>

Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise,
the city of our God, the holy place,
the joy of the whole earth.
Great is the Lord in whom we have the victory,
He aids us against the enemy,
we bow down on our knees.

And Lord, we want to lift Your name on high,
and Lord, we want to thank You,
for the works You've done in our lives;
and Lord, we trust in Your unfailing love,
for You alone are God eternal,
throughout earth and heaven above.

Steve McEwan © Body Songs/Adm. by Song Solutions CopyCare, 14 Horsted Square, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 1QG, UK.
info@songsolutions.org Used by permission.

Prayer

Lord God, there is none like you. We come before you in wonder and praise, grateful for your mighty works and your faithful love. Draw us into your presence, humble our hearts before you, and teach us to glorify your name. As we worship today, fill us with reverence, joy, and trust in you.

Laughter - A prayer from the United Reformed Church for 14th June

God, you cause us to laugh, And it is a precious gift. Sometimes our laughter is a questioning snicker. How could this be happening? Other times, overcome by joy, we laugh unrestrained. We give thanks for the gifts of joy and laughter.

You invite us into the symphony of laughter; a newborn baby taking delight in the mundane, amused children at play, teammates savouring the thrill of winning, lovers basking in each other's presence, fun-filled family moments with hushed laughter reliving precious memories. We give thanks for the gifts of joy and laughter.

Be with those who find it difficult to laugh. Overwhelmed by life's injustice, laughter evades them. Where is laughter for those living in the midst of war? Hear those for whom there is little laughter. As bodies and minds are healed, over time, May the tears of sorrow give way to the tears of laughter. We give thanks for the gifts of joy and laughter.

Mikie Roberts © The United Reformed Church

God of joy, We confess our sins, The things that weigh heavily on our hearts, That burden us with guilt and pain. We turn to you, God of freedom, Repenting of our nature, Of what we do to ourselves. God of the cross, May we know the assurance of forgiven sins, Of guilt lifted, Burdens carried away. We offer our thanks for blessings, Freely given and faithfully shared, Steadfast love and eternal calling. Fill us with your grace and joy.

Receive our worship, Speak through your Word, Hear our prayers, And bless our lives.

Now we pray the prayer of the Church on earth as we say together...

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.

Psalm 86:1-6 (Responsively)

Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you. You are my God; be gracious to me, O Lord, for to you do I cry all day long. Gladden the soul of your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you. Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to my cry of supplication.

Introduction to theme - Costly Love

Families can be complicated. When children belong to one parent rather than both, or when the family unit is at odds with the views of one member, there can be misunderstanding and hurt, sometimes leading to fractured relationships. Abraham had two sons who feature prominently in the Old Testament. Isaac was the child of his marriage to Sarah, while Ishmael was the son of Hagar, Sarah's slave. Jesus tells us two things in the Gospel passage. God loves and values every one of us and yet serving him can divide us like a knife, often painfully. Love can be costly.

Hymn - 705 - It is God who holds the nations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tKi4UzyT7R8>

It is God who holds the nations in the hollow of his hand;
It is God whose light is shining in the darkness of the land;
It is God who builds his City on the Rock and not on sand:
May the living God be praised!

When a thankful nation, looking back, has cause to celebrate
Those who win our admiration by their service to the state;
When self-giving is a measure of the greatness of the great:
May the living God be praised!

It is God whose purpose summons us to use the present hour;
Who recalls us to our senses when a nation's life turns sour;
In the discipline of freedom we shall know his saving power:
May the living God be praised!

He reminds us every sunrise that the world is ours on lease-
For the sake of life tomorrow, may our love for it increase;
May all races live together, share its riches, be at peace:
May the living God be praised!

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000) © 1977 Stainer & Bell Ltd

Readings - Genesis 21:8-21 and Matthew 10:24-39

Hymn - STF463 - Deep in the shadows of the past

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fBnZOC8Tj4>

This is the definitive version of the text. An earlier version in Faith Looking Forward and many other books is given elsewhere but the definitive version should be used wherever possible.

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 - Devotion Psalm 86:2 : Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you.

Background : As a word, 'Devotion' feels comfortable and warm. It is something that we express and it is how we might describe the relationships between people. They are devoted, we say. In the Bible, devotion does not only involve our traditional sense of the meaning of the word, but also love that is complicated or costly.

Abraham's family was complicated and Jesus sought to redefine family. Abraham learned that devotion to God leads to a promise, but it also brings painful sacrifice. By Jesus's definition, the price of gaining one family may be the expense of weakening or even severing ties with another one.

The verse from Psalm 86 reminds us of why this apparently self-inflicted pain is worth it, and it builds and strengthens the most reliable bond we will ever make – the bond between ourselves and God that is inviolable.

Psalm 86 gives us the language of trust: “Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you.” That is not a passing feeling. It is trust that holds fast when life becomes hard.

We will dig a little deeper. *The pain of separation in Genesis 21*

The account we read seems to add insult to injury for Hagar. First, she carries the child of her master and then she is banished. But the other side of the story is a picture of pain too. Sarah is the wife and she also has a son, against the odds. What should be a story of overflowing joy is a picture of potentially divided loyalties and of compromise.

There are many people amongst us who can relate to that sort of tension and distress. A solution is required and it is a tough one. Hagar and Ishmael are sent away so Abraham is less torn and Sarah can stop looking over her shoulder.

But the cost seems to be borne by Hagar and it seems harsh. This is family breakdown at its most painful: love, status and belonging all knotted together; and it does not end there.

Then comes the wilderness: the long road, the emptying water skin, the child beneath the bush, the mother who cannot bear to watch. Just as watching becomes unbearable, God rewards Hagar’s devotion to him with a display of his love and constancy...and it feels as though we should have expected a happy ending:

Psalm 86:2 Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you; save your servant who trusts in you.

But, in a situation like that with little sign of where a happy ending can come from, we may be left feeling bemused by a situation that appears as though it has been engineered by God. God hears the boy’s cry, speaks into Hagar’s fear, opens her eyes to the well, and stays with Ishmael as he grows. Was the well there all along? Presumably so. Should the devoted servant have known that God would provide and looked up and around her – perhaps, but how often do we look up and around us when we are in pain, feel abandoned and lost by life, and sense the irony in our devotion to God.

Maybe not in the wilderness, but many of us can relate to this on one way or another. The great lesson, tough as it is, is that God’s devotion does not always keep us out of the wilderness, but it does mean we are not left there alone. “Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you” is not only the psalmist’s prayer, it is Hagar’s cry as well.

In our own day we see echoes of Hagar in displaced families in conflict zones, carrying children through fear and uncertainty, not knowing where safety will come from. God’s love reaches the excluded, the frightened, and the forgotten.

The Aid efforts we support, the prayers we offer, the focus we put on the horror of a brutal world and our attempts to raise the awareness of others to it are all about the provision of Hagar’s well.

The cost of following Jesus in Matthew 10

You will have had this spelled out before; sermons have been preached and books written about the Cost of Discipleship. Jesus outlined the point in this passage recorded by Matthew. To follow him is not to choose an easy life. He speaks of misunderstanding, rejection and division, even within households.

He is not praising conflict. He is telling the truth: loyalty to God can expose deep fault lines in our relationships. In purely human terms there is no point in persisting with such recklessness. It is senseless to open yourself up to strife and disruption. Why would you do it?

After all, at a time of international crisis, it is often ordinary households that bear the weight most sharply: anxiety at the kitchen table, stretched budgets, and burdens shaped by political decisions far beyond our reach to influence.

So why do we: what is it that our text conceals that unlocks the reason for persisting in something that seems counterintuitive and looking towards heaven when the earth seems to be on fire?

We know that our lives are full of flaws; the sorts of familial tensions that we see in Hagar's story and Abraham's treatment of her are ours too and running through all of those tangles is the common strand of God's love that is not breakable and the sense that he values us...

Not one sparrow falls without the Father knowing.
We are worth more than many sparrows.

The call to costly discipleship rests within the promise of God's attentive care.

We are asked for devotion because we are first held in devotion.

And so the prayer returns: "Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you."

When things seem to be hopeless and God is irrelevant in our muddles, those are the times when having a deep sense of value stabilises us with the inexplicable 'peace of God that passes all understanding'. If we look carefully, we see the evidence around us that those who have faith are healthier and happier than others, notwithstanding the challenges that come.

In summary

Many of us know these tensions.

Sometimes faithfulness to Christ means hard choices about family loyalty: when love does not mean agreement, when truth must be spoken gently, or when boundaries must be held.

We see that costly love in parents who hold a family together quietly, carrying worry in one hand and hope in the other.

And perhaps for many of us, devotion is lived out not in dramatic moments, but in small daily acts of faithfulness:

the prayer said before the day begins, the kindness offered when patience is thin, the honest word spoken when silence would be easier, the quiet decision to keep trusting God.

That too is part of what it means to say, "Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you."

The same is true in friendships and in the workplace, where discipleship may call us to integrity rather than silence, courage rather than convenience, and compassion rather than conformity.

There is deep devotion too in believers who quietly live out their faith at work, showing kindness under pressure and standing with those who are overlooked. Costly love is not harshness, and devotion is not self-righteousness.

Christian devotion is shaped by the God who sees Hagar in the wilderness and by the Christ who walks the road of the cross.

So our calling is simple, though not easy:

to receive God's devotion to us, to answer with devotion to God, to let that love flow out to neighbours, friends, colleagues, and those with whom life is strained.

"Save your servant who trusts in you" becomes not only a plea, but a way of life.

A prayer : Lord, preserve our life, for we are devoted to you. When we feel abandoned, remind us that we are never beyond your care. When discipleship becomes costly, hold us steady. When love asks more of us than we thought we could give, grant us wisdom, grant us courage, and grant us grace. So may our devotion to you, become a blessing in our homes, in our work, and in the wider world. Amen.

Hymn – STF673 - Will you come and follow me if I but call your name

Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S-Bq1YtpQL8>

Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown,
in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?

Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me

John L Bell (born 1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019)

© 1987 WGRG, c/o Iona Community, 21 Carlton Court, Glasgow, G5 9JP, Scotland. www.wildgoose.scot

Dedication of Offering

Generous God, All that we have comes from you. All that we are is fashioned by you. We bring gifts, spend time, share ourselves. As we do it we pray that you will bless our endeavours And may your church bring you glory.

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

I offer this collection of words, some mine, some the work of others and pointers to help you form your prayers. Remember that this has been prepared 10 days ahead so you may need to add in anything especially relevant today. (William Glasse)

Lord God, as we turn to you with our prayers now, we begin where our readings began and pray for families, especially those where relationships are complex, sometimes stained, and we think of what Jesus had to say about challenging times.

May our own discipleship remain true to our calling and when hard choices are required, may we hear the Spirit's voice and do as God would have us do.

We pray for the needs of church and world:

For the Church: pray that we may be devoted servants who trust in God, willing to follow Christ faithfully even when discipleship is costly.

For Christians facing hostility or ridicule: ask for courage for those whose faith brings opposition, tension or misunderstanding in family, workplace or society. For the world: give thanks that there is none like God, and pray that all nations may come to honour God's name in justice, peace and truth.

For places of conflict and war: remember those living where laughter has been silenced by fear, violence and loss; pray for safety, peace and hope.

For Sanctuary Sunday, as highlighted by JPIT today: pray for refugees, people seeking asylum, and all who need safety, welcome and justice; and for churches and communities to be places of hospitality, compassion and hope.

For communities and nations: pray that people of every race and background may live together, share the earth's riches fairly, and grow in mutual respect and peace.

For the poor and needy: echoing Psalm 86, pray for those crying out for help, for people facing hardship, and for all who long for God's mercy and provision.

For the sick and those who nurse them: praying for all who are unwell and especially those suffering because of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Give courage and skill to those who care for them.

For those called to costly love: pray for strength to take up the cross, to live truthfully, and to choose Christ's way even when it is hard.

For those who care for others: remember parents, carers, teachers, ministers, health workers and all who bear responsibility for others with love and sacrifice.

For those who weep: bring before God all who are overwhelmed by grief, anxiety, injustice or exhaustion; pray that tears of sorrow may, in time, give way to laughter and renewed hope.

Love one another

You said we are to love one another. A simple enough idea, Yet not always simple to do. Sometimes I run out of love. Sometimes I just run out, Of everything. Sometimes I want to shut the world away, Hide under my blanket, And sip hot, sweet coffee. Rest, you say, is also a commandment. So come sit beside me, Take a deep breath of two, or three. Share my blanket, Jesus, Until I am ready to take up burdens again. You share my blanket, And I will hold the tassels of your scarf. Nicky Gilbert © The United Reformed Church

Hymn - STF103 - God is love, let heaven adore him

Watch on YouTube : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wT614dSjAHg>

God is Love: let heaven adore him;

God is Love: let earth rejoice;

Let creation sing before him,
and exalt him with one voice.

He who laid the earth's foundation,
he who spread the heav'ns above,
he who breathes through all creation,
he is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and he, enfolding

all the world in one embrace,
with unfailing grasp is holding
every child of every race.

And when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
then they find that self-same aching
deep within the heart of God.

God is Love, and though with blindness
sin afflicts each human soul,
God's eternal loving-kindness
holds and guides and keeps them
whole.

Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love, so Love for ever
o'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Rees (1874-1939)

Dismissal : Lord God, may we walk in love. May we walk slowly, step by step, so that we can be still in your presence. May we walk sometimes in silence, so that we can know rest and peace. May we walk with a spring in our step, and go forward with joy. May we walk gazing outwards, seeing the beauty of the world around us. May we walk looking more widely, conscious of other people and their needs. May we walk in faith, knowing that you are beside us on every path that we take. May we walk in love. Amen.

Catherine James, local preacher, Derby Circuit © The Methodist Church

Benediction : 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.