



Hymn: StF 335 Rejoice! The Lord is King

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Rejoice the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore!
Rejoice, give thanks and sing, and triumph evermore.
Lift up your heart! Lift up your voice!
Rejoice! again I say, rejoice!

Jesus, the Saviour reigns,
the God of truth and love:
when he had purged our stains,
he took his seat above.
Lift up your heart...

His kingdom cannot fail;
he rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell

Reading: Philippians 4:1-8

Prayer : Heavenly Father, We come before you with hearts full of gratitude and praise. We thank you for your steadfast love, your faithfulness, and your constant presence in our lives. Thank You for strengthening us to stand firm in you and for calling us your beloved children. Thank you for the joy and peace that come from knowing Christ Jesus as our Lord.

We adore you, Lord, because you are worthy of all honour and glory. You are gracious, merciful, and near to those who call upon you. Your gentleness and kindness exceed all understanding. We praise you because you are our provider, our sustainer, and our source of true contentment. You alone satisfy the deepest needs of our hearts. You are the God who gives us strength in every circumstance, whether in abundance or in need. Your peace guards our hearts and minds, and your presence fills us with hope.

Father, we confess that we have not always rejoiced in You. We have allowed worry, fear, and anxiety to take hold of our hearts instead of bringing our concerns to you in prayer. We confess that we have sometimes focused on our problems rather than on what is true, honourable, just, pure, lovely, and praiseworthy. Forgive us for the times we have complained instead of giving thanks, doubted instead of trusting, and sought contentment in earthly things rather than in Christ.

We also confess the ways we have failed to pursue unity and peace with others. Forgive us for holding grudges, fostering division, or neglecting opportunities to encourage and support our brothers and sisters in Christ. Teach us to be gentle, humble, and gracious, reflecting the character of Jesus in all our relationships. Lord, help us to learn the secret of being content in every situation. Whether we face plenty or scarcity, success or hardship, teach us to rely completely on Jesus, who strengthens us. Fill our hearts with joyful trust so that we may live with confidence in your care and provision.

Thank you for every blessing you have given us and for every way you have supplied our needs. Thank you for the generosity of your people and for the privilege of sharing in the work of the gospel. May our lives be a pleasing sacrifice of worship to you, marked by thanksgiving, obedience, and love. Guard our hearts with your peace, renew our minds with your truth, and help us to walk faithfully before you each day. We rejoice in you always and offer you all praise, honour, and glory. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Reading: Acts 9:36 to 10:9

are to our Jesus given.
Lift up your heart...

He sits at God's right hand
till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command,
and fall beneath his feet:
Lift up your heart...

Rejoice in glorious hope!
Jesus the Judge shall come
and take his servants up
to their eternal home:
We soon shall hear the archangel's voice,
The trump of God shall sound, rejoice!

There's a wideness in God's mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice
which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

There is plentiful redemption
in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members
in the sorrows of the Head.

But we make his love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

There is grace enough for thousands
of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations
in that upper home of bliss.

If our love were but more simple
we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord.

Message

I was teaching recently on the Book of Jonah. Famously, Jonah ends up inside a big fish because he is running away from God, refusing to take God's message to the people of Nineveh. When he finally does get to Nineveh, he delivers God's message and the people of Nineveh repent and turn from their wickedness. God is pleased because that's what he was wanting but Jonah not so much. In fact he is very angry. God's response is to provide Jonah with a plant that first grows up to give Jonah shade but then dies. The punchline at the end of the book comes from God and reads like this: But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?" (Jonah 4:10-11)

When God speaks about the Ninevites not knowing their right hand from their left, it doesn't mean that they have no sense of direction. Left, in many ancient cultures, was used to signify the dark or evil side. That carries into our English language in the word 'sinister' which comes from the Latin word for 'left'. What God is saying is that the Ninevites have no moral compass. It's not that they are deliberately choosing to be wicked. Rather that they do not understand the difference between right and wrong as God sees it. They need somebody to explain it to them and, as Jonah begins to do that, Bingo! We see amazing results.

Compare that with our reading from Acts. Apologies that I brought it to a close tantalisingly half way through a story. What happened to Peter after he went into a trance in prayer? You may well know the answer to that question but, if you don't or need reminding, it concerns a vision of a sheet containing a number of potential sources of food, some of which are clean under Jewish law and some of which are unclean. Peter hears a voice calling him to eat but he protests. The voice speaks again and this is God's punchline to this particular story: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean."

Jonah's eyes were opened to the fact that God cares about the world beyond the fringes of his present followers. God wanted his word to go to the people of Nineveh as good news so that they might see things God's way and be transformed. Likewise for Peter and the early Church, this dream carried the same message. God wasn't solely interested in the good news about Jesus being spread around the Jewish world. In God's eyes, this good news is for everyone and he wants it to be taken everywhere so that all people might be changed.

This week marks the fourth Sunday in June and the fourth and final dip into Paul's letter to the Philippians - if you've been following Philippians as this year's chosen Bible Month book. Chapter 4 begins with an appeal to two women called Euodia and Syntyche. They have fallen out with one another and Paul pleads with them to be of one mind. We don't know anything more about them nor much about the other members of the Church in Philippi. We can, though, add two more characters to the list of Church members from the stories we find recorded in the book of Acts. Paul met Lydia soon after he first arrived in Philippi and she became a Christian, we are told in Acts 16, together with the rest of her household. Likewise, the town jailer, who was converted together with his family after Paul and his fellow prisoners chose not to escape from prison when they had the opportunity.

These may be little more than names to us but what we can say is that they are not Jewish names. We know there were very few Jews in Philippi because there was no synagogue there. A synagogue required ten adult males so presumably the Jewish population of the town fell below even this minimal threshold. We also know that Philippi was a Roman colony with land given to retiring Roman soldiers and town laws that were modelled on Rome itself. Philippi, therefore, models the good news going out into the non-Jewish world as per Peter's dream. The church is made up of non-Jewish people who have heard the good news and changed their ways. Just like the people of Nineveh in the book of Jonah.

June has been a busy month in this circuit as we have had Bible Month to follow and also a month of prayer. A month of prayer fits well with Philippians 4 because, in verse 6, Paul encourages us in prayer: Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

In our Bible Month journey through Philippians we are presently in week four and so it is with our month of prayer. This week we are invited to pray for the churches at Felixstowe, Alan Road and Chantry and that we all might follow Christ faithfully and share his love with others. That invitation also fits well with Jonah going to the people of Nineveh; with the vision of Peter's dream and with Paul taking the good news to Philippi.

This month we have been asked to pray every day at 6pm and finding a way of being active and intentional in prayer continues to be a good idea once June is over even if you don't stick with that 6pm timing. In our reading from Acts we are told that Peter was very intentional in going up to pray on the roof of the house where he was staying.

The title given to this service is 'Left, Right, Up and Down'. We have already considered the left and right part of that title and the need to take the good news of God's love out to people that they might be changed through coming to understand God's ways and his saving grace. What about Up and Down? We have already seen that Peter goes up in our story in order to seek God in prayer on his rooftop. Did you also notice that he went up earlier in the reading as well? He went up to the room where the body of Dorcas was lying before God answered Peter's prayer and restored her to life. These events occurred in Joppa, the same Joppa that Jonah ran to looking for a ship in which to escape from God's call. Peter was seeking after God; Jonah was trying to block God out.

What happens to Jonah? The text tells us that he went down to Joppa; down into the ship; down into the hold of the ship where he falls into a deep sleep and then, of course, down into the depths of the sea where he is swallowed by the big fish. Peter is portrayed as going up, seeking after God in prayer; Jonah is portrayed as going down, trying to cut off communications with God. Even the trance-like state of Peter, open to dreams and visions from God, is in contrast to the empty oblivion of Jonah's deep sleep.

What sort of people do we want to be? Are we, like Peter, 'Up' people consciously and actively seeking after God? Do we want to hear from God? Do we want to discover those ways in which the Holy Spirit longs to send us out with the good news that will change people and help them understand their 'left' from their 'right'? Or are we 'Down' people? We might not be actively running away from God but where are our daily actions leading us? Do those actions help or hinder our ability to hear from God? Are we missing out on things that God wants to achieve through us? To quote the words we have been invited to pray in this final week of our prayer month, I pray that we might be more and more tuned in to God in prayer, so that we might more and more 'follow Christ faithfully and share his love with others'.

Hymn: StF 627 Everyone Needs Compassion Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrgTNa77O1Y>

Everyone needs compassion,
Love that's never failing,
Let mercy fall on me.
Everyone needs forgiveness,
The kindness of a Saviour,
The hope of nations.

Chorus:

Saviour, He can move the mountains.
My God is mighty to save,
He is mighty to save.
Forever, Author of salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave.

So take me as You find me,
All my fears and failures,
Fill my life again.
I give my life to follow
Everything I believe in.
Now I surrender.
Chorus

Shine your light and let the whole world see.
We're singing for the glory of the risen King.
Shine your light and let the whole world see.
We're singing for the glory of the risen King.
Chorus

Prayer

Lord God, We thank You that you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. As we reflect on Jonah's struggle to accept your mercy for Nineveh, forgive us for the times when we have limited your love to those we find easy to accept. Open our hearts to see others as You see them, precious and worthy of your grace.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your Church throughout the world. As You taught Peter that no person should be called unclean or excluded from your kingdom, help your people to break down walls of prejudice, division, and fear. Give us courage to welcome all whom you are calling, and wisdom to follow your leading even when it challenges our assumptions.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for the nations of the world. Where there is hostility, discrimination, or injustice, bring reconciliation and peace. Help leaders to govern with compassion and fairness, recognizing the dignity of every human being. May your desire to save and restore all people be reflected in the decisions made by those in authority.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our communities. Open our eyes to those who feel overlooked, rejected, or unwelcome. Show us opportunities to share your love through acts of kindness, hospitality, and service. May our homes, churches, and neighbourhoods become places where all can experience your acceptance and care.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are struggling today: the sick, the lonely, the grieving, the poor, and those burdened by anxiety or despair. Surround them with your comfort and provide for their needs. Raise up people who will bring hope, encouragement, and practical help.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for ourselves. When we are reluctant to follow where you lead, as Jonah was, grant us willing hearts. When you challenge our prejudices, as you challenged Peter's, give us humility to learn and grow. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, that we may join in your work of bringing good news to all people.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, whose love reaches beyond every boundary and whose grace extends to all peoples, receive these prayers and accomplish your purposes in the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer : Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be your name; your kingdom come; your 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 yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: Hymns and Psalms 770 Go Forth and Tell Watch on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vKuZovPm2M>

Go forth and tell! O Church of God, awake!
God's saving news to all the nations take;
Proclaim Christ Jesus, Savior, Lord, and King,
That all the world His worthy praise may sing.

Go forth and tell! God's love embraces all;
He will in grace respond to all who call;
How shall they call if they have never heard
The gracious invitation of His Word!

Go forth and tell! Some still in darkness lie;
In wealth or want, the sinner surely dies;
Give us, O Lord, concern of heart and mind,
A love like Yours which cares for all mankind.

Go forth and tell! The doors are open wide;
Share God's good gifts--let no one be denied;
Live out your life as Christ, your Lord, shall choose,
Your ransomed pow'rs for His sole glory use.

Go forth and tell! O Church of God, arise!
Go in the strength which Christ, your Lord, supplies;
Go till all nations His great name adore
And serve Him, Lord and King, forevermore.