

WORSHIP AT HOME – 1ST AUGUST 2021 – SOULLESS WEALTH

Dear Friends,

Well into the summer now and moving into a new phase of living with fewer restrictions but more responsibility as to how we conduct our lives. Most will no doubt take the need for behaving sensibly on board but there are always those who prefer to follow their own desires. We pray that more and more will come to understand the needs of everyone and not just their own. Today the gospel speaks of someone whose only thought was for himself, amassing more and more wealth and where that leaves him in the end.

Every blessing to you all. Margaret

Call to worship: O Lord God, how majestic is your name in all the earth! When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established, what are human beings that you are mindful of them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honour. O Lord our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth. [Psalm 8: 1-9]

Giver of all good gifts, enable us to choose between vanity and worth – between what is temporal and what is eternal – and grant us the courage to make that choice.

May we know how worthwhile we are to you, that we can decide what is vain in our lives and know that we lose nothing when we choose what is lasting.

Whatever is vanity, may we leave it be, and work beyond ourselves towards your realm, your reign – your 'here and now'. **Amen**

The words to 'Ye servants of God' written by Charles Wesley [1707-1788] Singing the Faith 340

1 Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim, and publish abroad his wonderful name;
the name all-victorious of Jesus extol; his kingdom is glorious, and rules over all.

2 God ruleth on high, almighty to save; and still he is nigh, his presence we have;
the great congregation his triumph shall sing, ascribing salvation to Jesus our King.

3 'Salvation to God who sits of the throne!' let all cry aloud, and honour the Son;
the praises of Jesus the angels proclaim, fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.

4 Then let us adore, and give him his right; all glory and power, all wisdom and might,
all honour and blessing, with angels above, and thanks never ceasing and infinite love.

Prayers:

Sovereign Lord, we join with all creation to praise your majestic name, for you have blessed us so richly with the gift of life and the beauty of your world – with the gift of today and each moment in it – with this opportunity to worship you - with the fellowship we share – with all the blessings which you have bestowed upon us. The greatest gift of all – your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, and the life-giving Holy Spirit. Receive our praise and the devotions of our hearts for we ask this in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Lord, only you are perfect. We all have bad habits of some description – some of them minor like biting our nails, leaving the top off the toothpaste, dropping wet towels on the floor. But some bad habits go much deeper – addictions, excesses, gossiping, impatience, intolerance or malice.

Lord, forgive us our failings and our own futile attempts to break free from the habits which continue to grip us. We need you to point them out and to help us to overcome for with you we can conquer anything. Forgive us for those times when our behaviour lapses and our eyes look down. Help us to continually raise our eyes to you – help us to worship by acting our faith and not just speaking of it.

Thank you, that just as the sun rises on each new day, so we too can arise afresh each day with you. **Amen**

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.

Colossians 3: 1-11: [Translation made by William Barclay]

If then you have been raised to life with Christ, your heart must be set on the great realities of that heavenly sphere, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Your constant concern must be with the heavenly realities, not with worldly trivialities. For you died to the world, and now you have entered with Christ into the secret life of God. When Christ, who is your life, comes again for all the world to see, then all the world will see that you, too, share his glory.

Once, finally and for all, you must put an end to the use of any part of your body for worldly and immoral purposes. Your new state must mean the death, as far as you are concerned, of fornication, impurity, unbridled passion, desire for the forbidden things, the spirit which makes a god of gain – for that is a kind of idolatry. These are the things which incur the wrath of God. There was a time when your life and conduct too were characterised by these things, a time when they were an integral part of your life, but now you too must remove them all from your life – the long-nourished anger, the blaze of temper, maliciousness, abusiveness, foul language. These must no longer stain your lips. There must be no more dishonesty to each other, for you have stripped off the old nature and all its works and ways, and you have clothed yourselves with the new nature, which is progressively renewed until it reaches fuller and fuller knowledge of God and comes nearer and nearer to being in the image of the creator. And as we have arrived at a state of things in which there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free man. Christ is all that matters, and there is neither person nor thing in which Christ is not.

You are God's chosen people, dedicated and dear to him. You must therefore clothe yourselves in compassion, in kindness, in humility, in gentleness, in patience. You must bear with each other, and, if someone and anything to complain about in someone else, you must forgive each other. You must forgive each other as the Lord forgave you.

Luke 12: 13-21 : [Translation made by William Barclay]

A man in the crowd said to Jesus: 'Teacher, tell my brother to give me my share of the estate which has been left to us.' 'Man,' said Jesus to him, 'who appointed me a judge or an arbitrator between you and your brother?'

He said to them: 'Watch carefully not to let any kind of greed get a grip on you. It does not follow that, because a man has a superabundance of possessions, his life is one of the things that belong to him.'

He used a parable to explain his meaning: 'The ground of a rich man,' he said, 'produced an excellent harvest. He began to ask himself: "What am I to do? I have no room to store my crops." So he said: "I know what I'll do. I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones. I will store up all my corn and my possessions in them. And I will tell myself 'You have enough goods stored up to last for many a year. So sit back and relax! Eat and drink and enjoy yourself!'"

But God said to him: 'Fool! This very night you must hand back your life to God! And then who will get all that you have stored up for the future?'

This is what happens to the man who amasses worldly wealth, but in God's sight has no riches at all!

The words to 'Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine' written by Frances Jane van Alstyne [Fanny Crosby]

[1820-1915] Singing the Faith 548

1 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine: O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God; born of his Spirit, washed in his blood:
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.
This is my story, this is my song, praising my Saviour all the day long.

2 Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture burst on my sight;
Angels descending bring from above echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

This is my story.....

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest, I in my Saviour am happy and blest –
watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

This is my story.....

Comment: The story which Jesus tells here arises from a sad situation – one which we read about in the papers nowadays quite often too – when there is a family row about who gets what after parents have died. It is amazing how many people have fallen out over a piece of furniture or an ornament or piece of jewellery, let alone the money.

Here the father has obviously died and there is no clear indication of who should have what – each person wanting to own, to possess – to say, 'That is mine!' At least one of them was being greedy and hanging on to the lot. Today we often see people who believe they have been denied their rights go to law – here they come to Jesus just as they would do to a rabbi.

Jesus refuses, however, to tell them what they should do – tells them that they need to live by grace, doing what they know would be decent rather than go to law. Jesus warns the crowd to be careful and to be on their guard against all kinds of greed because however many possessions are accrued, life is not one of them.

So here comes another story – this one in three acts.

Act One sees a bumper harvest as that year everything had grown well – so well that the barns are bursting at the seams, they are so full. Carpenters are being set to work to build ever bigger and better barns so more and more can be stored. What a lucky rich man. Most people would admire him [and probably envy him] – think God must love him to allow his harvest to be so great.

Now it's Act Two and the farmer is busy totting up his books of accounts. He is smug - really pleased with himself – and hasn't a thought for anyone else. He wants to keep the lot so he needn't work again but just have a good time. What a lucky rich man – many would be happy to swap places with him.

Then comes Act Three. This is where it all changes – this is where there is challenge. The rich man himself dies – and the saying 'You can't take it with you!' is very apt. He has left behind his farm and all those big barns full of good things. That leisure time he promised himself – all gone! All that he possessed and counted upon enjoying has gone – a poor rich man now.

Now he stands in the presence of God who says, 'You fool!' - and the farmer was in no way prepared for this.

Indeed he was rich in human eyes but he was poor in the eyes of God. He had cared about money and possessions but not about other people nor about God. Rich in material things but poor in the important relationships – poor in his caring for others. A poor rich man now.

You can tell by the way the rich man spoke that he was full of himself – but God was not impressed. God cares about how we share with one another, with how we care for others – not what we have amassed for ourselves. For God riches are measured by what we give of our possessions and of our time, energy, compassion. There is an old proverb which says: 'He who has bread is responsible for him who has none.'

Meditation of a listener to Jesus [Nick Fawcett]:

He didn't mean me, I decided. Well, he couldn't, could he, for I wasn't rich, not by a mile, and though I wouldn't have minded a bit extra in my pocket – the occasional luxury at home, I could hardly be termed greedy either.

No, he must have had others in mind, people who are always after more – you know the sort I mean. Only I thought afterwards about what he'd said about there being more than one type of greed, and suddenly I wasn't so sure he didn't mean me after all, for I'm greedy in all sorts of ways – for happiness – for security – for success – for comfort, to name but some. And though there's nothing wrong with those in themselves, there is if we try to turn them into possessions, as though we can cling on to them and make them our own.

We just can't do that, not in this life, and if we look for meaning in this world alone it will surely slip from our grasp like sand running through our fingers.

On what is our life based? That's the question he was asking.

The things of God or the things of earth? We can possess much yet have nothing – we can though own little but have all.

True contentment is in God's hands; whether we find it in *ours*.

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Forgive us, Lord, for we spend so much of our lives chasing illusory happiness, thirsting for what can never satisfy – pursuing riches on earth rather than treasure in heaven. Teach us where real fulfilment lies, and help us truly to seek the things of your kingdom; to work for these with the same effort with which we work for worldly wealth, and so find contentment indeed. **Amen**

Illustration [David Adam]:

When John Wesley was at Oxford he lived by a rule that he set himself: 'Save what you can and give away what you can.'

At first Wesley had an income of £30 a year. He then lived off £28 and gave £2 away each year. When his income rose to £60 a year, he continued to live on £28 and gave away £32. As his income rose then to £120 a year, he still lived on £28 and gave the rest away.

The Accountant General for Household Plate [a sort of tax collector] asked for a return from Wesley supposing he should have a great deal to show. Wesley replied: 'I have two silver teaspoons at London and two at Bristol. This is all the plate which I have at present, and will not buy any more while so many people around me want bread.'

Prayers:

In our Gospel reading the rich man was one of the 'haves' of the world and he was not at all interested in others – in the 'have-nots'. We pray now for the 'have-nots', first thanking God for the gifts we have received.

Loving God, we thank you for all that we have – our homes – our food – our clothing – our modern appliances – our public amenities – our opportunities for education – our access to healthcare – and so much more.

Now, Loving Lord, we pray for those who have no homes, living as refugees, or living rough on our streets. We pray for those who live in inadequate housing – the shacks and huts of shanty towns – those reduced to living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation here because there is nowhere else for them to go.

We pray for those who have no food their crops having failed – their economies burdened by debt – or their labours not fairly rewarded. We pray also for those who find that after all else is paid they do not have enough money to feed their families and have to rely on food banks.

We pray for those who have no fresh water, daily facing the threat of disease and the nightmare of drought – for those who have no resources and are condemned to a life of poverty with no prospect of respite – and no opportunity to help themselves.

We pray for those who have no access to education nor to a health service or welfare system – those who have no-one to whom they can turn for help or support.

Loving God, in the context of this world we are the 'haves' for we have been fortunate. Stir our hearts to the plight of the unfortunate.

It is right that we pray for them but also, Lord, help us to be ready to say no to ourselves so that we may say yes to them – help us to sacrifice a little so that they may receive much.

Loving God, hear our prayer in the name of Christ. **Amen.**

And a prayer for ourselves for those times when God seems silent.

Loving God, we thank you for the ways you speak to us through Scripture, prayer and worship, through the fellowship of your people and the daily experiences of life.

We thank you for the ways you have spoken to your people across the ages and the ways you speak to us today. But now we ask for your help in those times when you seem to be silent – those days when we do not hear your voice no matter how we listen for it – those times when we feel ourselves to be alone and far from you.

Give us courage then to ask if we have closed our hearts and minds to what you would say, or if there is something in our lives creating a barrier between us, preventing us from getting close to you.

But help us also to understand there are times when you expect us to get on with our discipleship without you always directing us – without your instructions being spelt out step by step. Help us to see that your silence may not be a sign of our faithlessness or your displeasure, but rather of your love, offering us the opportunity to grow towards Christian maturity.

And when we do not hear you speak help us to remember all those times you have spoken unmistakably to us and to others, and let those moments sustain and direct us until your word comes again, in your own time and your own way.

Loving God, open our hearts to all you would say to us, in the name of Christ. **Amen**

The words to 'You shall go out with joy' written by Stuart Dauermann [b.1944] and Steffi Geiser Rubin Singing the Faith 487 [generally sung through three times getting progressively faster]

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before.

There'll be shouts of joy and the trees of the field
shall clap, shall clap their hands,

and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,

and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,

and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,

and you'll go out with joy.

Closing Prayer:

Lord, as we seek your daily renewal, help us to become the people you created us to be. Help us to live each day joyfully celebrating our new life in you, honouring your name in all we do or say.

As a Christlike community Christ is all in all. We go, trusting in him and his heavenly riches.

Go and radiate his love.

Show Christ, speak Christ, be Christ. **Amen**