

WORSHIP AT HOME – 6TH JUNE 2021 – CALL TO ACTION

Dear friends,

How quickly we seem to be moving through this year! I hope that you are all well and are enjoying the early summer. Today we see that being God's people can be pictured in various ways and each picture shows us something different about our relationship with God and with each other – and the obligations which come too. These passages speak of us being set aside for God. The people of God need tending and guiding, but their calling is to teach and to proclaim to others the good news, and the possibility of a covenant of peace and wholeness with God through the Holy Spirit. In fellowship – *Margaret*.

Call to worship: Lord, we cannot sit at your feet as did the first disciples.

We cannot follow you through the roads of Galilee.

We cannot watch in wonder as you heal.

But, Lord, we are your disciples today.

We would serve you and speak for you.

We would show your compassion and take your risks.

So we pray your blessing on each kind of ministry and on one another. **Amen.**

Gracious God, we ask that you would meet us today and touch our hearts with your generosity, your compassion, your wisdom. We ask that you would transform our lives and speak through us, pray through us, and heal through us, as we walk the way of the first disciples, always to your glory. **Amen**

The words to 'My God how wonderful thou art' written by Frederick William Faber [1814-1864]

Songs of Fellowship 395

1 My God how wonderful thou art, thy majesty how bright!

How beautiful thy mercy-seat in depths of burning light!

2 How dread are thine eternal years, O everlasting Lord,
By prostrate spirits day and night incessantly adored!

3 How wonderful, how beautiful the sight of thee must be,

Thine endless wisdom, boundless power and awesome purity!

4 O how I fear thee, living God, with deepest, tenderest fears,
And worship thee with trembling hope and penitential tears!

5 Yet I may love thee too, O Lord, Almighty as thou art,

For thou has stooped to ask of me the love of my poor heart.

6 No earthly father loves like thee, no mother e'er so mild
Bears and forbears as thou hast done with me, thy sinful child.

7 Father of Jesus, love's reward, what rapture will it be

Prostrate before thy throne to lie, and gaze, and gaze on thee.

Prayer: We are filled with wonder at so many things in this world of yours, Lord. The power of nature, the rainfall and high seas; the gentleness of light emerging to bring the dawn; the wind refreshing or cold; the moon when full and bright in a dark sky.

We are filled with wonder at what humankind has been able to achieve, Lord; skyscrapers appearing to defy gravity and reaching toward the sky; aeroplanes criss-crossing the sky; castles and monasteries linking us to the past; the Internet full of so much knowledge. You have given us the ability to find new things, Lord – but we do not always use them as we should. Help us to be wise.

Fill us, Lord, with wonder for the things we cannot always see or hear or feel;

Your grace, an open channel assisting us in serving you; your justification a gift of the faith you give us; an inner joy and peace that helps us to spread your good news; the plentiful harvest which requires more hands. Steep us in these things, Lord, fill us with wonder and awe and help us to be all things for which you created us. Lord, we praise you and worship you.

We need to ask your forgiveness, Lord.

Forgive us when we demand from others that which we have freely received from you.

When we stop being moved by the plight of others – help us to rest and recover our compassion.

When we are too quick to shake off the dust of other people's needs – help us to remember those who have been patient with us.

When we are reluctant to move out of our comfort zone - reassure us that you go with us.

In all our challenges be our strength.

We give you thanks, loving God, that when we can't find the right words, you transform our stumbling – when we can find only harsh words, you transform our pain; when we can find no words, you transform our silence; when we would speak your words, you transform our longing and speak through us your life-giving words of healing, acceptance and grace.

We pray always through our precious Saviour, Jesus Christ. **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 forever and ever. Amen.

Romans 5: 1-8; [William Barclay]

It is through faith that we have been put into a right relationship with God. We therefore are at peace with him because of what our Lord Jesus has done for us. Through him we possess the entrance into that grace in which we stand, and our pride is in the glorious hope that God has given us. More than that – we take a pride in our own troubles, for we know that trouble produces fortitude, and fortitude produces a character which has stood the test – and character produces hope, and this hope never lets us down, for God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For, while we were still in all our weakness, in God's good time Christ died for godless men. It is very unlikely that anyone would be willing to die for a just man; it is just barely possible that someone might even dare to die for a good man. But God proves how much he loves us by the fact that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.

Comment; William Barclay himself, writing about this passage, says that this is one of Paul's great lyrical passages in which he almost sings the intimate joy of his confidence in God. Trusting faith has done what the labour to produce the works of the law could never do for it has given us peace with God. Before Jesus came, no one could ever be really close to God.

We Christians have peace in our God, and a knowledge that he loves us passionately. Rosita Forbes, the traveller, tells of finding shelter one night in a Chinese village temple because there was nowhere else to sleep. In the night she woke and the moonlight was slanting in through the window on to the faces of the images of the gods, and on every face there was a snarl and a sneer, as of those who hated men.

Barclay goes on to say that it is only when we realise that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that there comes into life that intimacy with him – that new relationship – the relationship which Paul calls justification. Through Jesus, says Paul, we have an introduction to this grace – it is as if Jesus ushers us into the very presence of God – he opens the door for us. And we find grace, not condemnation or judgement or vengeance but the sheer, undeserved, incredible kindness of God. We have reached the haven of God's grace and we know the calm, the peace, of depending on what God has done for us – no longer do we have to strive with what threatens to overwhelm us completely.

This is a glorious truth, but Paul realises that even so, the Christians are up against it – very hard to be a Christian in Rome. He speaks of the pressure of the things which press in on Christians – want and

straitened circumstances – sorrow – persecution – unpopularity – loneliness. This, he says, will bring fortitude or the ability to endure. Not a passive endurance but one which actively overcomes the trials and tribulations of life. Needed then – and needed nowadays also as we face what life throws at us. We need the spirit which meets things head on and overcomes them.

Then he says that fortitude produces character so that we might emerge stronger and better – and nearer God.

And character produces hope. Lord Reith said: 'I do not like crises, but I do like the opportunities they provide.' WE don't want to let circumstances beat us, we need to be able to stand up to challenge – to face it head on with, as Barclay says, 'eyes aflame with hope.'

Paul's last great statement: 'The Christian hope never proves an illusion for it is founded on the love of God.' When our hope is in God we shall never be disappointed. We are never disillusioned when our hope is in the love of God for God loves us with an everlasting love backed by an everlasting power.

The words to 'Give me the faith' written by Charles Wesley [1707-1788] Singing the Faith 661

1 Give me the faith which can remove and sink the mountains to a plain;

Give me the childlike praying love, which longs to build thy house again;

Thy love, let it my heart o'erpower, and all my simple soul devour.

2 I would the precious time redeem, and longer live for this alone;

To spend, and to be spent for them who have not yet my Saviour know;

Fully on these my mission prove, and only breathe to breathe thy love.

3 My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord, into thy blessed hands receive;

And let me live to preach thy word, and let me to thy glory live;

My every sacred moment sped in publishing the sinners' friend.

4 Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart with boundless charity divine;

So shall I all my strength exert and love them with a zeal like thine;

And lead them to thy open side, the sheep for whom their Shepherd died.

Exodus 19: 2-8a: [NIV]:

After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert, in front of the mountain.

Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said: 'This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel. You yourselves have seen what I did in Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.'

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, 'We will do everything the Lord has said.' So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.

Matthew 9: 35- 10:8: [William Barclay].

Jesus made a tour of all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds he was heart-sorry for them, for they were bewildered and dejected, like sheep who had no shepherd. 'There is a rich harvest,' he said to the disciples, 'but there are few workers. So you must pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers to gather this harvest.'

Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them such authority over unclean spirits that they were able to eject them, and to cure every disease and every sickness.

These are the names of the twelve apostles; first, Simon, who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, Zebedee's son, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew, the tax-collector; James, Alphaeus' son, and Thaddeus; Simon, the Nationalist, and Judas Iscariot, the man who betrayed him.

Jesus sent out these twelve, and these were his marching orders to them; 'You must not go off on any road that leads to Gentile territory; you must not go into any Samaritan town; it is rather to the sheep of the family of Israel who have gone lost that you must go. As you go, make this proclamation: "The Kingdom of Heaven is almost here." Cure the sick, raise the dead to life, cleanse the lepers, eject the demons. You paid nothing to get, accept nothing to give. *[Freely you received; freely give.]*

Comment: In the passage from Exodus we find the people of Israel being given the hope of becoming the treasured possession of God – of being a kingdom of priests, a holy nation – if they prepared [as a whole community] to work with their God rather than against him. Confidently they replied: "We will do everything the Lord has commanded." Do we find that rather poignant reading as we think back to promises we may have given just as confidently, but have subsequently failed – as they did?

The wonderful thing for us as Christians, though, is that we have hope – not as a non-existent strong people who can save themselves, but in the reality of a well-intentioned and blundering race who know that saving themselves is not one of things we can do as humans.

In the reading from Matthew's Gospel we see Jesus going about doing his daily work – teaching, proclaiming the good news and healing the sick. He was and is fully aware of how many harassed and helpless people there are – you can see it in their faces and actions. We only have to look around us as we move around and on any street we can see the same distress and stress. Jesus feels for them – he has compassion for them, seeing that they are like sheep without a shepherd to guide and protect them. He wants to help all of them.

Jesus was aware of the great harvest to be won and says: 'The harvest is plentiful but the labourers are few, therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into the harvest.' David Adam [once Vicar on Lindisfarne] writes that such a prayer should come with a health warning, for the reply from God is, 'Whom shall I send?' and the answer should be, 'Here I am, send me.'

Jesus called his twelve disciples to him, to learn from him, to be with him, to love him – but he also sent them out, giving them his power for them to give to others. Matthew also used the other title of the twelve – the Apostles – those who are sent. Jesus sent them to be heralds and leaders, to proclaim the good news and to care for the distressed. Jesus needed his disciples to continue his work – just as he needs us today. He warned the twelve that the task would not be easy; indeed, there would be opposition, but they would have the power of the Spirit so were not to worry. Today, also, the task is not easy but we, too, have the power of the Spirit living and working within us.

Jesus sends all whom he calls. If we know him for ourselves and love him, then we can speak for him. Again, David Adam says that it is then we can be seen as one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

The one [united in him] **holy** [belonging to God] **catholic** [for all people, at all times and in all places] **and apostolic** [sent out by him in the name of the Spirit] **Church** [called by him and answering his call]

Our God calls us, seeking a response from each of us. He is a sending God.

In Jesus we hear the command: 'Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' With this sending out comes the promise: 'I am with you always.' [Matthew 28: 19,20]

Meditation of Matthew. [Nick Fawcett. A Most Amazing Man Year A]

‘Take no coins in your belts, no wallet for your journey; no spare tunic, sandals or a staff.’

Could he be serious, I wondered? Surely not! But he *was* – we were to travel in faith, confident that somewhere, somehow, our needs would be met. Well, my heart sank, as you can imagine – to set off on a journey not knowing where the next meal is coming from, without a shield to your name, not to mention a change of clothing – that takes some doing, believe me! He was right though, I came to see that later, for it taught us not simply to live by faith, important though that can be, but to sort out our priorities and to travel light.

You see, we couldn’t have gone far with a load on our backs, a sackful of provisions. We had to be free, unencumbered, able to stride out wherever he might lead us – and that’s what we did – not just then, but later, going out in his name to proclaim his word.

Yet that’s not the end of it, for those words of his were not simply for us but for you – as much about *your* journey as any. ‘Do not worry about what you will eat, drink or wear,’ he had said, ‘but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and you will receive all these as well.’ ‘Sell everything, and give to the poor; then, come, follow me.’ ‘Come to me all you who are tired of carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest – take my yoke on you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

In other words, let go of everything that binds us to earth, that weighs us down and holds us back: the grasping for riches and clinging to possessions that consumes not just so much of our time but us as well, leaving us empty instead of full – hungry instead of satisfied. Focus instead on the things that matter – the resources he provides – the true essentials of life.

I’m not telling you what to take for *your* journey – that’s between you and him – but don’t confuse what you want with what you need – what will see you through with what will hold you back – or else, far from being ready to travel you may find yourself ready to drop, and with nothing and no-one to pick you up.

A Prayer for help: What do I do, Lord, with these conflicting feelings of mine – excitement and fear!

My excitement of being a Christian and the rising joy at times, which pushes me to share the good news – my own experiences of faith, prayer, and community.

My fear of having to take some risks if I am to be missionary – if I am going to be a labourer to help gather the plentiful harvest. I don’t like the thought, Lord, of being judged or criticised – of having people I care about turn against me. I don’t know what to say, Lord, and I struggle to know what to do with this conflict. Lord, free me from fear and give me your words, and a knowledge of how to be wise and yet innocent in reaching out to the crowd who are ready for your salvation. **Amen**

Gracious God, we all have concerns laying on our hearts – the concerns may be about our own problems, or about family and friends – maybe about the community in which we live – and for the woes of the world which we see day by day on the TV. Walk alongside all who need you and allay our fears. In Jesus’ name we pray. **Amen**

Closing Prayer and Blessing: Lord Jesus, bless us with your peace, that we may share it with others; show us where we are rich, that we may be generous to others; make us compassionate, that we may be gentle to others; speak to our weaknesses, that we may not demand from others; touch our pain, that we may not hurt others.

Use all that we are in your service, that we may be an example to others – not because we are special, or wise, or good or gifted, but because you are. **Amen**

In your journeying, be adventurous – in your encounters, be kind – in your hearts, be at peace.

May God bless you as you take risks, and reward you as you make a difference. **Amen**