

WORSHIP AT HOME – 4TH JULY 2021 – IN STEP WITH JESUS

Dear Friends,

Another month is upon us – and we hope for a good summer. Although restrictions can be extremely frustrating we should give thanks for those who made the vaccines and for the fantastic roll out of them. Today we shall hear that God often confounds our expectations. Waiting for a king, the people of Israel mostly failed to spot the Son of Man, ‘gentle and humble of heart’. Also what God has to say is often so obvious that the ‘wise and intelligent’ tend to look too hard at it, searching for obscure meanings or dismiss it out of hand, while those in need of love, mercy and grace soak it up. *Every blessing. Margaret*

Call to worship: Jesus said: ‘Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.’ So let us worship and receive rest for our souls.

Come to God, all who are weary and tired.

Come to God all who are burdened by life.

Come to God all who feel trapped and underappreciated.

For you will find the rest you need – the peace you seek – and the love you long for so come to God in Jesus Christ. **Amen**

We come before you with all our cares and worries, laying them down before you.

We come before you, setting this time aside to worship, opening ourselves up to you.

We come before you, in the expectation that you will take and transform us, before we return to the world once again ready to face all that comes our way.

We trust in you and in your promises for you are gentle and humble in heart – your yoke is easy and the burden you place upon us is light – and you grant us rest. **Amen**

The words to ‘Praise to the living God’ a medieval Jewish doxology translated by Max Landsberg [1845-1928] and Newton Mann [1836-1926] Hymns and Psalms 56

1 Praise to the living God! All praised be his name,

Who was, and is, and is to be for aye the same.

The one eternal God ere aught that now appears:

The First, the Last, beyond all thought his timeless years!

2 Formless, all lovely forms declare his loveliness;

Holy, no holiness of earth can his express.

Lo, he is Lord of all! Creation speaks his praise,

And everywhere above, below, his will obeys.

3 His Spirit floweth free, high surging where it will;

In prophet’s words he spoke of old, he speaketh still.

Established is his law, and changeless shall it stand,

Deep writ upon the human heart, on sea, on land.

4 Eternal life has he implanted in the soul;

His love shall be our strength and stay, while ages roll.

Praise to the living God! All praised be his name,

Who was, and is, and is to be for aye the same.

Prayers: God of many names, gracious in your loving – merciful in your judgements – steadfast in your faithfulness to us – compassionate to all; may we always be thankful for what you have done from creation to the end of time, and into the eternity of your rest. May we always sing your praises, speak of your

greatness, and bring glory to you by our actions gracious, merciful, steadfast, compassionate, loving God. **Amen.**

Lord, we like to think of ourselves as self-reliant and that we don't need anybody's help – though the furrow be long and the going tough, we try to plough it alone. That is what is admired in this world, Lord: pride and self-sufficiency, never giving in.

But you see that this is the way of slavery and you offer us a different yoke. We confess that we barely understand it for your yoke is light and easy – a balm to our shoulders and a lightening of our load. We confess our need of your help, your guidance. Help us, Lord, to fall into step with you. **Amen**

And a personal prayer:

Lord, I do not understand my own actions. There are things I don't want to do but I still do them. I want to change but I don't seem able to do that. I need insight, but I don't seem to know where to find it.

Lord, will you rescue me? **Amen**

Jesus said: 'Come to me, mine is a light burden, an easy yoke, a restful and refreshing way.'

Thank you, Jesus, for showing us God's way in you. **Amen**

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 145: 8-14.

The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all that he has made. All your works praise you, Lord; your faithful people extol you. They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendour of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does. The Lord upholds all who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.

A personal prayer: Lord, let me be yoked to you in all I say and do, be there with me. Lord, let me be yoked to you. Help me carry my load – share my burden. Lord, let me be yoked to you and let me rest in your strength, until my labour is through. **Amen**

Zechariah 9: 9-12: [Living Bible]:

Rejoice greatly, O my people! Shout with joy! For look – your King is coming! He is the Righteous One, the Victor! Yet he is lowly, riding on a colt! I will disarm all peoples of the earth, including my people in Israel, and he shall bring peace among the nations. His realm shall stretch from sea to sea, from the river to the ends of the earth. I have delivered you from death in a waterless pit because of the covenant I made with you, sealed with blood. Come to the place of safety, all you prisoners, for there is yet hope! I promise right now, I will repay you two mercies for each of your woes!

Matthew 11: 16-19 and 25-30:

"What shall I say about this nation? These people are like children playing, who say to their little friends, 'We played weddings and you weren't happy, so we played funerals but you weren't sad.' For John the Baptist doesn't even drink wine and often goes without food, and you say, 'He's crazy.' And I, the Messiah, feast and drink, and you complain that I am 'a glutton and a drinking man and hang around with the worst sort of sinners!' But brilliant men like you can justify your every inconsistency!"

And Jesus prayed this prayer: 'O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank you for hiding the truth from those who think themselves so wise, and for revealing it to little children. Yes, Father, for it pleases you to do it this way!.....

'Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father. Only the Father knows the Son, and the Father is known only by the Son and by those to whom the Son reveals him. Come to me and I will give you rest – all of you who work so hard beneath a heavy yoke. Wear my yoke – for it fits perfectly – and let me teach you; for I am gentle and humble, and you shall find rest for your souls, for I give you only light burdens.'

Comment: The reading from Zechariah gives us a clear picture of peace and humility, as we hear of a king entering in triumph, but on a donkey. It is an image which Jesus made his own and it speaks of a king totally in touch with the ordinary people and their needs – an unpretentious king who is unimpressed by the worldly idea of wealth and power - a king who isn't interested in domination and threat but is open and truthful.

The psalmist poured out a whole list of God's wonderful qualities, supportive and gracious, knowing that this kingdom is not fickle and short-lasting like those on earth, but is everlasting in its goodness.

So when we meet with Jesus in our reading from Matthew's gospel we find everything is still in keeping with the understanding of those Old Testament writers who had waited on God and trusted him. Jesus' heart goes out to all those who are weighed down by their lives – he welcomes them and doesn't seek to dominate them nor to set down strict rules for them to follow. These would be yet another burden for people would be scared that they would fail. Instead, we see Jesus open and offering relief and rest for our souls. He offers this if we become joined – or yoked – with him and his life in the living God.

Isn't that simple? When you think of the complexities we can get tangled up in – how we might struggle to handle it all, just because we are not at peace with God.

Susan Sayers in her book *Sermon Outlines*, points out that it is this very simplicity, while welcomed with joy by anyone ready to hear it as they are conscious of their failure to achieve it on their own, is also what brings out the childishness in those who petulantly reject God's help, manufacturing one reason or another to justify their rejection. She goes on to say that: 'Sadly, it is often those who pride themselves on their learning or their mature, independent thinking, who continue to see Jesus' offer of rescue as a threat and an insult to their maturity and success.'

Jesus must have felt saddened when he saw the religious leaders of his own people behaving like a bunch of quarrelsome children – they complained but there was no pleasing them! All the time they went on behaving in this way they were unable to take advantage of what God was doing in their lifetime. On the whole, it was the ordinary, uneducated people then who responded to Jesus with openness – 'and a spiritual maturity.'

And it has been the same in every generation since – and it is like it today. As Susan Sayers writes: 'While we are never meant to leave our brains at the church door, it is also true that sophisticated cynicism or intellectual smugness can blind us to the true value of our great, saving God coming to us meekly on a donkey.'

Illustration; from *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan.

He ran.....till he came to the place somewhat ascending and on that place stood a cross..... Just as Christian came up.....his burden loosed from his shoulders and fell from off his back.....I saw it no more. Then Christian glad and lightsome said with a merry heart, 'He has given me rest by his sorrow and life by his death'.....it was very surprising to him that the cross should ease him of his burden.....Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on, singing:

'Thus far did I come laden with my sin
nor could ought ease the grief that was within
till I came hither: what place is this,
must be here the beginning of my bliss,
must here the burden fall from off my back,
must here the strings which bound it crack.

Blest Cross! Blest Sepulchre! Blest rather be the man who was put to shame for me.'

The words to 'Come, let us sing of a wonderful love' written by Robert Walmsley [1831-1905] StF 443

1 Come let us sing of a wonderful love, tender and true;
Out of the heart of the Father above, streaming to me and to you;
Wonderful love dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell, joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell, sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost, saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet; why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget; home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love dwells in the heart of the Father above.

4 Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love, come and abide,
Lifting my life till it rises above envy and falsehood and pride;
Seeking to be lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Prayers: *[this prayer reminds us that faith must be earthed in our daily situation]*

Living God, we thank you for all you have done for us in Christ. You have given a new dimension to our lives – a hope and a purpose not of this world – a taste of eternal life with all the fulfilment that offers – resources to meet whatever challenges we might face. **Lord of life, hear our prayer.**

We praise you that through faith we are able to glimpse things as yet unseen – that we are part of the great company of your people in heaven and on earth – that we are pilgrims together on a journey of discovery – that we are in Christ. **Lord of life, hear our prayer.**

But we thank you also that you have given us life in this world, that you have called us to serve you in this particular place and time and that we are Christians here in our particular places and communities. **Lord of life, hear our prayer.**

We thank you for all that our area has to offer and for all the ways we are part of it and all the people who live here. Help us to work out our faith in this place, offering service to the community in which we are set, making the Gospel real in our activities, our relationships and our attitudes. **Lord of life, hear our prayer.**

Living God, help us to anticipate your kingdom, but help us also to keep our feet on the ground, remembering that this begins now and not at some distant point in the future – that your kingdom is on earth and not simply in heaven – here in the place where we live as much as anywhere. **Lord of life, hear our prayer and help us truly to be in Christ wherever you have placed us to the glory of your name.**

Amen.

A personal prayer:

Jesus says: 'Come to me you who are weary' –
God, grant me strength to keep going.

Jesus says: 'Come to me, you who are carrying heavy burdens'. –
God, grant me the courage to let go of all my worries.

Jesus says: 'Come to me and learn from me' –
God, grant me the faith to trust in you. **Amen**

Meditation of Matthew:

'Are you weary, tired of carrying a heavy load?'

I was, though I didn't know it at the time – didn't quite grasp what it was that warmed me to Jesus when he found me at the tax-collector's booth and asked me to follow.

I obeyed without a second thought – in the blink of an eye turning from one life to another – and if you'd pressed me for my reasons I'd probably have said it was curiosity or a thirst for adventure, nothing deeper than that.

But I'd have been wrong, for the truth is I was worn out, if not in mind and body then in spirit. I'd not yet admitted it to myself, but life was a relentless quest for gain – to feather my nest as best as I could – so I'd swindled and extorted in the name of Rome, selling out, not just my countrymen, but my very soul. Yes, I made light of it, wearing a careless smile for the world, but the shame and emptiness within hung heavy upon me – a manacle from which I could not break free. Until, that is, I met Jesus, and found new life, new beginnings – the past put aside, mistakes forgiven – rest for my soul.

The chains you wear may be altogether different, but the answer's the same, believe me, for I have followed Jesus these last few years and seen so many set free. Whatever your burden, stop wrestling with it on your own. Give it to him – give *everything* to him, yourself included – and let go.

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How do we do it, Lord. How do we turn a message of deliverance into a religion that enslaves – a gospel of freedom into a travesty of faith that remorselessly holds us captive? It shouldn't be possible, but we do it time and again, adding to the trials of life by weighing ourselves down with guilt, rules, demands and expectations – each of our own making rather than yours. Remind us that your yoke is easy and your burden light and that you invite us to cast whatever loads we carry on to your shoulders, confident that you are strong enough to bear not just them but us too. Help us, then, to truly let go, and so find rest in body, mind and soul. **Amen**

The words to 'What a friend we have' written by Joseph Medicott Scriven [1819-1886] StF 531

1 What a friend we have in Jesus, all our griefs and sins to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

2 Have we trials and temptations, is there trouble anywhere?

We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?

Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

3 Are we weak and heavy-laden, cumbered with a load of care?

Precious Saviour, still our refuge – take it to the Lord in prayer!

Do your friends despise, forsake you? Take it to the Lord in prayer;

In his arms he'll take and shield you, you will find a solace there.

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

Offer to God

all the things that make you unhappy,

all the things that make you sad,

and all the things that you worry about.

God understands all that you are going through;

you are not alone, for God is with you.

Thanks be to God. **Amen**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us and with all whom we love and with all for whom we pray this day and for evermore. Amen.