

DS&W Circuit Written Service 2nd June 2024 by Revd Steph Jenner

Call to Worship Psalm 139: 1 – 6

O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O LORD, you know it completely. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Hymn StF 255

The kingdom of God
is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores
what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory
in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter
the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God
is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed,
the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened
in place of despair.

The kingdom of God
is challenge and choice,
believe the good news,
repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement
for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,
the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun,
in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom
shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory
to God all in all!

Bryn Rees

Prayers of Praise and Confession

How can we bring anything to our God who knows us inside and out? How can we say or pray something new? How can we do better, be better? We do what we can by humbly turning to God in prayer; to realise that to know ourselves, the good that we show and the not so good that we hide, is to be able to lay our true selves open to God's love, Jesus' instruction, the Holy Spirit's guidance. We bring our praise.

And we pray, in praise of our God who grants absolution and forgiveness when we repent and turn back: for the thoughts that come unbidden, for the words that are spoken without thinking, for the lack of self-control that brings regretful actions. Whether significant or minor, whether concealed or in full view, whether universally offensive or self-destructive, forgive us, we pray, show us the way, bring a new day, and help us to start again, because we are truly sorry and seek to grow in your kingdom way. Amen.

Lord's Prayer please use whatever version or language you prefer.



Reading Mark 2: 23 – 3: 6

One Sabbath he (Jesus) was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way his disciples began to pluck heads of grain. The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath?" And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food, how he entered the house of God when Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and he gave some to his companions?" Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath, so the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. They were watching him to see whether he would cure him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come forward." Then he said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. He looked around at them with anger; he was grieved at their hardness of heart and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.

Hymn StF 244

Blest are the pure in heart,
for they shall see our God:
the secret of the Lord is theirs;
their soul is Christ's abode.

Still to the lowly soul
he does himself impart,
and for his dwelling and his throne
chooses the pure in heart.

The Lord, who left the heavens
our life and peace to bring,
to dwell on earth in lowliness,
our pattern and our King.

Lord, we your presence seek,
a vision of your face;
give us a pure and lowly heart,
a temple of your grace.

John Keble & William John Hall

Reflection

In our reading we have two distinct, but connected, stories of Jesus. In the first, Jesus and his disciples are hungry and do some foraging as they walk along, as we might take blackberries off the bush, or even an apple from a tree. It may not have been their crop, or a crop they had permission to harvest, or potentially the gleaning at the edge of the field that the farmers were obliged to leave for anyone that needed grain. But this wasn't what was troubling the Pharisees, who just happened to be there and watching, but it was that it was the Sabbath on which Jews weren't supposed to do any work at all. So, I'm not quite sure quite sure what the Pharisees were doing, because their job was upholding the law, so they were technically working. Unless the transgression was reported to them by a third party after the Sabbath had ended, which is when they then approached and reproached Jesus and the disciples, but it doesn't read like that.

The next story again takes place on the Sabbath, but this time in the Synagogue, where the Pharisees plausibly were, but this time it reads as if they were lying in wait, they may have even coerced or bullied or bribed the man to be there (obviously pure conjecture in my part!). The connection between these two stories is that Jesus had an answer, a justification, even an irrefutable justification for what he did.

In the first he cites a story from King David's time. For all his flaws, King David was held as the example of a king – the one everyone wanted back, Nostalgia played a part I'm sure, as people looked back to the days of David through the lens of time. But if Jesus was emulating King David, the Pharisees would be on tricky ground if they criticised him, plus add to that his verbal response:

“The Sabbath was made for humankind and not humankind for the Sabbath,” and they have to retreat in humiliation.

In the second he turns the situation back on the Pharisees and shows his anger at their petty ‘hard-heartedness’ of using a vulnerable person to try and score points against Jesus, without caring about the injured man. Jesus reminds them that the Sabbath is not just ‘don’ts’ but also ‘do’, and doing good, helping someone is not only allowable, but encouraged. Plus, to further make his point, Jesus simply asks the man to stretch out his hand. He doesn’t touch him or place a salve, it is purely his words, and, in faith, the man does as he is asked and is healed.

The Pharisees immediately seek a like-minded group, with regards to their feelings about Jesus at least, and set about finding a way to get rid of him, permanently. We know what happens from there... Mark is telling us this very early in his Gospel, setting the scene for us, that from the very beginning of his ministry Jesus is taking care of people’s basic needs – food and healthcare – and getting up the noses of the people at the top, who like things as they are, with themselves at the top!

And yet this supposed nobody, from a downtrodden area of the country, is facing up to them, besting them at theology and compassionate words and deeds, and people are following him instead of the established authority and finding a new way to be. The followers are growing in number and are no longer just fishermen, women, sickly outcasts and other undesirables – now the upper echelons of society and even some of the ruling classes, the Pharisees themselves, are taking a positive interest. And when people who are normally deferred to and respected feel threatened, they lash out.

Jesus was and is the leader for everyone, especially the discarded, neglected, and ignored and we must follow his example. There are times when we have to engage with those who think they are superior, but our energies should be with those who are constantly told, by words and actions, that they are inferior, different, abnormal and therefore dispensable. We may consider ourselves in that category. Be assured that to Jesus we are all equally worthy and deserving of a share in the Kingdom of Heaven. This is what we strive for. In Jesus name.

Hymn StF 248

I heard the voice of Jesus say:

‘Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast.’

I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad,
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:

‘Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink and live.’

I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:

‘I am this dark world’s Light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright.’

I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I’ll walk,
till travelling days are done.

Horatius N. Bonar

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Awesome God, we offer our thanks-yous for all that we can be because of your faith in us, all that we can do because you have already given us your permission, for all the goodness, kindness and compassion you have shown us, so that we can share it too. In Jesus we have all the example we need, so whether we are in a position to give or a situation to receive, we thank you that your followers make life better and more bearable for all your children.

And so we also ask, in your name, for strength to enable us to carry out your work; patience for when we may need to keep trying and trying; for sympathy to be able to meet people where they are; and skills to join up with each other so that community looks after and out for their community to cover the world, bringing the kingdom of heaven on earth for people. Amen.

Hymn StF 251

Jesus Christ is waiting,
waiting in the streets;
no one is his neighbour,
all alone he eats.

Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely too:
make me, friend or stranger,
fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging,
raging in the streets,
where injustice spirals
and real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry too:
in the Kingdom's causes
let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ us healing,
healing in the streets,
curing those who suffer,
touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too:
let my care be active,
healing, just like you.

Jesus Christ is dancing,
dancing in the street,
where each sign of hatred he,
with love, defeats.

Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too:
where good conquers evil
let me dance with you.

Jesus Christ is calling,
calling in the streets,
'Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet.'
Listen, Lord Jesus,
let my fears be few:
walk one step before me;
I will follow you.

John Bell & Graham Maule

Blessing

May we all be blessed by God so that we may be a blessing one to another, until all are blessed.
Amen.

