

Dorset South & West. Written Service.

Sunday 9th June 2024.

“How does it feel to be a problem?”

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship. Cast all your cares upon Him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7

STF 57

Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
his praise may thither fly;
the earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!

Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!
The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out;
but above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!

Prayers of adoration and confession.

I used to print our call to worship verse on the back of the envelope of all the letters that I sent.

Do you remember when we used to write letters?

Imagine that you are writing a love letter to God, what would you want to say?

Take a moment to think of the things you would like to say to God, to thank Him for his love?

What would you like to thank Him for, that you have enjoyed in this last week?

What made you smile? What cares has he resolved?

Loving God, we praise you, not only when the sun is shining, but when rain seems endless. For just as a seed needs both sun and rain if it is to grow, so faith becomes stronger, lives become more fruitful, if we root them in the rich and solid earth of your love. **Amen**

A prayer of confession

Imagine that it's a sunny day and you have an isolated spot to sit comfortably on a Sandy beach.

Think about the things that you regret and are sorry about.

In your mind write those things in the sand. Just a word will suffice, God knows.

Now watch in your mind's eye the waves washing over the sand and making your words disappear.

That's how it is with the love of God. When we confess our sins,

He forgives our sins and remembers them no more. **Thanks be to God.**

For the love you have shown us as sometimes reluctant disciples, your patience in being with us when we decide to go our way, your hand that is there for us as we stumble or are anxious, your gentle whisper reminding us that you will never let us go, for all of this and more besides what can we do but offer you the worship of our hearts and lives **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

STF 102

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies:

*Gracious God, to you we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon and stars of light:

For the joy of ear and eye,
for the heart and mind's delight,
for the mystic harmony
linking sense to sound and sight:

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,
pleasures pure and undefiled:

For each perfect gift and sign
of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine,
flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

Bible Reading...Psalm 138

I give you thanks, O Lord, with my whole heart;
before the gods I sing your praise;
I bow down towards your holy temple
and give thanks to your name for your steadfast
love and your faithfulness;
for you have exalted your name and your word
above everything.

On the day I called, you answered me,
you increased my strength of soul.

All the kings of the earth shall praise you, O Lord,
for they have heard the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the ways of the Lord,
for great is the glory of the Lord.
For though the Lord is high, he regards the lowly;
but the haughty he perceives from far away.

Though I walk in the midst of trouble,
you preserve me against the wrath of my
enemies;
you stretch out your hand,
and your right hand delivers me.
The Lord will fulfil his purpose for me;
your steadfast love, O Lord, endures for ever.
Do not forsake the work of your hands.

Reflection

“Are you sitting comfortably then I will begin....” Those are some familiar words to us all and probably take us back even to childhood and comforting stories told.

So, how are you answering that question today? I guess we all have different answers depending upon what we are going through.

The other day someone wished me the usual, ‘have a good day!’ ‘I was on my way to the dentist and rain was threatened! I managed to respond with a smile and “You too.” But inside it was a slightly different story! Until on my journey I noticed a perfectly formed oval tree just coming into leaf. I wondered why I hadn’t seen that tree before? I have passed that way many times. Suddenly it was a good day!

There are days and experiences when we are not sitting comfortably for all sorts of reasons.

The psalm of David we read today, begins by implying that we should praise God with our whole heart. In fact in verses 1-3, the Psalmist can’t seem to say enough good things about God. However the psalm is believed to have been written after the Israelites had been taken and freed from exile. I guess having regained their freedom and remembering, there would be much to celebrate. Yet, I wonder if they had any of what we call today, PTSD? Flashbacks to the horror moments and fear that distressing events can create?

I am reminded of the Spiritual “Nobody knows the trouble I see, nobody knows but Jesus.” Written during the time of African slavery. One writer has described it as one of the sorrow songs’. That same writer W.E.B. DuBois asks a question that has been so insightful in looking at the troubles of life, right into our present day. The empathetic question is, “How does it feel to be a problem?”

One humorous version is a telling twist to the Negro spiritual, “nobody knows the trouble I’ve been!” 🤔

A very pertinent News Report as I write this reflection, is the question about making euthanasia legal in some countries? This has become a hot topic! While ongoing refugee and asylum seeker problems are secondary news. The Grenfell Towers enquiry won’t be nearing a conclusion until nearly ten years after the event. People’s lives are still in turmoil from the post office scandal and the war in the Ukraine and in Gaza seem unrelenting. So many troubles in our world and probably numerous events that we have to deal with daily. Plus the early general election announced .So praising God with our whole heart is understandably difficult at times.

In the last few verses of this very short psalm the Psalmist ends realistically with his admission that, “I walk in the midst of trouble.” Also that he has enemies. Plus is there a shadow of doubt in his conclusion, ‘Do not forsake the work of your hands.’

I personally don’t believe that he doubts God, but perhaps is being realistic about what even those who think they are, the ‘Gods of this world’ think. Perhaps he has truly reflected on how the downtrodden of life are struggling with just fleeting moments of hope. We know from David’s story that he has explored what it’s like to feel like, you are the problem! Can a loving God really want you to be in His presence?

The middle verses of the psalm undoubtedly express the reality that we are all precious in God’s sight and no one is unacceptable, or unloved by God.

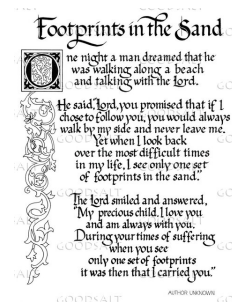
Even those who think they are above others and look down upon those they deem to be less important, are still in His sight line. Those who reject Him are still cared for.

I guess in a very simple sense it is like the tree that I have never given a second glance to. Now I have seen it’s splendour, I will certainly be looking out for it every time I am near. How much more so is that true, when we have finally reflected on God’s infinite love towards us?

The Negro Spiritual , ‘Nobody knows the trouble I see, nobody knows but Jesus;’ moves us in a similar realistic direction. We all suffer. The psalmist said, “ I walk in the midst of trouble, ... Do not forsake the work of your hands.”

In our weakest moments, we tend to cling on the assumption that other’s may not have suffered as much. This misconception arises from the simple fact that we cannot really feel each other’s pain, we can only realise our own sufferings. A situation that may cause fear or anxiety in one person may not cause the same level of pain to another one. This is compounded in that some even fail to move on from their sufferings. They might be unfortunately urged to “grow up” or “get over it” as if it’s just a trivial exercise that can be accomplished in the blink of an eye. We are urged to leave everything in the hands of God. Which the verse that was used as our call to worship might imply. ‘Cast all your care on God, he cares for you.’

The important fact is - no matter how lonely or down you are, no matter how terrible life seems to be, God is aware of everything and will be with you. Remember that lovely story, ‘footprints’. We are never alone, as Jesus is always there, casting a watchful eye over us.



While some people do suffer horrible physical afflictions such as sickness, disability, injury or torture, even that sort of obvious suffering is deeply influenced by how we respond to it.

In The Problem of Pain, C. S. Lewis discusses the differences in suffering. He makes the important point that our suffering can be made worse by anticipation, worry, feelings of inadequacy, and remembrance. Such things can't be seen or touched, yet they can cause serious problems even in the absence of any objective external cause.

This explains why others generally fail to fully appreciate our own particular sufferings. It's so important to try to understand how it might feel to be, the perceived problem. Either by the person suffering or others perspectives.

If our sufferings are not obvious and physical, most people will just figure we are simply too weak. And even if your sufferings are physical, after a certain period of time those without your affliction will begin to be surprised that you're still concerned about it. They've moved on; the suffering wasn't theirs. Jesus Knows and Jesus doesn't move on, He stays with us.

While it is true that every person suffers in a variety of ways. It is even more important to know that God really understands and the whole Easter story is a revelation of how much God suffered for our redemption. He shared our suffering of yesterday, our current suffering, and all our sufferings yet to come, because he carried the whole vast weight of our sin and every kind and instance of suffering throughout time upon the cross. God's empathy with our complete catalogue of suffering went as far as to make the ultimate sacrifice to restore all people that come to Him, to His loving acceptance and compassion.

How do we praise God with our WHOLE heart? By being real about the world we inhabit and the real needs of others. By trying to understand from others points of view what their situation really is. The bulk of our psalm is about counting our blessings and in then in the end remembering that we are all in the midst of trouble, but God does not let us go.

We need to hold onto verses such as, Luke 10:27 which remind us of the need to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind' and, 'Love your neighbour' how? as yourself, which means loving and caring for yourself too, just as God loves and cares for us.

A final thought that to me speaks of the redemptive power of God and the sadness of how try as we might, we are so inept in times of real suffering.

The following account is from an enslaved woman: [All spellings are as they appear in the original text .]

Dear husband, I want you to buy me as soon as possible, for it you do not get me somebody else will. . . Dear husband, you [know] not the trouble I see . . . It is said Master is in want of money. If so, I know not what time he may sell me, and then all my bright hops of the futer are blasted, for there has ben on bright hope to cheer me in all my troubles, that is to be with you—for if I thought I shoul never see you this earth would have no charms for me. Do all you can for me, witch I have no doubt you will. Your affectionate wife, Harriet Newby

To praise the LORD wholeheartedly we need to concentrate on Christ, 'fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.' Hebrews 12:2. He by His sacrifice purchased our redemption, so that we might love him with our whole heart and express that love in our love of others.

Prayers for Others.

We pray for all who work in stressful situations; healthcare, teaching, law enforcement, social services and other occupations where patience, love and perseverance can wear thin, and daily stress levels rise. Keep them safe and keep them well, equipped to follow their vocation through the most difficult of times. We especially remember those who serve us as politicians. We pray those preparing for the general election. Give them guidance and grace in their preparations. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Loving God, we bring to you those for whom this day is simply a continuation of a struggle to survive; to feed and clothe the family, pay the rent or mortgage, keep the children in school, stem a rising tide of debt, search for yet another job. Be with them in the choices that must be made today. Bring light into their darkness with the help that they so need, and embrace them in your love. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Loving God we pray for all those struggling physically and mentally because of the pressure of life, particularly where relationships are on edge or breaking down and there is violence and abuse. Be with victims in their distress, protecting them from further harm, and may those seeds of anger within the home wither and die. Above all, when need is great, may we never be too proud to ask you, and others, for help. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those in hospital, for routine or emergency care, thanking you for the dedication and skills of doctors and nurses in whom we all entrust our lives. Bless their work, keep them safe, along with all receiving treatment, that damaged and broken bodies might be made whole once more. God of love and life, we pray. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those in the news today. For those whose suffering we can barely imagine. Those caught up in acts of war, for those who are wrongly accused or imprisoned. For those who must make difficult decisions for the good of their nations. Bring peace and harmony to all peoples. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.**
We say the Lord's Prayer.

STF 504

May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do or say.

May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour,
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.

May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything,

that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self forgetting -
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.

The Blessing

In the busyness of life may we find space.
In the worries of life may we find peace.
In the beauty of life may we find joy.
In the sorrows of life may we find comfort,
May our faith be strengthened and our days be blessed
by the knowledge of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ . **Amen**

