

Call to Worship: Psalm 145: 1 – 7

I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever.
Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever.
Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised; his greatness is unsearchable.
One generation shall extol your works to another and shall declare your mighty acts.
They will recount the glorious splendour of your majesty, and on your wondrous works I will meditate.
They will proclaim the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness.
They shall celebrate the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness.

Introduction

Every year the Methodist Church designates a book in the Bible for Bible Month. Resources are produced to study it more in depth and we try to concentrate our Sunday readings accordingly. This year the book is Genesis and this first week we are recommended to read the first 11 chapters, our concentration today is on verses from chapter 11. You can read it all for yourself, but if you have a study Bible or commentary that may help too – or online access is www.methodist.org.uk and follows the link to 'Faith' then 'The Bible' then 'Bible Month'.

Hymn StF 1

All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
come ye before him and rejoice.

The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make:
we are his folk, he doth us feed;
and for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter then his gates with praise;
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud, and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.

For why, the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.

To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
the God whom heaven and earth adore,
from earth and from the angel host
be praise and glory evermore.

William Kethe

Prayers of Praise and Confession

Loving God, through worship we are in communion with you and each other, so we bring our prayer and praise to you today knowing we are in the company of saints. Through the adherence to your example and guidance, we know that the Holy Spirit is our constant companion, and for that advocacy we are grateful. Be with us as we read your word, pray in your name and sing to your praise.

Forgive us, when we have hurt others by our words and actions, when we have been hasty, rather than thoughtful, divisive, rather than uniting, exclusive in our community, rather than inclusive in our communion.

Whether our sins may be considerable or few, deliberate, accidental or by neglect, allow us, we pray, to reflect and repent, so that we may seek forgiveness and absolution through the grace of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Genesis 11: 1 – 9

Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and fire them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

Acts 2: 1 – 11

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

Hymn StF 682

God of grace and God of glory,
on your people pour your power;
crown your ancient Church's story;
bring her bud to glorious flower.

Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
for the facing of this hour.

Heal your children's warring madness;
bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.

Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.

Lo, the hosts of evil round us
scorn your Christ, assail his ways!
Fears and doubts too long have bound us;
free our hearts to work and praise.
Grant us wisdom,
grant us courage,
for the living of these days.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Reflection

As I am preparing this act of worship, we are in the run up to the general election. I know that by the time we share this, the polls will be closed, and the results probably known, so it seems pertinent that our readings today contrast the passage from Genesis with the passage from Acts. In Genesis humanity goes from unity of language and understanding to confusion through humanity (again) trying to be better than God, by going their own way. In Acts the arrival of the Holy Spirit gives humanity the opportunity to re-engage with one another, to understand and communicate with each other, to break down the barriers built up over the centuries.

In Genesis, we see that the earth's population is growing after the flood, so people are moving to form new communities, and when a new community is formed they want to not just be a breakaway from the old, they want to be established in their own right, they want to be noticed and respected and even feared. They separate themselves, but forming a walled barrier, to become 'us and them', and we know how that works out. When we 'other' groups of people we see them as lesser, not worthy, dispensable. So we get division, violence, wars, genocide... 'nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.' The author of Genesis gives reasons for population scatter over the earth, and human-made barriers between them which are used to justify atrocities.

In Acts, in public view, not hidden away, the wind (a symbol of God's Spirit) and the tongues of fire (a symbol of divine presence) were clearly visible and audible, to the apostles and the others there. Together they are associated with judgement, and there would be fear in the crowd, but this gives way to bewilderment as they hear familiar words and phrases, giving them good news, comfort and hope. The astonishment builds as so many different languages are heard and understood – they are equally amazed and afraid as they try to work out what is happening. |But they are being brought together to hear the Word.

But it is not just about knowing the words, as you might increase your vocabulary when learning a new language, but about understand the emphasis, the nuances, the culture. Because to truly understand someone else you may start by using the same language, but it is only through further conversations and establishing a relationship that trust and understanding grows, sympathy, empathy and compassion may then develop and finally a respecting, loving relationship is formed. It has to be worked at, not by creating tall, isolating towers, but by breaking down walls. We are not in this world alone, although sometimes we act like it, through arrogance, through fear. So let us take warning from Genesis and hope from Acts in all our relationships with our fellow humans and our God. May the Holy Spirit be with us as we continue to strive.

Lord's Prayer – please use whatever language and form you prefer, or try a new version?



Hymn StF 720

We turn to you, O God of every nation,
giver of good and origin of life;
your love is at the heart of all creation,
your hurt is people's pain in war and death.

We turn to you, that we may be forgiven
for crucifying Christ on earth again;
we know that we have never wholly striven
to share with all the promise of your reign.

Free every heart from haughty self-reliance,
our ways of thought inspire with simple grace;
break down among us barriers of defiance;
speak to the soul of all the human race.

On all who rise on earth for right relations
we pray the light of love from hour to hour.
Grant wisdom to the leaders of the nations,
the gift of carefulness to those in power.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve the need of
others;
help us to give and not to count the cost.
Unite us all to live as sisters, brothers;
defeat our Babel with your Pentecost!

Fred Kaan

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We bring our thanks to you, loving God, on this National Thanksgiving Day, for the people that you bring into our lives that help us every day, the people who do so through their work, and those who do so in a voluntary capacity.

And we thank you too for the opportunities to help others, giving our lives direction and purpose.

But on this Sunday, with our countries dealing with the results of the general election, we think of and pray for those who have new roles to play in society, and those who need to find new ones; those who are full of hope, and those filled with despair. And we pray for peace and progress, thinking of those that have least and need most help, usually through no fault of their own, whilst also praying for those who seek to divide, rather than unite, thus hampering moving forward to improve life for all, at home and overseas.

We pray that all may be open to receive your guidance and endless love. Amen.

Hymn StF 17

With gladness we worship, rejoice as we
sing,
free hearts and free voices how blessed to
bring;
the old, thankful story shall scale thine abode,
thou King of all glory, most bountiful God.

Thy right would be give thee – true homage
thy due,
and honour eternal, the universe through,
with all they creation, earth, heaven and sea,
in one acclamation we celebrate thee.

Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,
thy children revere thee for all thou hast
done.

O Father! Returning to love and to light,
thy children are yearning to praise thee
aright.

We join with the angels, and so there is given
from earth alleluia, in answer to heaven.

Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,
redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!

George Rawson

Blessing

As you give us life, O God,
give us also love and strength
to follow your Way to bring blessing
in all of our lives. Amen.