

Winchester, Eastleigh and Romsey Circuit

Service at Home, 18 June, 2023

Service prepared by the Revd Eric Renouf

Hello!

The readings set for today from the Bible remind me of twin essentials for being a Christian, and indeed for being truly human. Those 'twins' can be expressed in several ways: receiving and giving; being accepted as I am and accepting others as they are; to be as well as to do.

Our two collects for today also express that sort of relationship with God on the one hand and, on the other, with people and the whole of life.

Collect

Your glory, O God, fills heaven and earth and all creation resounds with your praise. As we rejoice in your presence, may we know your power to save and praise you for your faithfulness, now and for ever; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Many of us know the dangers involved when we are constantly giving ourselves in one way or another and hardly stopping to take in. We also need to receive, to be as well as to do. Our first hymn recognises this deep need and asks for the help of God. I suggest that we read and ponder it, then after a while, that we sing the chorus as our prayerful response to God.

Read and ponder hymn StF 400

Wind of God, dynamic Spirit,
breathe upon our hearts today;
that we may your power inherit,
hear us, Spirit, as we pray:
fill the vacuum that enslaves us --
emptiness of heart and soul;
and, through Jesus Christ who saves us,
give us life and make us whole.

Voice of God, prophetic Spirit,
speak to every heart today
to encourage or prohibit,
urging action or delay:
clear the vagueness which impedes us --
come, enlighten mind and soul;
and, through Jesus Christ who leads us,
teach the truth that makes us whole.

Fire of God, volcanic Spirit,
burn within our hearts today;
cleanse our sin -- may we exhibit
holiness in every way:
purge the squalidness that shames us,
soils the body, taints the soul;
and through Jesus Christ who claims us,
purify us, make us whole.

Michael Saward (b. 1932)

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Hymn (StF 395)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DtJgaGRav4>

Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.
Break me, melt me,
mould me, fill me.
Spirit of the living God,
fall afresh on me.

Daniel Iverson (1890-1977)

In his letter to Christians in Rome, Paul explored our persistent problem as human beings - that we are estranged from God because of sin, and how amazingly God bridges that huge divide through Jesus Christ, as we respond to him in faith.

Epistle: Romans 5 v 1-8

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Whenever I can, I avoid using the little word 'sin', basically because, it seems to me, it can so easily be dismissed as being too religious or that it is misunderstood. But the fact that I don't say that three letter word does not mean that I'm not aware of the reality of it!

Sin is all around us and within us, each one. As has been said in the past, sin is a little word with a big 'I' in the middle! That big 'I' appears in any and all of us as individuals and is a huge reality, devastating our relationships with other people. It's the root of the persistence of conflict more widely and is a major cause of climate change.

The Christian good news is that God intervened dramatically in Jesus Christ to deal with the root of our need, if only we will respond to his invitation. If I accept that I am not the centre of the universe, that I am not God, and respond to his amazing grace, his unearned love, there is hope for us beyond our dreams!

As Paul says, *'Therefore, since we have been justified through faith,'* In other words, we

have been put right in our relationship with God, as we respond in trust to his invitation. In his letter to Christians in Ephesus, Paul expressed that fact in this way: 'it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, ...' (Ephesians 2:8)

Charles Wesley expressed this amazing love of God in many of his hymns, including this one.

Hymn: StF 345

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dsl7I0a3abQ>

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above --
so free, so infinite his grace --
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray --
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Gospel: Matthew 9 v 35-10: 8

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'

He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

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

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near'. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep.'

As Charles Wesley emphasized in that classic hymn, in Jesus God comes to deal with our need and frees us to share in his liberating work: *'my chains fell off, my heart was free, I rose, went forth, and followed thee'*.

Our response to God's love is to accept his invitation for ourselves **and** to follow Jesus in his way of relating to others and in sharing the good news of God's love.

It's worth noting that in his version about the task given to the disciples, Luke simply says that Jesus told them *'to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal'*. At this point Mark gives no indication of what they are to do or say, but like Matthew and Luke, Mark includes the emphasis of Jesus on travelling with a minimum of gear.

All three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, include the names of the twelve disciples, a varied bunch of people, just as we are! Their lists of names all start with Peter and end with Judas Iscariot, that is, both the one who had denied he knew Jesus and the one who betrayed him.

In this day and age we also, like the first followers of Jesus, are not always true to him and his way of life and service. John and Charles Wesley and early Methodists were well aware of this persistence of ingrained sin. It is true that when we accept that we are loved and forgiven by God, we can feel that *'my chains fell off, my heart was free'*. But, as the Wesleys emphasized, we always need to keep on growing in God's love.

Daniel T. Niles, was born in Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in the early 20th century. He became a Methodist minister who served in his home country but later also on the world-stage in the Student Christian Movement and also in the World Council of Churches, becoming a well-known evangelist and pastor.

He had a saying which goes to the heart of our continuing need even while we engage in seeking to serve both church and world. Sharing the gospel is *'like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.'* AMEN.

Prayer of Dedication

In response to your overflowing love, dear God, we offer to you who we are and have, to work with you in your life-giving and renewing work in the church and in the world. Amen.

Prayers for others and ourselves

(leaving space for our own thoughts and prayers)

Dear God,

We thank you, the centre and source of all life, that especially in Jesus you show that you are very much 'for us'. Forgive us when we live, plan, or act with little more than a nod in your direction..... Help us to be more open to the work of your Spirit.

Thank you for your rainbow creation, amazing in its sheer variety, including the whole human family. Forgive us when we ride roughshod over and abuse your creation including people. Encourage all who work for peace and those who challenge us to respect your creation.

We thank you for all with whom we share life and work and service..... Forgive us when we forget our partners in any situation. We remember before you anyone who feels isolated as a 'lone voice' or struggling alone May they find support and be encouraged.

We thank you for those who have gone before us, especially those who loved, sustained, and inspired us As we leave them in your care, help us to trust and serve you so that we strengthen and inspire others. Amen.

Collect:

Generous God, you gather your people and lavish your gifts upon us, day by day. Grant that each experience of your pardon may enlarge our own love, until it meets the measure of your extravagant forgiveness. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen

Hymn: StF 4

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1j0eRYvlf2c>

Father in heaven,
grant to your children
mercy and blessing,
songs never ceasing,
love to unite us,
grace to redeem us --
Father in heaven,
Father our God.

Jesus, Redeemer,
may we remember
your gracious passion,
your resurrection.
Worship we bring you,
praise we shall sing you --
Jesus, Redeemer,
Jesus our Lord.

Spirit descending,
whose is the blessing,
strength for the weary,
help for the needy,
sealed in our kinship
yours be our worship --
Spirit descending,
Spirit adored.

Daniel Thambyrajah Niles (1908-1970)

Words and Music: (c) East Asia Christian Conference

Benediction

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.