

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
Service at Home – Sunday 24 November 2024**

Prepared by Rev John Archer

Call to Worship

“Be fruitful within us O God and fill our words with your love, our lives with your glory, and our labour with your blessing”

Ann Gilbert, Cornish Methodist preacher 1735 – 90

Introduction

These 2 weeks are 'in between weeks' - between Remembrance and the start of Advent. The build up on TV will rapidly concentrate on spending with an emphasis on what 'comfort and joy' it will bring to people. We are aware that around the world, and here in Britain, there are many people who will not be happy. In this service I have turned to Jesus' 'sermon on the plain' from Luke about what makes us happy.

Praise Prayer

Almighty and all loving God
we come to worship you,
to proclaim your greatness,
to acknowledge your power,
to recognise your sovereignty,
and declare your goodness.

Compassionate and caring God
we praise you for the love which surrounds us,
for all the blessings of our lives,
for the wonders of our world,
and for the hope of our faith in Christ.

Lord hear our prayer. **Amen**

Pray 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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. **Amen.**

Read, pray or sing StF 715

[StF 715 The Right Hand of God](#)

- 1 The right hand of God is writing in our land,
writing with power and with love;
our conflicts and our fears,
our triumphs and our tears,
are recorded by the right hand of God.
- 2 The right hand of God is pointing in our land,
pointing the way we must go;
so clouded is the way,
so easily we stray,
but we're guided by the right hand of God.
- 3 The right hand of God is striking in our land,
striking out at envy, hate and greed;
our selfishness and lust,
our pride and deeds unjust,
are destroyed by the right hand of God.
- 4 The right hand of God is lifting in our land,
lifting the fallen one by one;
each one is known by name,
and lifted now from shame,
by the lifting of the right hand of God.
- 5 The right hand of God is healing in our land,
healing broken bodies, minds and souls;
so wondrous is its touch,
with love that means so much,
when we're healed by the right hand of God.
- 6 The right hand of God is planting in our land,
planting seeds of freedom, hope and love;
in these many-peopled lands,
let his children all join hands,
and be one with the right hand of God.
Patrick Eugene Prescod (alt.)

Bible Reading : Jeremiah 17 : 5 – 10

Forgiveness Prayer

Merciful and forgiving Lord
in sorrow and shame we come before you
to confess our unworthiness,
to confess we have not loved you
or one another as we should,
to confess we have failed to use our gifts
and broken your commandments.

Lord forgive us we pray **Amen**

Read pray or sing StF 723

[Who Can Sound The Depths of Sorrow \(Singing the Faith 723 / StF723 / SA 1004\)](#)

- 1 Who can sound the depths of sorrow
in the Father heart of God,
for the children we've rejected,
for the lives so deeply scarred?
And each light that we've extinguished
has brought darkness to our land:
upon our nation, upon our nation,
have mercy, Lord.
- 2 We have scorned the truth you gave us,
we have bowed to other lords.
We have sacrificed the children
on the altars of our gods.
O let truth again shine on us,
let your holy fear descend:
upon our nation, upon our nation,
have mercy, Lord.
- 3 Who can stand before your anger?
Who can face your piercing eyes?
For you love the weak and helpless,
and you hear the victims' cries.
Yes, you are a God of justice,
and your judgement surely comes:
upon our nation, upon our nation,
have mercy, Lord.
- 4 Who will stand against the violence?
Who will comfort those who mourn?
In an age of cruel rejection,
who will build for love a home?
Come and shake us into action,
come and melt our hearts of stone:
upon your people, upon your people,
have mercy, Lord.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Bible Reading: Luke 6 : 17 – 26

Sermon

“Who wants to be a millionaire?”

A few years ago, I saw the stage version of this popular TV programme (the one when they tried to cheat). It was entertaining but ultimately depressing. It focusses on a common desire for an unexpected cash bonanza, a treasure chest enabling us achieve

our dreams of great material prosperity. There are few of us who have at some time in our lives not thought about the difference it would make if we were rich. So it comes as a bit of a blow to such fantasies when we read in Luke's gospel that Jesus said “Woe to you who are rich” Did he really say that? What about the many rich people throughout history who have belonged to the church?

Our readings today from Jeremiah and Luke hover around the contrast between living with, or dying apart from, God. It is a theme which appears frequently in the Bible. Jeremiah contrasts the blessings that come to those who trust the Lord and the curses that blight those who trust mere mortals. He tells the people they must choose between being a tree with roots or being a shrivelled shrub in the desert. The message of Jeremiah here is that our scientists and intellectuals, our philosophers and pundits, are mere mortals and it is in God alone that we ought to trust. Too easily in the last 200 yrs we have put too much trust in science and technology, in industrial strength and militarism.

Jeremiah develops the value and strength of the tree by the water. The tree shall not fear when the heat comes and its leaves shall still stay green. In other words, trusting God will not save us from the challenges and ills, the circumstances and changes that affect all people but, when the heat is on, our faith will save us. The words from Luke are from the 'sermon on the plain', very similar to Matthew's sermon on the mount. Jesus had chosen his disciples and they came down from the mountain and he set about the serious job of teaching them. Like a football coach, he tells them that they are a team who will have to work together to train for the serious games ahead. He knows that they know something about 'the game', something of the rules. But now he tells them that some things are going to be different. The game has changed. And old rules will be superseded. Rather than lecturing them for hours he realises what they need is 3 or 4 things to remember to do or not to do. Then in the heat of the moment these basic guidelines will come back to them and keep them focussed on how best to play and move forward. Think what Jesus was doing. They did not have football teams with rules, What they did have was a long memory of the time when God

called the 12 tribes of Israel, descended from the 12 sons of Jacob, and made them his special people. So that through them he could fulfil his purpose for the whole world. Now Jesus has come into a world where all sorts of people are trying out new ways of being God's people, some with new rules to obey, some with new schemes for violent revolution, some with support for Herod and his regime, some with proposals for withdrawing into the desert and praying and worshipping in private. So Jesus has picked his team. They are to be the nucleus and starting point of what God was now going to do. They were the core of God's renewed Israel.

He gave them clear orders of how his vision of God's work would go forward. In the Luke passage we find 4 promises and 4 warnings, based on Israel's great scriptural codes in the book of Deuteronomy. There are long lists of 'blessings' for those who obeyed the law, and 'curses' for those who did not. These formed part of the binding agreement (the Covenant) between God and Israel. Now with the renewed Israel formed around him, Jesus gives them his own version of the same thing.

And a radical version it is! It's an upside down code, or perhaps (as Jesus might have said) a right way up code instead of the upside down ones people had been following. God is doing something quite new: as Jesus had emphasized in the synagogue at Nazareth. In Luke chapter 4, he is fulfilling his promises at last and this will mean good news for all the people who haven't had any for a long time. The poor, the hungry, those who weep, those who are hated: blessings on them! Not that there is anything virtuous in being poor or hungry in itself. But when injustice is reigning, the world will have to be turned once more the right way up for God's justice and kingdom to come to birth. And that will provoke opposition from people who like things the way they are. Jesus' message of promise and warning, of blessing and curse, rang with echoes of the Hebrew prophets of old, and he knew that the reaction would be the same

The people whom Jesus called happy the world would call wretched; and the people Jesus called wretched, the world would call happy. Just

imagine someone today saying "Happy are the poor and woe to the rich". To talk like that is to put an end to the world's values altogether.

Where then is the key to this? It comes in Luke 6: 24. Jesus says "Woe to you who are rich because you have all the comfort you are going to get. "The word Jesus uses for *have* is the word used for receiving payment in full of an account. What Jesus is saying is this "If you set your heart and bend all your energies to obtain the things which the world values, you will get them – but that is all you will ever get! In the expressive phrase, literally you have had it! If on the other hand you set your heart and bend all your energies to be utterly loyal to God and true to Christ, you will run into all kinds of trouble; you may by the world's standards look unhappy, but much of your payment is still to come; and it will be joy eternal.

We are here face to face with an eternal choice which begins in childhood and never ends till life ends. Will you take the easy way which yields immediate pleasure and profit? Or, Will you take the hard way, which sometimes yields immediate toil and sometimes suffering?

Jesus had no doubt which way in the end brought happiness. It has been said that Jesus promised his disciples 3 things – that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy and in constant trouble. G.K Chesterton, whose principles constantly got him into trouble, once said "I like getting into hot water. It keeps you clean!" It is Jesus' teaching that the joy of heaven will amply compensate for the trouble of earth. As Paul said "This slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond measure (2 Corinth; 4 :17)" The challenge of the beatitudes is 'Will you be happy in the world's way or in Christ's way?'

Amen

Read pray or sing StF 712

StF 712 Put peace into each other's hands

- 1 Put peace into each other's hands
and like a treasure hold it,
protect it like a candle-flame,
with tenderness enfold it.
- 2 Put peace into each other's hands
with loving expectation;
be gentle in your words and ways,
in touch with God's creation.
- 3 Put peace into each other's hands
like bread we break for sharing;
look people warmly in the eye:
our life is meant for caring.
- 4 As at Communion, shape your hands
into a waiting cradle;
the gift of Christ receive, revere,
united round the table.
- 5 Put Christ into each other's hands,
he is love's deepest measure;
in love make peace, give peace a chance,
and share it like a treasure.

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

Prayers of Intercession

Loving Father

today we think of those in trouble,
those for whom this last week
has brought disaster and tragedy
Especially we pray for those in Spain,
whose lives are in turmoil due to floods,
those in Gaza and Lebanon whose
country is being destroyed,
the people of Sudan facing starvation.

We pray for those injured or maimed
who will face the rest of their days
coming to terms with the scars of war.

We pray for those striving to give support;
equip them with compassion, wisdom
and skill in all they do.

Loving Father

We believe you grieve and suffer
wherever your people are in need.
Reach out then to these people
in their sorrow and despair

and grant them help

to rebuild their shattered lives and hopes.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayers in the name of
Christ

Amen

Read pray or sing StF 706

Longing for light StF 706

- 1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Longing for truth, we turn to you.
Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.
- 2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice.
- 3 Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.
- 4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.
- 5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of
God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with
you and those you represent.

Amen

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