

HOME SERVICE 18 OCTOBER 2020

Let us share some words from the Psalms set for today:

'Great is the LORD in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations.³ Let them praise your great and awesome name— he is holy'. (Psalm 99)

Sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.² Sing to the LORD, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day after day.³ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples..... Splendour and majesty are before him; strength and glory are in his sanctuary' (Psalm 96)

Hymn 340 (StF) by Charles Wesley

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim,
And publish abroad His wonderful name;
The name, all-victorious, of Jesus extol;
His kingdom is glorious, He rules over all.

2 God ruleth on high, almighty to save,
And still He is nigh, His presence we have;
The great congregation His triumph shall sing,
Ascribing salvation to Jesus, our King.

3 "Salvation to God, who sits on the throne!"
Let all cry aloud, and honor the Son:
The praises of Jesus the angels proclaim,
Fall down on their faces and worship the Lamb.

4 Then let us adore and give Him His right -
All glory and pow'r, all wisdom and might,
All honor and blessing, with angels above,
And thanks never-ceasing, and infinite love. [Charles Wesley]

Let us pray together:

Lord God, our loving heavenly Father, we come before you this morning with thankful hearts, recognising that you are all powerful and Almighty and 'worthy to be praised'. We praise you for your gifts in creation as we look at the wonderful autumn scenes around us, scenes of such beauty and magnificence. Father, we cannot even begin to understand, with our human minds, the vastness of your power and presence but we know that you sent your Son, Jesus into this world to show us your face and that he called you 'Abba' (Daddy) to show to us how much you love us and want to be a central part of our lives that we may reflect your glory to the world in which we live.

We recognise, Father, as we look back over these last days, that we have not always served you as we ought and we ask you to forgive us for those times when we have said, thought or done things which have not reflected your glory. We ask now, in the silence, that you will create new and clean hearts within us. Grant to us, we pray, your Holy Spirit deep within our hearts and

minds that we may recognise, through Him, that we are *'ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven'* [H&P No.] and so that we *'his praise may sing'* in a new and perfect way.

Grant to each one of us that 'peace which passes all understanding' [Phillippians that we may, from this day forward, be radiant ambassadors for Christ in a world which is so much in need of His love. Help us, ,strengthen us and uphold us with your powerful hand and speak closely to us that we may hear your word to us as we worship now – for we ask it in the precious name of Jesus. **Amen**

Let us now share in reading together the following passages from Scripture:

Exodus 33 verses 12-23 (Moses and the glory of God)

Matthew 22 verses 15-22 (Paying the Imperial Tax to Caesar).

Hymn 519 (StF) by Jenny Hewer

1. Father, I Place Into Your Hands
The Things I Cannot Do
Father, I Place Into Your Hands
The Things That I've Been Through
Father, I Place Into Your Hands
The Way That I Should Go,
For I Know I Always Can Trust You.

2.Father, I Place Into Your Hands
My Friends And Family.
Father, I Place Into Your Hands
The Things That Trouble Me.
Father, I Place Into Your Hands
The Person I Would Be,
For I Know I Always Can Trust You.

3. Father, We Love To See Your Face
We Love To Hear Your Voice
Father, We Love To Sing Your Praise
And In Your Name Rejoice
Father, We Love To Walk With You.
And In Your Presence Rest,
For We Know We Always Can Trust You.

4.Father, I Want To Be With You
And Do The Things You Do.
Father, I Want To Speak The Words
That You Are Speaking Too.
Father, I Want To Love The Ones
That You Will Draw To You,
For I Know That I Am One With You.

GOD IS GOD AND HE ALONE IS TO BE PRAISED

I wonder if you have ever been in a situation where you feel you are being manipulated. When we look at the world in which we live, we are bombarded by advertisements that lure us into buying particular brands or items, and we think to ourselves, 'I'll get that particular type of toothpaste next time – it might be a bit more expensive but the person advertising it was a Dentist and she said that it would whiten my teeth and make me look more attractive!!'

The impact of subliminal advertising is known to be highly effective. You know the sort of thing, 'you wonder where the yellow went when you wash your teeth with!' [Pepsodent!] – so we go and buy that brand, only to find that it was not that dramatically effective!

In our world where so much is going on we are given incredible amounts of information – Covid-19 figures across the world. Pandemic guidance in different parts of the country which seem to conflict with other advice being given so that we become confused. Now fully introduced in the American, and indeed, the world's cultures, is the idea of 'Fake News'! What can we believe? There are those who are saying that the President of the USA went into the military hospital after declaring that he had been tested positive for Covid-19, was simply a ploy to improve his ratings in forthcoming elections particularly as his recovery was so speedy! Where does the truth lie in these strange times?`

Pilate was in the same position when he was told by the crowd that Jesus should be crucified because he was setting Himself up as King of the Jews and so flouting the Roman authorities of which Caesar was the Head. Jesus was called before him. Just note for a moment that, during his life, Jesus was called many things – Beelzebub the prince of devils, blasphemer, a law breaker, seditionist (leading a violent rebellion), setting Himself up as King, and so it goes on, and even the witnesses they brought against him did not agree in their testimonies. He was accused of blasphemy by the Sanhedrin (the Supreme ruling Jewish Council), after they asked Him the question, 'Are you the Christ? [Messiah]' and then went on to ask, 'Are you then the Son of God?' and He replied, 'You are right in saying that I am' [Luke 23:70] and that led to their accusation of blasphemy and justified their handing Him over to Pilate for the death penalty to be enacted. Can you see how they were manipulating the truth as they saw it, to rid themselves of the one who questioned their traditions and practices?

'O the bitter shame and sorrow that a time could ever be when I let the Saviour's pity plead in vain and proudly answered: all of self and none of thee' (H&P 538 by Theodore Monod).

But what about Pilate? They brought Jesus before Pilate, not once but twice [Luke 23] accusing Him of 'subverting our nation' and 'He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar' (Untrue, as we have seen from our reading from Matthew's Gospel) and 'claims to be Christ [Messiah], a king.' Pilate asks, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' and receives the reply, 'Yes, it is as you say'. Pilate, being under Roman law and not under Jewish Law, can find nothing wrong with Him but their protestations grew louder and louder. Talk about being manipulated into a decision by the forcefulness of the crowd!! But Pilate resisted and was happy to find an excuse to refer Jesus on to Herod, as He was a Galilean! But Herod found this 'potato' too hot to handle and referred him back to Pilate who, three times said he could find nothing wrong with Jesus, and he asked the crowd, 'What Crime has this man committed?' Just note, here, that the crowd did not give Pilate a straight answer but simply shouted louder, 'Crucify him!' and, sadly, we are told, 'their shouts prevailed.'

But just let us have a peek into John's Gospel [Chapter 18], for here we see even deeper meaning and we also see how manipulative and deceitful things become. Again, Pilate asks those who brought Jesus to his palace from the High Priest's house, 'What charges are you bringing against this man?' Just look at their avoidance tactic – they replied, 'If he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you!' – can you see it? They had nothing but trumped up, conflicting stories which could not, in any way, form the basis of an accusation, so they avoided making one! The false accusers would not enter the palace because it would make them unclean and they would then not be able to eat the Passover. But Pilate went back inside

the palace and summoned Jesus, asking Him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' and 'What is it that you have done [that your people have handed you over to me]?' . It was then that Jesus told Him that His Kingdom was not of this world but 'from another place' (verse 36) and He said, 'You are right in saying I am a king. In fact for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.' [verse37]. 'What is truth?' asked Pilate – what a loaded question! Here were Jesus and Pilate in the midst of 'fake news', hearing witnesses that did not even agree with one another, bent on getting the Saviour onto a cross of wood, all for selfish gain. I wonder if Pilate had waited a little longer for an answer, perhaps he would have heard what the disciples heard before the crucifixion when they expressed anxiety about Jesus saying that He would not be with them much longer after which He spoke those famous words, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God always; trust also in me....[and He went on to say]... 'I am the **way** and the **truth** and the **life**. No-one comes to the Father except through me.' [John 14: 6]

It was not human interpretations of truth He was talking about but the pure divine truth that shone so brightly on Mount Sinai as God passed by Moses and showed His back to him, so bright that when Moses came down the mountain he had to put a veil over his face as it was shining a reflection of the bright, luminous [shekinah] glory of God. That same glory that those three disciples observed on the Mount of Transfiguration from which they had to avert their eyes. Jesus is 'The Truth' in a most profound way, and in a world of 'fake news' and manipulation he calls us to gaze upon Him that the more of Him and His truth we may take in, so that the more like Him we might become and the more of Him we might reflect into the world around us.

Higher than the highest heaven, deeper than the deepest sea, Lord, thy love at last has conquered; grant me now my supplication: None of self, and all of thee' [Hymns and Psalms 538]

Amen.

Prayers of Intercession: As we reflect on the power and trustworthiness and Truth of our God, recognising that He is Sovereign in all the earth, let us now bring our prayers to Him:

We pray for those suffering illness or distress: for those known to us who need our prayers at this time – those who are ill at home or in hospital; those who are suffering as a result of the spike in coronavirus; for those who are anxious or worried at this time and who feel a cloud hanging over them that they feel will never be dispelled; for those who have lost a loved one in recent days and who are feeling, so sharply, the grief that this brings – we think particularly of David Megginson, Premises Manager at the Wesley Centre who passed away last Tuesday afternoon and who was so loved in the community. We pray for Alison, his wife, and Rory, his son and the family at this time.

Father, we place into your hands all those for whom we pray. Please encircle them with your loving arms of mercy and grant to them *that* peace midst the storm, that they may feel uplifted through the prayers of your people and assurance of your grace.

We pray for the World in which we live: *'The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it; the world, and all who live in it.'* [Psalm 24].

Father, we thank you for the beauty of the earth and all the benefits it affords to all of us.

Forgive us, we pray, for the way in which we have marred that beauty. Help us to respect this earth on which you have placed us as stewards that we may pursue your will in preserving it for the benefit of all people, that all may be fed and that all may be allowed to live in peace. We pray for the Leaders of the nations that your Spirit will brood over them and guide them into decisions that favour peace, not war, freedom and not slavery, the good of all and not just the few. Bring peace and harmony where there is currently discord and may we, as individuals, practice these principles in our own lives that we may, indeed be shining beacons to Your Glory and Truth. We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen

So let us close our time of worship together with an affirmation of our Trust in Him who is '*the Way, the Truth and the Life*' [John 14: 6]

Hymn 645 (StF) by Priscilla Owens

1 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

[Refrain:]

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!

2 Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your bark o'erflow? [Refrain]

3 Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds within the veil. [Refrain]

4 Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore? [Refrain]

Let us share in saying the grace together: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit fill our hearts and minds, showing us the Way, guiding us in the Truth and enabling us to continually experience the Life eternal. Amen