

Sunday 15th November 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

'Lord, we come into your awesome presence, from the shadows into your radiance' May the light of your presence guide our worship today. Amen .

Hymn: Be Thou my Vision (StF 545) - Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-faith/worship/singing-the-faith-plus/hymns/be-thou-my-vision-o-lord-of-my-heart-stf-545/>

or for a modern/celtic version: <https://youtu.be/XiukM6WHQEQ>

1. Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
2. Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.
3. Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
4. Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
5. High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

*Irish, 8th century
translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931)
versified by Eleanor Henrietta Hull (1860-1935) (alt.)*

Let us pray together: Prayer of Praise and Invocation

Lord Jesus, Light of the World; you came to turn our world upside down, or rather the right way up.

Word of God made flesh, you came to show us how to truly live, to love and to serve; how to live out the values of your kingdom here on earth.

As we gather to praise you for all that you are and all that you bring, we pray; 'mirrored here, may our lives tell your story' today and everyday. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession:

Lord we acknowledge that there have been times when we have not shared the riches of your kingdom with others. Times when we have taken the easy route, choosing options that require less time, less energy, less thought. Times when we have turned back to the ways of the world, that are contrary to the values of your kingdom. And in a moment of quiet we bring into your light our own personal confessions.

Lord, we remember you are a God of mercy and grace, who forgives us and transforms us, by the power of your Spirit, into the people you have truly made us to be. **Amen.**

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 25: 14-30

Today's Epistle Reading: 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-11 (you may like to read Acts 17: 1-9 which details Pauls' visit to Thessalonica.)

Time to Reflect

I used to work for a company where every month we were visited by a mystery shopper. There used to be quite a lot of anxiety amongst certain staff around the time this visit may occur. When exactly would they come? How would we be rated? Our boss had us doing lots of extra tasks to prepare. However, I was never that worried, thinking if we were behaving as we should be, we would have nothing to be concerned about.

One of the questions concerning the people in Thessalonica, who Paul is writing to, is 'when will the day of the Lord come?' Paul replies, 'about times and dates we do not need to write to you', that day 'will come like a thief in the night' (1 Thess 5: 1-2).

However, for those who are living in the way God has guided them, 'this light will not come like a searchlight to reveal the sins done under the cover of darkness', but like the light of a new day (Howard Marshall, 2011, p1283).

The Thessalonians focus should not be on trying to predict this day, but living as children of light. In my job the mystery shopper came to assess how we were treating all customers. It wouldn't have done the company any good if we had only treated the mystery shopper well. It was the many other customers every day that would be speaking to their family and friends and at risk of not returning.

How we treat all people, how we live our lives on a daily basis, amidst the challenges and competing values of the world, matters.

The church in Thessalonica was relatively new. Paul had to leave after only three preaching sessions due to mob violence from those who opposed his teachings.

The new believers were living during a time of persecution. There is the military image of being awake and on watch, but here, 'peace and security', a slogan sometimes associated with imperial Roman rule, is not brought about through military might and threat of violence, which only brings fragile peace. Rather the Thessalonian's are to put on the defensive breastplate and helmet of faith, hope and love (Roots Nov – Dec 2020). They are to live as a contrast society. They are to live the Jesus way.

Our Gospel reading is also set at a time where the values of God's' kingdom are clashing with the values of the world. This parable is told two days before the Passover festival in what we now call Holy Week, where the story reaches its climax and Jesus himself brings about peace, not through violence but through the way of the cross. Jesus, firstly is offering a challenge to his own day, a time where he is forcing a final confrontation between God's kingdom and the system that had resisted it.

The third slave could be seen as representing the Pharisees, who had been given the Law of Moses, the Temple, and the command to share God's blessing and yet had kept the light to themselves. The other slaves can be seen as those who take the good news of God's kingdom they have been entrusted with, share it and act to help it grow (Wright, 2004).

To ponder: *What do we do with the news of God's' kingdom that has been entrusted to us? How do we live each day in light of this news? As Paul writes to the Thessalonians, how can we encourage one another and build ourselves up in our faith?*

Take a time to sit quietly....

A time of prayer

We pray for places where people face persecution for their faith and are not free to worship you,
and for people who have not yet heard the Good News of Jesus;
Lord, help us shine your light and share our faith.

We pray for those who fear for the future, those facing job uncertainty or loss, those anxious about the continued impact of the Covid pandemic; Lord, help us shine your light and share your hope.

We pray for those who are ill, those facing loneliness, isolation and separation from loved ones;
Lord, help us shine your light and share your love.

In a moment of quiet we bring before you our personal prayers.

Lord, we remember 'the light of your love is always shining' as we offer you these prayers in Jesus' name.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father*

Hymn: Hear the Call of the Kingdom (Singing the Faith 407) <https://youtu.be/d5AkyRFIKaM>

1. Hear the call of the kingdom,
lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.
2. Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ may shine through us.

Chorus

King of heaven, we will answer the call.

*We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim*

salvation in Jesus' name.

3. Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations put their trust in him.

Chorus

*Keith Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980)
and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)*

A prayer of blessing:

As we are sent out to live as children of light;
May we walk in faith,
be sustained by hope,
and share the all-embracing love of God
with everyone we meet.

Amen.