

Hello and a very warm welcome to Digital Church from the East Solent and Downs Methodist Circuit (in the South of England). I'm Bill Stillwell

### CALL TO WORSHIP

#### Psalm 46:1-3

1 God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
3 though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

#### HYMN O Lord my God – how great Thou art

O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,  
Consider all the works Thy Hands have made;  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.  
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur  
And hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on the Cross, my burdens gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin.*

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,  
When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,  
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.  
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,  
And there proclaim: "My God, how great Thou art!"*

*Then sings my soul, My Saviour God, to Thee,*

*Stuart Wesley, Keene Hine*  
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### PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

We give you thanks, almighty God,  
For John the Baptist  
preparing the way by repentance and baptism

*All: we thank you*

For Jesus Christ  
proclaimed your Son by water and Spirit

*All: we thank you*

For Good News  
that salvation has come to the earth

*All: we thank you*

For your love  
undeserved and graciously given

*All: we thank you*

For the Holy Spirit  
transforming and empowering our lives

*All: we thank you*

For your promise  
of an eternity in which to praise you

*All: we thank you*

In the name of Christ Our Lord. **Amen**

## **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Almighty God:

Your majesty is beyond Imagination -  
the eternal King  
high and lifted up,  
whom the angels worship.

Your power is beyond understanding -  
the Creator God  
who shakes the heavens  
yet holds us in his hands.

Your mercy is beyond our deserving -  
the Saviour God  
once born for us,  
sacrificed in love.

Forgive the smallness of our faith;  
the magnitude of our need;  
the depth of our sorrow.

*In a few moments of silence, we bring our guilt and failure before our Lord.*

In the confidence of your Son's  
dying and rising to set us free,  
we ask that you will  
raise us up to new life  
and new ways of service.  
In his name we ask it. **Amen**

## **OUR LORD'S PRAYER**

**All: Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever. Amen**

## **BIBLE READING - Isaiah 55 v1-11**

The LORD says, "Come, everyone who is thirsty—here is water! Come, you that have no money—buy grain and eat! Come! Buy wine and milk—it will cost you nothing! (2) Why spend money on what does not satisfy? Why spend your wages and still be hungry? Listen to me and do what I say, and you will enjoy the best food of all. (3) "Listen now, my people, and come to me; come to me, and you will have life! I will make a lasting covenant with you and give you the blessings I promised to David. (4) I made him a leader and commander of nations, and through him I showed them my power. (5) Now you will summon foreign nations; at one time they did not know you, but now they will come running to join you! I, the LORD your God, the holy God of Israel, will make all this happen; I will give you honour and glory." (6) Turn to the LORD and pray to him, now that he is near. (7) Let the wicked leave their way of life and change their way of thinking. Let them turn to the LORD, our God; he is merciful and quick to forgive. (8) "My thoughts," says the LORD, "are not like yours, and my ways are different from yours. (9) As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways and thoughts above yours. (10) "My word is like the snow and the rain that come down from the sky to water the earth. They make the crops grow and provide seed for planting and food to eat. (11) So also will be the word that I speak - it will not fail to do what I plan for it; it will do everything I send it to do.

## **HYMN - On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry announces that the Lord is nigh (StF 182)**

On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry  
announces that the Lord is nigh.  
Awake and harken, for he brings  
glad tidings of the King of kings!  
Then cleansed be every life from sin:  
make straight the way for God within,  
and let us all our hearts prepare  
for Christ to come and enter there.

We hail you as our Savior, Lord,  
our refuge and our great reward.  
Without your grace we waste away  
like flowers that wither and decay.  
Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,  
and make us rise to fall no more.  
O let your face upon us shine  
and fill the world with love divine.

All praise to you, eternal Son,  
whose advent has our freedom won,  
whom with the Father we adore,  
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

*John Chandler (1806-1876)  
© 1986 Greg Leavers, Peter Horrobin, Peter  
Accompanied by: Jo Banbury*

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## **BIBLE READING - St Mark 1 v4-11**

So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. "Turn away (**repent: reverse your decision**) from your sins and be baptized," he told the people, "and God will forgive your sins." (5) Many people (**all/ everyone**) from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River. (6) John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. (7) He announced to the people, "The man who will come after me is much greater (**more powerful/stronger**) than I am. I am not good enough (**worthy/fit**) even to bend down and untie his sandals. (8) I baptize you with (**immerse you in**) water, but he will baptize you with (**immerse you in**) the Holy Spirit." (9) Not long afterward (**in those days**) Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. (10) As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like (**as if it were**) a dove. (11) And a voice came from heaven, "You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you." *Psalm 2 v7; Genesis 22 v2; Isaiah 42 v1*

## **REFLECTION**

As far as I'm concerned, a calendar is just a way of arranging future meetings or making it clear what time in the past you're talking about. In other words, it's a purely functional thing. That's not really the full story, though, is it? Calendar dates often conjure up particular images in your mind. Mention 1066 and you're likely to have some fairly clear thoughts about it. Mention the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, and you'll think of 'ringing out the old, ringing in the new'. It's a time for nostalgia and reminiscing, and for speculating on what the new year holds. Even now, on the second Sunday of 2022, we're still in that phase of transition between the past and the future. To some extent, that's what human beings are constantly doing day by day, moment by moment: trying to understand what's happened in the past and, based on that, planning for what's to come. Our readings both address that tension. Isaiah talks about what happened in the time of King David and the promises God made to him: and it also talks about how God will fulfil those promises in days to come. The reading from the Gospel of Mark deals with the past and the future as well, but it's much more personal to us as individual people.

First of all it addresses our sense of guilt and failure. John the Baptist tells his hearers; 'Turn away from your sins -and be baptized'. Traditionally, the word used instead of 'turn away' is, of course, 'repent'. I prefer another alternative translation: 'reverse your decision'.

I'm not keen, either, on the word 'sins': it always sounds as though it's about some monumental *evil* that you've done. I think the better alternative word is 'mistake'. It isn't necessarily some evil that you've done deliberately which plagues you; it's more about missing the mark and feeling guilty about not getting something quite right.

To put what John says in my own language, then, I think he's say: 'Take a close, honest, look at your past. Identify those things you know you got wrong - either deliberately or by accident. Face up to your sense of guilt and shame and confess it openly to God. See how you can learn to behave differently in times to come. And then receive forgiveness and demonstrate it by being baptised.'

The vast majority of people have some sense of guilt for things they feel they got wrong in past days. Maybe it was just a silly mistake, or not being there to help someone in need, or choosing the wrong words and hitting someone's sore point. To other people such things may seem trivial, but to the guilty sufferer it may be a sin that leaves an open wound for many years. Whatever that failure, that mistake, that sin may have been, it's up to us, as Christians, to share with them the news that faith in Christ will set them free.

John the Baptist holds out that offer of hope. We're told that, unsurprisingly, a great many people from the surrounding area came to hear what he had to say and to receive that offer of hope.

But that's not the end of the story. John tells them that someone far more powerful than him is on his way. That someone is his relative, Jesus. John baptises with water – a sign of freedom from the past. Jesus brings something far more powerful still. John immerses people in water, but Jesus will immerse people in the Holy Spirit. John has been the instrument which God has used to help people get free from the past. Now Jesus comes to give people new life for the future.

No-one can really define the Holy Spirit, any more than we can fully describe God. On the other hand, the Nicene Creed calls him 'the Lord, the giver of Life' – and that's not a bad start. 'Holy' means belonging to God. 'Spirit' means breath of God. Christ is coming, John says, to breath the very life of God into our souls, our hearts, our spirits. He fills us with that mysterious new life which reaches into the very core of our being. We look to the future as new people: not just new in our words and actions and thinking, but new in every part of our life. New in our thankfulness to God for our freedom from our past; new in our praise to him for the mystery of creation that surrounds us; new in what we find him enabling us to do; new in dealing with the challenges of life; new in what we see the future holds; new in looking forward to all the coming days with hope and faith and expectation.

Yes, now is the time to look back, reflect and receive forgiveness. Now is **also** the time to look **forward**, trusting in God the Father to immerse us in His Holy Spirit, to fulfil in us the lives he ordains for us.

Thanks be to God.

### **HYMN - When we walk with the Lord/Trust and obey**

When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,  
What a glory He sheds on our way!  
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,  
And with all who will trust and obey.

***Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.***

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,  
But His smile quickly drives it away;  
Not a doubt or a fear, not a sigh or a tear,  
Can abide while we trust and obey.

***Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.***

Not a burden we bear, not a sorrow we share,  
But our toil He doth richly repay;  
Not a grief or a loss, not a frown or a cross,  
But is blessed if we trust and obey.

***Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.***

But we never can prove the delights of His love  
Until all on the altar we lay;  
For the favor He shows, for the joy He bestows,  
Are for them who will trust and obey.

***Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.***

Then in fellowship sweet we will sit at His feet.  
Or we'll walk by His side in the way.  
What He says we will do, where He sends we will go;  
Never fear, only trust and obey.

***Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.***

*John H. Sannis  
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### **PRAYERS FOR OTHERS**

Loving God, in our darker moments, when clouds gather and the heaviness we feel seems overwhelming, remind us of your love, carrying the weight of all things on his cross, embracing the world with arms outstretched that we might know freedom from the chains which now constrain us. Bring us to your light, release our burdens and, out of despair, bring hope.

Lord, in your mercy, **All: Hear our prayer**

Loving God, we bring to you those for whom this day is simply a continuation of a struggle to survive; to feed and clothe the family, pay the rent or mortgage, stem a rising tide of debt, search for yet another job. Be with them in the choices that must be made today. Bring light into their darkness with the help that they so need, and embrace them in your love.

Lord, in your mercy, *All: Hear our prayer*

Loving God, as we pray for the many families struggling with life at present, we remember our own families and ask that you will enable us to be there when we're needed by them and by our friends. Help us, too, to be your servant when our neighbours, close by and further afield, need a shoulder to lean upon or simply a helping hand; that as a community, together, we can share your love, in word and deed, to your glory, loving God.

Lord, in your mercy, *All: Hear our prayer*

Loving God, we pray for all those in hospital or in care, thanking you for the dedication and skills of the staff into whose hands so many entrust their lives. Grant to them your wisdom, strength, and love. Protect them and all those to whom they minister, that damaged and broken bodies and minds may be made whole once more.

Lord, in your mercy, *All: Hear our prayer*

Loving God, we bring to you those whose lives in this world have ended, and ask your comfort for those who mourn. May those who grieve and those who stand upon the threshold of a future life rest secure in the future which you - our God of yesterday, tomorrow and eternity - hold out to them.

Lord, in your mercy, *All: Hear our prayer*

Gracious God, be close to those who are struggling physically and mentally because of the pressure of life, particularly where relationships are on edge or breaking down and there is violence and abuse. Be with victims in their distress, protecting them from further harm, and may those seeds of anger within the home wither and die. Bring peace into their turmoil, love into their emptiness and the help that they need to become the person you want them to be.

Lord, in your mercy, *All: Hear our prayer*

We pray for the leaders of the nations, that you may make them worthy of leading by the way in which they serve with honesty, integrity, wisdom and the wellbeing of their people in their hearts.

Lord, in your mercy, *All: Hear our prayer*

Almighty God, we commend our prayers to you in the name of Christ and in the assurance of the words of the one who sits upon the throne who tells us: Behold, I make all things new. **Amen**

### **HYMN - Lord, your church on earth is seeking (StF 410)**

1. Lord, Thy Church on Earth is Seeking Thy renewal from above;  
Teach us all the art of speaking With the accent of Thy love.  
We would heed Thy great commission; "Go ye into every place;  
Preach, baptize, fulfill My mission, Serve with love and share My grace."

2. Freedom give to those in bondage, Lift the burdens caused by sin;  
Give new hope, new strength and courage, Grant release from fears within.  
Light for darkness, joy for sorrow; Love for hatred, peace for strife.  
These and countless blessings follow As the Spirit gives new life.

3. In the streets of every city Where the bruised and lonely dwell,  
We shall show the Savior's pity, We shall of His mercy tell.  
In all lands and with all races We shall serve and seek to bring  
All the world to render praises, Christ, to Thee, Redeemer, King.

*Hugh Sherlock (1905-1998)*

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*Performed by: Ruth & Joy Everingham (Everingham Music)*

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### **BLESSING**

May the love of the Father,  
the tenderness of the Son,  
and the presence of the Spirit,  
gladden your heart  
and bring peace to your soul,  
this day and all days.