

WORSHIP AT HOME - 5th July 2020

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Opening declaration from Psalm 145

The Lord is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and filled with unfailing love.
The Lord is good to all. He has compassion on all his creation.
All of your works will thank you, Lord, and your faithful followers will praise you.
They will speak of the glory of your kingdom; and confirm your power.
They will tell about your mighty deeds and about the majesty and glory of your reign.
For your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. You rule throughout all generations.
The Lord is a faithful promise-keeper; he is gracious in all he does.
The Lord helps the fallen and lifts those bent beneath their loads.

HYMN SF 466 - Praise my soul the King of Heaven

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| 1. Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven;
To His feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee His praise should sing?
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise the everlasting King! | 3. Father-like, He tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame He knows;
In His hands He gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Widely as His mercy flows. |
| 2. Praise Him for His grace and favour
To our fathers in distress;
Praise Him, still the same forever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Glorious in His faithfulness. | 4. Angels help us to adore Him;
Ye behold Him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before Him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise with us the God of grace! |

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

Prayer of adoration and confession

Our God and our Father we worship and adore you for who you are the all-powerful Lord of heaven and earth. We acknowledge your greatness and power; your compassion and mercy; your goodness and grace, and your faithfulness and loving-kindness. The whole creation sings out your praise declaring the wonder of your Kingly rule; may we add our voices to that chorus today.

Holy God, thank you for your righteous rule in our lives:
that mercy triumphs over judgement,
that compassion overcomes anger,
that those who fall are lifted up and heavy loads are eased.

Almighty God, we confess that our thoughts, words and actions have not been shaped by your character seen in the life of Jesus.

When we speak out of spite and not in love, Father forgive us.

When we act out of anger and not in mercy, Father forgive us.

When pride overcomes humility, Father forgive us.

When selfishness prevents generosity, Father forgive us.

Father, forgive our sins and give us the humility to receive the loving help of the life-giving Holy Spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Reading – Matthew 11: 16-19 and 25-30 ¹

¹⁶ ‘To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the market-places and calling out to others: ¹⁷ “We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.”

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, “He has a demon.” ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, “Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.’

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, ‘I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

²⁷ ‘All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

²⁸ ‘Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.’

Reflection

Come with me in your imagination to an unremarkable village long, long ago. It is like many a village in remote rural areas even today. As you walk around the market square look and listen. You will see children playing and hear them calling to one another - innocent amusement just like the games you played with your friends in the playground, skipping rhymes, chase games and hide and seek. This is what they’re saying, ‘we played the flute for you to dance to, a happy jolly tune but you wouldn’t join in. We played a dirge, a sad song but you wouldn’t respond to that either’. Spoilsport! What are we to do, we just can’t win!

Then as you look beyond the market place your eyes alight on an open doorway. From within you hear the sound of someone at hard manual work. This is the workshop of the local general builder. He will build you a house, make you a chair and mend your broken plough. Above the door there is an advertising slogan, it reads ‘My yokes are easy’. For this skilled labourer will make you a yoke to allow your animal to pull that newly repaired plough without the animal being chafed or injured.

This place is Nazareth, the worker is Joseph, he has a young son the oldest of a growing family. Did that son, Jesus by name, hear those village children we have imagined? Did he maintain the same advertising slogan when he took over the family business having learned the trade from his father?

Did he remember those experiences from his younger days when travelling the dusty roads in his native land to teach about the Kingdom of Heaven and to show it in action with love and compassion? I like to imagine it might have been so. Jesus certainly knew that sadly some of his hearers were so closed to his message and his presence that they would never get it. In their eyes John the Baptist was too dour, too acetic whereas Jesus was too much of a reveller, a party goer. You just can't please some people but the truth will out or as he declared 'wisdom is proved right by her deeds'. Don't make the same mistake. Think about what Jesus did, healing the sick, touching and healing the leper, raising the dead, casting out demons, calming the stormy wind and waves, feeding 5000 men plus women and children from an offering of five loaves and two fish. Above all, think about his action in going to die on a Roman gibbet, the innocent One giving his life for you and me. If that doesn't justify his wisdom, his wise words of truth then ask yourself are you too hard-hearted, cynical or constrained by materialistic thinking? For this doesn't need great intelligence to grasp, it is hidden from those who think they are wise and learned and revealed to little children like those playing in the market place. Yet it is not simplistic; it is intellectually satisfying for the most intellectually astute. It is logically consistent and fully susceptible to reasoned inspection. And what is this truth shown in action by Jesus' deeds? It is this, no one knows the father, capital F, by which Jesus means God, except the Son, capital S, and those to whom he chooses to reveal him.

Men and women are spiritual beings and have been searching for God for millennia - reaching for transcendence from prehistory. That search has produced myriads of gods and multiple understandings of what they are like, enough to keep hundreds of anthropologists in research for entire lifetimes. Yet all that research and all that human endeavour will not reveal God or his true nature. For as that great book of wisdom, Job says in chapter 11 verse 7 'who can by searching find out God? Can you fathom the mysteries of God?' To which the answer is no. The wonderful truth is we can end our fruitless search and our vague imaginings because Jesus has come to reveal God. In him all the fullness of God dwells. So ask him to reveal God to you and he will. If you have the humility to abandon your prideful search and your arrogant assumptions and let him guide you then he will lead you on a lifetime of discovery that will not end until you see him face to face when you will know fully even as you will then be fully known.

Now in this reading from Matthew's gospel we see but one aspect of the revelation of the nature of God. It echoes those verses from Psalm 145. God is not angry, cruel or unreliable. He is not out to catch you doing wrong, to punish you or to point out your failures. He is the God of love, of loving kindness and compassion and because he is so, he is also the God of right judgement, of truth and justice so that sin will not be ignored or overlooked but will be dealt with once and for all.

This brings us to that advertising sign we imagined hanging outside Jesus' workshop – my yoke is easy. Of course we have no way of knowing that such a sign existed. It is not

implausible but what is true is Jesus' claim that his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He says to all of us 'come to me to find rest. That is not sleep but ultimate ease and lasting peace from all that burdens you. If you are burdened by guilt, fear or anxiety; if you are burdened by suffering and pain, whether your own or that of someone you care for; if you are burdened by your own failures or by what others have done or said to you, then hear Jesus' invitation. He will not necessarily take away the burden but he will ease it, carry it with you and if necessary for you. For that to happen you may have to let go of things that have become part of you and which you may have been carrying, struggling with for a long time.

So work with him, allow yourself to be joined with him like a pair of oxen yoked together. As you share the burden with him through prayer and trust, your own effectiveness in serving him, in working for him, in sharing the good news, in worshipping God and loving others will increase. As you work in harmony, as you share the load, as you feel and know his power at work alongside and within you, I pray so much more will change to enable his will to be done and his glory to be revealed in and around you. Amen.

Response

'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.' (NIVUK) ¹

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me - watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Matthew 11: 28-30 ²

You may want to spend some time thinking about

- any burdens you are carrying that you need to lay down because they are not yours to carry or
- ask Jesus to give you his easy yoke to help you carry those loads that are hard for you to bear.

Turn those thoughts into your own prayer. Then listen to or sing this song and let God minister his healing grace to you through it.

Hymn SF 1674

Your love, shining like the sun,
pouring like the rain, raging like the storm,
refreshing me again. I receive Your love.

Your grace frees me from the past,
it purges every sin, it purifies my heart
and heals me from within. I receive Your grace.

*Pour over me, pour over me,
let Your rain flood this thirsty soul.
Pour over me Your waves of love, pour over me.*

I come and lay my burden down
gladly at Your feet, I'm opening up my heart;
come make this joy complete. I receive Your peace.
*Pour over me, pour over me,
let Your rain flood this thirsty soul.
Pour over me Your waves of love, pour over me.* ³

West Berkshire Homeless video

Prayers for others

Lord God, we lift those in need to you in prayer.

May you ease their burdens and may they find rest.

We pray for the work of West Berkshire Homeless. We thank you for all that has been achieved to house people and to keep them safe during this pandemic. Especially we pray for those who have newly been made homeless for whatever reason, those living in insecure places and those who have been helped into more permanent accommodation.

We pray for all in authority, ease the burdens of responsibility they bear that they may act responsibly for the people they serve. We pray for them in their personal lives, with the worries and cares that only they know.

We pray for our friends, family, colleagues and neighbours, that as we walk alongside them, you will use us to bring them closer to you, and they will learn of your love.

We pray that we might be sensitive to the needs of those around us – the people we may see every day, however fleetingly. We have no idea what burdens they are carrying, or if they need a kind word from you that only we can give. We pray that we will see the positive in people, even when it's hard, and reach out to encourage them.

We pray for your vision for a better future for our communities, education, health and social care, international development and relations; our care for this planet and its resources and for your Church as we begin to consider how and when to meet for worship.

Silence for your own prayers

Lord God, we lift those in need to you in prayer.

May you ease their burdens and may they find rest.

We ask our prayers in the name of Jesus the lifter of burdens and the giver of eternal rest.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

HYMN SF 829

I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.
How marvellous! How wonderful!
And my song shall ever be:
How marvellous! How wonderful!
Is my Saviour's love for me!

For me it was in the garden
He prayed, 'Not My will, but Thine':
He had no tears for His own griefs,
But sweat drops of blood for mine.
How marvellous! How wonderful

He took my sins and my sorrows,
He made them His very own;
He bore the burden to Calvary,
And suffered and died alone.
How marvellous! How wonderful

When with the ransomed in glory
His face I at last shall see,
'Twill be my joy through the ages
To sing of His love for me.
How marvellous! How wonderful

Charles Gabriel (1856-1932)

Final Blessing

Loving Father, every morning that dawns is created by you,
every hour that passes is given by you,
every meal we share we receive from you,
every joy we experience is shared by you,
every sorrow we feel is known by you,
every prayer we make is heard by you
every night that falls is watched by you.

Send us out to your world this week in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and always. **Amen.**

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