

Introduction

Hello, I'm Helen Watson, one of the Local Preachers in the Methodist Berkshire and Hampshire Borders Circuit. It's good to be with you today.

Call to Worship¹

God, I call out to you because you will answer me. Listen to me and hear my prayer. Show the wonder of your great love.

Psalms 17

Hymn STF480 The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want

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| 1 The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not
want ;
he makes me down to lie
in pastures green ; he leadeth me
the quiet waters by. | yet will I fear no ill ;
for thou art with me, and thy rod
and staff me comfort still. |
| 2 My soul he doth restore again,
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake. | 4 My table thou hast furnishèd
in presence of my foes ;
my head thou dost with oil anoint,
and my cup overflows. |
| 3 Yea, though I walk through death's
dark vale, | 5 Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me,
and in God's house for evermore
my dwelling-place shall be. |

Psalms 23

The Scottish Psalter, 1929

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 480

Prayer^{2,3} and Lords Prayer

Caring God, you probe our hearts with tender mercy,
Anointed One, Son of God, you are full of righteousness and compassion.
Divine Holy Spirit, you awaken us to the wonder of this world and all that is
in it. How wonderful is your great love that holds us tight.

Before words and beyond imagination, grasped in wonder and beauty,
realised in silence, noticed in care, you are Lord.

Within each atom and nucleus, carried in the rhythm of every breath,
borne in the love songs of creation, you are present.

Known in grace, joy and hope, lived in generosity and hospitality, found
within and without us, you are love.

Loving lord, divinely present, may we trust you enough to cease our striving
and so attend to your gift among us which brings meaning to all we are and

all we do.

Thank you for all your gifts to us and for all that you are.

Lord God, we often struggle with our conscience,
wrestling with negative emotions, weaknesses and imperfections.
We hold tight to you but sometimes find our grip loosening.
We struggle with dread and worry about what may lie ahead,
instead of looking to you and placing our trust in your love.
Lord God, forgive our failings we pray.

Jesus, you gave up so much to bring salvation,
enduring your body being broken
and being placed on the cross to pay for our sins.
But death was overcome.
Life polluted by sin is now debt-free,
and forever more we are washed clean with loving forgiveness.

Amen.

We say together the Lord's prayer.
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 today 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, the power and the glory.
For ever and ever.

Amen.

Reading¹ Matthew 14: 13 – 20

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

(This happened just after John the Baptist was beheaded.)

Jesus heard what had happened to John. He wanted to be alone. So, he went in a boat to a quiet place. The crowds heard about this. They followed him on foot from the towns.

When Jesus came ashore, he saw a large crowd. He felt deep concern for them. He healed their sick people.

When it was almost evening, the disciples came to him. "There is nothing here," they said. "It's already getting late. Send the crowds away. They can go and buy some food in the villages."

Jesus replied, "They don't need to go away. You give them something to eat."

"We have only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

"Bring them here to me," he said.

Then Jesus directed the people to sit down on the grass. He took the five loaves and the two fish. He looked up to heaven and gave thanks. He broke the loaves into pieces. Then he gave them to the disciples. And the disciples gave them to the people.

All of them ate and were satisfied.

Reflection

Many people today live with a quiet hunger. We hunger for meaning, for peace, for hope. Yet much of life teaches us that everything must be earned. Success, security, even rest seems to depend on what we achieve. But as we come to worship, we hear a startling invitation from God. 'Come and I will feed you. Come as you are. No money necessary. Just sit down.'

In our reading we hear that Jesus has just received news of the death of his cousin, John the Baptist. He wants some solitude, but the crowds follow him and instead of turning them away, he has compassion on them. He sees their hurts, their habits and their hangups, and he responds to them with mercy.

As evening draws in, the disciples begin to worry that the people will not have enough to eat. They suggest sending everyone home. Only five loaves and two fish can be found in the way of food, which we admit seems much too little to feed everyone. But Jesus has other ideas. 'Bring them here to me', he says.

This reveals a lot about God. We often come to worship with little to offer. Our prayers seem small, our faith feels fragile, our resources seem inadequate. Yet Christ invites us to bring what we have. In worship we place our small offerings into his hands.

And just as with the loaves and fishes, Jesus takes into his hands what we have brought. It is blessed and shared. The little we bring becomes part of something far greater.

Each time we come to worship we come as hungry people. We bring our worries, our questions, and our offerings of faith. And Christ still speaks the same words to us.

‘Bring them here to me.’

When we place what we have in his hands our small gifts become part of God’s generous work in the world. Our hunger is met with Christ presence. The God who invites us is also the God who feeds us. And in his presence, all are satisfied.

Amen

Hymn STF636 O love that wilt not let me go

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| 1 O love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee :
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be. | 3 O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee :
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be. |
| 2 O light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee ;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be. | 4 O cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee :
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms
red
life that shall endless be. |

George Matheson (1842–1906)

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Prayers of intercession²

There is a response in these prayers. When I say ‘Lord, hear us’, if you wish you may respond with ‘**Lord, graciously hear us.**’

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us

Let us pray.

God, most gracious and most holy, grant us the help of your Spirit as we pray for the church and for the world.

We pray for the church in every land, and for all the local churches, that we may worship and serve you with reverence and joy.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us

We pray for the peoples of the world, particularly those who are suffering oppression and injustice, those suffering from the effects of war or famine.

We pray for the leaders of nations, particularly our own leaders just now,
that all may work together for justice and peace.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us

We pray for those among us who are ill in body or in mind, or distressed for
whatever reason, for those who are lonely, for those who are bereaved, and
for those who are in any other need or trouble.

May they all be comforted and sustained by your great love.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us

We remember before you all your servants who have died in the faith of
Christ.

We pray for ourselves, that we can know your presence and your blessing
with us in everything we do.

All these prayers we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

**Hymn STF59 Lord, the light of your love is shining – known as
‘Shine, Jesus, shine!’**

1 Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness,
shining :
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon
us ;
set us free by the truth you now
bring us —
shine on me, shine on me.
*Shine, Jesus, shine,
fill this land with the Father's
glory ;
blaze, Spirit, blaze,
set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river, flow,
flood the nations with grace and
mercy ;
send forth your word,
Lord, and let there be light !*

2 Lord, I come to your awesome
presence,
from the shadows into your
radiance ;
by your blood I may enter your
brightness :
search me, try me, consume all my
darkness —
shine on me, shine on me.

3 As we gaze on your kingly brightness
so our faces display your likeness,
ever changing from glory to glory :
mirrored here, may our lives tell your
story —
shine on me, shine on me.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

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Blessing

May the God of love fill you with all joy and peace and may the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and with all those you love now and forever.

Amen

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