



A service sheet to guide reflections on and
around
Sunday 17th January 2021

Welcome Once again we gather our thoughts together though separated by 'lockdown', to offer worship and to reflect on God's Word. During the past week the Housegroups have met, via Zoom of course: for the next few weeks we are studying The Psalms, so it seems appropriate to include words from Psalms within our Service.

Call to Worship – Longing for God's house - Psalm 84:1-4 (GNB)

**'How I love your Temple, Almighty God! How I want to be there!
I long to be in the Lord's Temple.**

With my whole being I sing for joy to the living God.

**Even the sparrows have built a nest, and the swallows have their own home;
they keep their young near your Altars, Lord Almighty, my king and my God.
Happy are those who live in your Temple, always singing praise to you.'**

Those words are from one of the Psalms which pilgrims would have sung as they journeyed to offer worship in the Temple at Jerusalem. It was the place in which it was believed God was present in a very special way in 'The House of God', the only place in which true worship could be offered.

How we long to return and offer worship at Christchurch, or in another church building which we are familiar with. Sadly, we cannot open the doors and gather, in a place where we remember feeling we were blessed by God's presence. And yet, as Christians we are free to worship and blessed by the promise Jesus Christ made to be in our midst, even whilst sitting at home, reading these words, or gathered via Zoom.

*Loving, ever present God; make us conscious of your presence in our midst.
Open our eyes to the beauty of your holiness; open our ears to the message of your word;
open our minds to the challenge of your truth; open our hearts to the power of your love.
Open our lives to the coming of your Spirit, that we may truly worship you, now and forever.*

Hymn – Singing the Faith 28. Jesus calls us here to meet him - Omit verse 4

1. Jesus calls us here to meet him
as through word and song and prayer
we affirm God's promised presence
where his people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps his promise,
praise the Son who calls us friends;
praise the Spirit who, among us,
to our hopes and fears attends.

2. Jesus calls us to confess him
Word of Life and Lord of All,
sharer of our flesh and frailness
saving all who fail or fall.

Tell his holy human story;
tell his tales that all may hear;
tell the world that Christ in glory came
to earth to meet us here.

3. Jesus calls us to each other:
found in him are no divides.
Race and class and sex and language-
such are barriers he derides.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
join the hands of age and youth;
join the faithful and the doubter
in their common search for truth.

John L. Bell and Graham Maul

Prayer

Lord, our God,

Your love for us brings a smile to our face as we share the joy of being alive
Your love for us brings wonder into our hearts as we see the beauty of your creation
Your love for us brings tears to our eyes as we remember the pain you carry
for humanity and acknowledge our part in causing that pain.

Lord, our God,

Your love for us makes us silent for no words can express our feelings for you.
And so, in the silence of inmost hearts and souls we open ourselves to the wonder
of your presence and to seek your blessing on the worship we offer. Amen

Reading and Reflecting

Do you ever feel misunderstood?

'You know me better than to think that, I would never...';

surprised by what others assume you are capable of?

'I don't have it in me to take on that responsibility....';

Are you careful to hide what you think, or how you are feeling?

The writer of Psalm 139 (let's imagine it is a woman) is aware of herself, but also knows she has hidden depths which she is somewhat afraid to explore!

There is part of herself she understands and is confident enough to reveal to others

There is part of herself, a vulnerability, which she hides even from those close to her.

It's also true that others may be aware of a part she is not aware of.

Psalm 139 begins '***Lord, you have examined me and you know me***'

Bible reading Psalm 139: 1-12, 16-18,

LORD, you have examined me and you know me.

²You know everything I do;

from far away you understand all my thoughts.

³You see me, whether I am working or resting;

you know all my actions.

⁴Even before I speak,

you already know what I will say.

⁵You are all around me on every side;

you protect me with your power.

⁶Your knowledge of me is too deep;

it is beyond my understanding.

⁷Where could I go to escape from you?

Where could I get away from your presence?

⁸If I went up to heaven, you would be there;

if I lay down in the world of the dead, you would be there.

⁹If I flew away beyond the east

or lived in the farthest place in the west,

¹⁰you would be there to lead me,

you would be there to help me.

¹¹I could ask the darkness to hide me

or the light around me to turn into night,

¹²but even darkness is not dark for you,

and the night is as bright as the day.

Darkness and light are the same to you.

you saw me before I was born.

The days allotted to me

had all been recorded in your book,
before any of them ever began.

¹⁷ O God, how difficult I find your thoughts;^[b]
how many of them there are!

¹⁸ If I counted them, they would be more than the grains of sand.
When I awake, I am still with you.

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The psalmist was a poet, creating pictures to express recognition of God's knowledge of them and the nature of their relationship with God saying, **You know me**. The Hebrew word used for 'know' is the word used to speak of a husband *knowing* his wife, the deeply intimate knowledge within a marriage relationship.

Then, ***Where can I escape from your spirit, where flee from your presence?***

The psalmist is saying that the God who knows us is present by our side and that **We can know that presence**, personal to each one of us.

The most glorious poetry in this psalm is in the picture of the psalmist trying to flee from God's presence; climbing to heaven, going down to hell or **Sheol**. To fall into this place of darkness was to lose hope.

But **Psalm 139** claims that God may be found even in this place of darkness and hopelessness, for no-where, no situation, no one is outside the circle of his loving, caring presence. Go as high as you can, go as deep as you can, fly as far east as the sunrise or westward to the limit of the sea, and God is still there.

There is no experience of life in which God is not present: in the *heavenly* moments.... and those times when we want to say *it was sheer hell!*

When we think about that we have to admit that on the one hand it's a comforting thought: but on the other hand there are those times when we'd prefer that God wasn't around; it is disturbing to think about God knowing exactly what we're thinking, or what we are up to! There are times when we wish God would leave us alone!

It's at that point that I want to bring in the Christian perspective, for in Jesus Christ we learn that although God's presence may sometimes illuminate the darker corners of our lives, make us feel ashamed, we need not fear: for God's greatest concern is for our well being, for us to know that we are accepted, and loved, just as we are, with all our faults and failures.

A few thoughts to ponder, but I invite you to read and reflect upon the message which the words of this psalm brings to your mind, which may be very different, but valid because we are all so different to one another. **Just BE YOURSELF.**

Before we read and reflect on the appointed gospel passage we pause.

If this is an unfamiliar hymn or tune I invite you read the words instead

**Hymn StF 161. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word**

1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ

might be seen today
In our acts of love
and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes, for Your glory.

2. Teach us Lord full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.
Cause our faith to rise
Cause our eyes to see,

Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans
for us.

Truths unchanged from the dawn of
time,
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on Your
promises;

And by faith we'll walk as You walk with
us.

Speak, O Lord, 'til your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory

Stuart Townend & Keith Getty

Reading **John 1:35-46** - * *From "John was standing..."*

³⁵ The next day John was standing there again with two of his disciples, ³⁶ when he saw Jesus walking by. "There is the Lamb of God!" he said.

³⁷ The two disciples heard him say this and went with Jesus. ³⁸ Jesus turned, saw them following him, and asked, "What are you looking for?"

They answered, "Where do you live, Rabbi?" (This word means "Teacher.")

³⁹ "Come and see," he answered. (It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon.) So they went with him and saw where he lived, and spent the rest of that day with him.

⁴⁰ One of them was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹ At once he found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah." (This word means "Christ.") ⁴² Then he took Simon to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, "Your name is Simon son of John, but you will be called Cephas." (This is the same as Peter and means "a rock.")

⁴³ The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Come with me!" (⁴⁴ Philip was from Bethsaida, the town where Andrew and Peter lived.) ⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one whom Moses wrote about in the book of the Law and whom the prophets also wrote about. He is Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth." ⁴⁶ "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," answered Philip.

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Comment

Some of you might have heard me offering a thought some years ago, reflecting on the call of the disciples: it seems relevant for today, having thought about Psalm 139.

In one of the author P.D. James books', *The Black Tower*. a 10 year old boy is having a conversation with an old priest who is sitting at his desk, with his diary in front of him.

It's just an ordinary diary then: it isn't about your spiritual life? asks the young boy. To which the priest responds, "*This is the spiritual life, the ordinary things one does from hour to hour*"

He was teaching that there is no distinction between 'ordinary' and 'spiritual'

I wonder... has your Christian journey been straight forward?

Have you always been able to see exactly where you were going? Has the way ahead been clear, your direction obvious, your sense of God's call clear as a bell?

Then thank God for the clarity of vision and sense of purpose.

For most of us, much of the time, the way forward isn't clear. Perhaps it is only as we look back that we acknowledge any 'sense of a calling'. That has certainly been my experience.

The most profound lesson I have learnt over the years is that **God calls us to be ourselves**, and even to discover ourselves as we make our response to the inner prompting we sometimes call *the voice of God*.

Have you looked in the mirror and wondered? Wondered who you are, gazed at your own reflection and asked what anyone sees in you? What God sees in you?

Each of us is at a different stage on our journey through life and our journey of faith. It is good to pause and reflect, to seek God's guidance about future direction.

And whether we are 8 or 80.... young in the faith or Christians for many years I believe that if we look, and listen, we shall discern in that mirror we call our soul, a glimpse of the love of God for us: a whisper of the voice of God, calling us to himself and calling us to **be ourself** before he calls us to DO anything!

Sometimes we are not aware of a divine voice speaking to us: in fact, let's face it, divine encounter is rare!! What tends to happen is that we dream dreams, or realise a need, or respond to a request to think about doing something.

Words which I have found meaningful over the years, written by *George Appleton*

***Give me a candle of the Spirit, O my God,
as I go down into the deep of my own being.
Show me the hidden things: take me down to the spring of my life
and tell me my nature and my name!***

***Give me freedom to grow so that I may become the self,
the seed which thou didst plant at my making.***

Prayers for ourselves and others

We thank you, loving God, for those times when we have sensed your presence, heard your voice, seen new insights – especially when we have needed the reassurance that your presence brings, or lacked the confidence to speak to others about our relationship with you.

We thank you that even if we can't remember ever hearing your voice in a deep and personal way, we belong to a faith community in which we do receive reassurance and guidance as we commit ourselves to follow in your footsteps.

Teach us how to make space, how to be still, to listen deeply as we sing our hymns and search the Scriptures which help us to hear you and to recognise your presence with us: help us to play our part so that others may come to know you. **Amen**

Give thanks for those who are close to you as we travel through these uncertain days

- Family and friends living nearby and those from whom we are separated
- those we keep in touch with thanks to modern communication opportunities

Give thanks for the family of Christchurch, or other churches we belong to

- bless those who continue to care for the Christchurch building
- those who keep in touch with families, Café and Dan's Den staff and customers

Give thanks for the community in which we live,

for the strengthening and continuing of support networks for the vulnerable

Offer to God the issues which upset or challenge you

Bring to mind those you love and about whom you are concerned

We offer our prayers and the unspoken longings of our hearts to our loving God,
In name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

StheF 407. Hear the call of the Kingdom

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.

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

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*

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

*King of Heaven we will answer the
call....*

- Keith & Kristyn Getty & Stuart
Townend

Closing Prayer

God of beginnings and endings
take the past with its memories
take the present with its activities
take the future with its uncertainties
and make all three one whole;
that our lives may be in harmony
with your Spirit of peace. Amen

The Blessing

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, and all those we love, today and always. Amen

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