

Welcome

God is here, as we, God's people, gather to praise, to pray and to reflect. Move amongst us, by your Spirit, that we might see your Kingdom come, your will be done. Amen.ⁱ

Song

Give thanks to the Lord, our God and King:
His love endures forever.
For he is good, he is above all things.
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.

*Forever.
Forever God is faithful,
Forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us,
Forever.
Forever.*

With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm
His love endures forever.
For the life that's been reborn,
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.
Sing praise, sing praise.

*Forever God is faithful,
Forever God is strong.
Forever God is with us,*

Form the rising of to the setting sun,
His love endures forever.
By the grace of God, we will carry on,
His love endures forever.
Sing praise, sing praise.
Sing praise, sing praise.
Forever God is faithful...ⁱⁱ

Prayers & The Lord's Prayer

Faithful God, we are thankful for the example of Jesus who showed us how we should live in this world. Thank you that when we feel overwhelmed by all that life brings to us, you invite us to rest in you. We give thanks to you for your compassion and love to all who feel like sheep without a shepherd, and for whom the brunt of life's disappointments weighs heavy. Help us too, so that we could offer compassion to others, as well as receive the same when offered. Bring healing and wholeness to all of us so that we can experience life in all its fullness. Amen.ⁱⁱⁱ

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 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, the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Introduction to the Theme

At this point in our reading from the book of Kings, Solomon is becoming Israel's third king.

But let's take a little trip down memory lane. Moses was really the first leader of the Israelites as he led them through the wilderness. After him came Joshua and a load of people known as judges – they would rule over the different tribes as they settled in the promised land. The people then wanted a king. So first came Saul, but he's considered a mistake by God because he got it wrong. Then comes King David, who's considered the greatest king of Israel and praised for the many things he does as leader of Israel. Then we arrive at Solomon.

After some of these great leaders, Solomon feels the pressure of becoming king and so he seeks God. He's the most powerful person in Israel, but he knows he first needs to seek God. So he worships God and God asks him what he should be given? Solomon prays and asks not for riches or powerful weapons, but he asks for wisdom. He wants to know how he should rule the people in the right way. He wants wisdom so he knows right from wrong.

God was pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom and not other things and so Solomon is given the gift of wisdom. Solomon went on to be a wise king in many ways – there's even stories in the bible showing how good his wisdom is. And he's even credited with many of the sayings found in Proverbs – a book teaching wisdom.

Solomon's story in the bible is an example to us of what we should do whenever we have a task before us: we should seek God's wisdom and guidance. However much power we think we have, or whatever our role, we should first seek God. The letter to the Ephesians affirms this by saying, 'Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise.' Let us seek God's wisdom and be a wise people.^{iv}

Readings

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. **(Ephesians 5:15-20)**

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

So Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever." **(John 6:51-58)**

Song:

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
Give thanks to the Holy One;
Give thanks because he's given Jesus Christ, his
Son.
Give thanks with a grateful heart,
Give thanks to the Holy One;
Give thanks because he's given Jesus Christ, his
Son.

*And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
Let the poor say, 'I am rich,'
Because of what the Lord has done for us;
And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
Let the poor say, 'I am rich,'
Because of what the Lord has done for us;
Give thanks.^v*

Reflection

Ali Johnson

"Changed from the inside out"

The videos can be viewed at [Burley Methodist Church Online - YouTube](#) & www.wandamethodists.org.uk
Alternatively, the written text is provided below

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray.

Lord God, we thank you for the opportunity to encounter you in the words of Psalm 111, in the reflections of others, and in our own hearts and minds. As we come together in worship, we pray for a better, safer, fairer world. We pause, today, to hold in mind all who are suffering and in pain today – all who we are worried about and who we wish to bring into the light and love of the Lord this day.

[Pause].

Lord, you know our pain, and you know the challenges faced by those on our hearts. You know the sorrow of grief and isolation and illness and tiredness and breakdown and meaninglessness. You know the sorrow that weighs heavily on our shoulders.

This day, as we pray, help us to know how to become an answer for prayer for those most in need around us, and in our world. Show me what is mine to do, we pray, dear Lord.

And so, too, we pray for our world. Knowing there are so many 'big' issues that seem beyond us which challenge and trouble us. God who moves in ways we cannot understand, come amongst the conflicts, the poverty, the injustice, the abuse of power. Come amongst the climate crisis, the refugee camps, the rough-sleepers, the burnt-out.

Come, Holy God, by your grace. Amen.^{vi}

Hymn

The Church of Christ, in every age
Beset by change but Spirit-led,
Must claim and test its heritage
And keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street,
The victims of injustice cry
For shelter and for bread to eat,
And never live until they die.

Then let the servant Church arise,
A caring church that longs to be

A partner in Christ's sacrifice,
And clothed in Christ's humility.

For he alone, whose blood was shed,
Can cure the fever in our blood,
And teach us how to share our bread
And feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve
In full obedience to our Lord:
To care for all, without reserve,
And spread his liberating Word.^{vii}

Blessing

Gracious God, we bring you all that we have and are. As we commend to you these gifts, we also offer you our whole lives – use us to see your will be done, your kingdom come, In Jesus' name Amen.^{viii}

Reflection

Changed from the inside out
Ali Johnson

In his commentary on Psalms 111 and 112, James Limburg calls them 'the ABCs of theology' and the 'ABCs of anthropology' respectively. The reason for this is that the two neighbouring Psalms are twins – each Psalm is divided into 10 verses, but has 22 lines. They are what are called 'anachronistic, alphabetic Psalms'. Basically, the Hebrew alphabet has 22 letters in it and the Psalm follows through these in the same way as an A-Z might do in ours.

Psalm 111 is mostly about theology, about God. Psalm 112 picks up on the human response to God. Themes echo between the two Psalms, and today we are going to think a little bit about 111 – but it's important we understand that these Psalms are interconnected and would be read together. Let's look at Psalm 111 now:

¹ Praise the LORD! I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation.

² Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them.

³ Full of honour and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever.

⁴ He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds; the LORD is gracious and merciful.

⁵ He provides food for those who fear him; he is ever mindful of his covenant.

⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works, in giving them the heritage of the nations.

⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.

⁸ They are established forever and ever, to be performed with faithfulness and uprightness.

⁹ He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name.

¹⁰ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.

It was a while ago that the story of Virgil, from Kentucky, found its way to me. Virgil's story is absolutely incredible for this reason: he is one of the only stories I know of in which someone went from being blind, to being able to see. Virgil was born with sight, but he caught a disease which led him to lose his sight. He learned to live as a blind man, he learned to walk and process the world without vision. Virgil went to school and university as a blind man.

When Virgil went away to university, he kept in touch with a girl from his home town, by writing letters to her. So, when he was a little bit older, they met again, fell in love, and decided they would like to get married. His fiancé asked him, one last time to go to a doctor before their wedding – because it was her dream that he'd be able to see her in her wedding dress. The disease had affected his cataracts and the doctor said there was an operation that might be able to fix his sight. So they did the operation, and Virgil was able to see. What is incredible about Virgil's story is the way his whole world is transformed: he can see nothing, and then his sight is returned!

Virgil really struggled with seeing things that felt like they 'jumped out' at him, and became obsessed with bright colours, but felt that most people's faces were really boring, sorry! So they did a test with Virgil, soon after he had

regained his sight, where he had to look at things and tell you what they were for. And he really struggled to do this, but once he could close his eyes and feel them, he knew exactly what they were for.

When we are worshipping God, we are taking part in a counter-cultural activity. It is not what everyone is doing. It challenges us, when we worship God, to move from the internal to the external. We are part of a world that is much bigger than the one that we live in – inside our own heads. We go from being blind, to being able to see. We realise that we are part of this deep inter-connectedness, that we are connected with the whole world. A world is different, once we see Jesus.

Step back a second, and think about your week. We, typically, spend most of our week thinking about our needs: going from A-to-B, doing our job, thinking about getting things done, washing our clothes, doing the routines. We seem to go from one thing into another. When we worship God, we step back out – we step out of the internal, and into the external. We realise the importance of worshipping God. It's amazing when you go online or watch TV adverts, the incredible amount of 'quick self-help tips', whether it be fixing hair loss or the 'quick diet', the 'quick way to get fit,' or the next phone, or whatever it may be – our whole advertising industry is based on the premise that we are waiting for the next thing as quickly as possible.

I remember, when I was young, the Gameboy Colour had just come out – a small handheld gaming device where you could play 'Pokemon Challenge,' the game of the time. Anyone remember that? I used to have a job collecting eggs at a local egg farm, and at the end of everyday, when we got paid in a brown envelope, I would put my money away and saved, and saved, and saved so I could get this Gameboy Colour. I remember, not long after I bought my Gameboy Colour, I played it non-stop for 6 months and then it went in a drawer somewhere, and I don't know what happened to it. The next thing came along, we got an Xbox in the house, and I moved on. As a society, we love 'the next thing,' a 'quick fix,' the easy solution. But the question that Psalm 111 asks us is do we understand that we worship a God who is much greater, much more compassionate and is part of a bigger, wider world-view?

The church can sometimes be presented as another one of those self-help adverts. It can sometimes feel like this 'exchange,' where we turn up, we do our bit, we serve the tea, lead worship, play our role... and then when we leave we get the blessing of God on the way out of the door, to last us the rest of the week. The church should NOT feel like this. Worship should not feel like a transactional exchange. What we are missing, when that is all we do, is that God is God. God is sovereign, and God is actually the most important thing in our world. The uncomfortable truth for us, in our western society is that God is in control. That worship isn't a booster or a get-out-of-jail-free card, it's not a plaster for our problems, but worshipping God will change us from the inside. It will transform our worldview as dramatically as the operation did for Virgil.

Psalm 111 has two key questions and two key themes for us to understand. The first is 'who is God?' The Psalm tells us who God is: 'glorious and majestic are his deeds...his righteousness endures forever...the Lord is gracious and compassionate.' This gives us some deep theological truths about the God we worship – it takes us out of our self-centred western mind-set, into the beautiful understanding of who God is. We read about a God who shows love to his people, who is involved in their everyday, in the unexpected and the ordinary. I love this! I love that this Psalm gives us a deeper understanding of who God is, and this invitation to learn more about God.

The second theme for us, is that this Psalm teaches us what God has done for us. In Jeremiah 6: 16 we read: 'This is what the Lord says: "stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'we will not walk in it'."

It is just amazing think, that we – like the people of Israel – are constantly invited to look back. To stand on the mountain and look back where God has come from. When times are really hard, when times are difficult, let us remember what God has done for us.

There are three important interactions in the Psalm where we are reminded what God has done for us. The first is in v 5: 'he is ever mindful of his covenant'. This is a reference to the covenant on Mount Sinai, the covenant that he made with his people. The second is in v 6: 'Giving the heritage of the nations'. This is a reference to the gift of the promised land that God gave his people as a safe space to grow in space. And the second half of v 7: 'All precepts are trustworthy.' This is reference to all the ways that God has fulfilled his prophecies to and for us.

This Psalm is beautiful, because it reminds us who God is, and it reminds us what God has done for us. Let us be clear, that God is in control, and we need to see this worship here today as an opportunity to centre ourselves, to remind ourselves that we worship something much greater than us.

This worship is not a transactional exchange. This day, as you worship, I encourage you to pray that you will be raw – like Virgil. Pray for your eyes to be opened, and even as you accept that each day will be a struggle as you come to grips with how this world looks and works with this new vision, it will be bright, and clear, and beautiful. It

won't be straightforward, and it won't always be easy, but we need to open our eyes and we need to take one step at a time, to find out more about who God is and what our God has done for us, his people.

I hope today is a blessed day for you. Thank you.

ⁱ Written by Tim Baker.

ⁱⁱ Words and music by Chris Tomlin, 2000, worshiptogether.com songs / Six Steps Music. StF 77.

ⁱⁱⁱ Written by Ramona Samuel.

^{iv} Written by Gary Hopkins.

^v Words and Music by Henry Smith, 1978, Integrity's Hosanna! Music, StF 78.

^{vi} Written by Tim Baker.

^{vii} Words by Fred Pratt Green, Music by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1971, Stainer & Bell, StF. 415.

^{viii} Written by Tim Baker.