

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of August 2026

**Compiled by:
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Sunday 2nd August 2026 – 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service was compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

Sons and daughters of God,
let us meet with our Father who loves us and longs to bless us.
Come into the presence of the One to be forever praised.

Hymn: Be thou my vision (StF 545)

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art.
be thou my best in the day and the night
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, and thou my true Word;
be thou ever with thee, and I with thee Lord.
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might.
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower;
O raise thou me Heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's, empty praise;
be thou mine inheritance, now and always.
be thou and thou only the first in my heart,
O Sovereign of heaven my treasure thou art.

High King of Heaven, thou heavens bright sun
O grant be its joys after victory is won,
great heart of my heart, whatever befall,
Still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Opening Prayers:

Father God, who probes our hearts with tender mercy,
how wonderful is your great love that holds us tight.
Anointed One, Son of God, full of righteousness and compassion,
how wonderful is your great love that holds us tight.

Divine Holy Spirit, who awakens our conscience, enlightening us,
how wonderful is your great love that holds us tight.
Three-fold blessings are ours.

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.
Amen.

Hymn: I've had questions without answers (StF 632)

I've had questions, without answers
I've known sorrow, I have known pain
But there's one thing, that I'll cling to
You are faithful, Jesus You're true

*When hope is lost, I'll call You Saviour
When pain surrounds, I'll call You Healer
When silence falls, You'll be the song within my heart*

In the lone hour, of my sorrow
Through the darkest night of my soul
You surround me, and sustain me
My defender, forever more

When hope is lost, I'll call you Saviour...

Bible Reading: Genesis 32.22-31 - Jacob Wrestles with God:

²² The same night he arose and took his two wives, his two female servants, and his eleven children,^[a] and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ He took them and sent them across the stream, and everything else that he had. ²⁴ And Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the breaking of the day. ²⁵ When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched his hip socket, and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. ²⁶ Then he said, "Let me go,

for the day has broken.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me.” ²⁷ And he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.” ²⁸ Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,^[b] for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed.” ²⁹ Then Jacob asked him, “Please tell me your name.” But he said, “Why is it that you ask my name?” And there he blessed him. ³⁰ So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel,^[c] saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” ³¹ The sun rose upon him as he passed Peniel, limping because of his hip.

Thought for the Day:

Some small children really enjoy wrestling. Attempting to physically overpower someone much bigger than themselves presents as a fun challenge, even when the odds are overwhelmingly stacked against them. The image of a five-year-old launching themselves on a parent comes to mind when thinking about Jacob wrestling with God. We know that, in reality, most parents will match their child’s efforts, just enough that the child has fun and no one gets hurt. The aim is not to defeat the child but to allow the child to test their strength and to enjoy the fun.

In Jacob’s story, he wrestles the man through the night, but the man has the power to dislocate Jacob’s hip with a touch. Jacob doesn’t win the fight, but he perseveres until the other man ends the fight and agrees to bless him. Jacob fears meeting Esau again and has just sent his entire family and possessions ahead of him to an uncertain fate. His emotions will have been in turmoil: full of anxiety, anger, guilt and more. Maybe it is this that keeps him fighting even though he doesn’t win.

Sometimes we think God cannot handle our anger and frustration, but perhaps God welcomes us bringing those emotions to him – even when we think we are kicking and hitting out at God. We can’t hurt God, and we need his blessing. This passage gives us permission to come to God with all that we are carrying and to express all our emotions, positive and negative, to him in prayer. In the same way, a parent can manage their child kicking and fighting, God can handle all we bring him.

Hymn: O Love the will not let me go (StF 636)

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.

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.

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.

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.

Intercessions:

Lord Jesus, as we come to you now in the stillness of prayer, we are aware that you are listening. It is amazing that you can hear us individually as we pray. Thank you that you care 100% about each of us and our lives. Thank you for being a God of hospitality who loves it when we come and talk to you. Forgive us for the times when we just rush into your presence and don't pause to listen to what you have to say to us. But we are here now. Help us to focus our full attention on you as you are focussed on us. Lord, give us generosity of spirit:

help us to recognise that everyone we meet is special.

Lord Jesus, we think for a moment of some of the people we have met this week: our friends that we've spent time with; our colleagues at work;

shopkeepers; health workers; anyone we've been with. And we remember some of the faces of those we have passed in the street or seen on the bus or train. Lord, you know the stories of each of these people. We are sorry for any occasions when we could have made ourselves more ready to spend time with them or listen and show we care but we did not.

Lord, give us generosity of spirit:

help us to recognise that everyone we meet is special.

We think now of our plans for the week ahead. We picture in our minds places we have planned to go and people we expect to meet. We commit our encounters, our energies, our activities to you. Help us to be accessible and present to those we spend time with. Help us to be willing to be interrupted.

Lord, give us generosity of spirit:

help us to recognise that everyone we meet is special.

Lord, we pray for all children and teachers currently on summer holidays. We thank you for opportunities for rest and recreation. We pray for any from our congregation who are on holiday at the moment. We pray for summer camps and missions that bring the good news of your love to thousands of children. We thank you for all those who have given time and energy to work on the camps and missions and at festivals over the summer. We pray that many will come to have a deeper relationship with you because of their time away. We thank you for those who first told us about you and helped us grow in our faith.

Lord, give us generosity of spirit:

help us to recognise that everyone we meet is special.

We remember places of war and unrest throughout the world. We pray for all who are suffering because of war. We pray for refugees and all those who travel to try and find a better life for themselves or their families. We pray for anyone who is a victim of trafficking and exploitation. Give us all a sense of the worth of every human being and how we are all made in your image.

Lord, give us generosity of spirit:

help us to recognise that everyone we meet is special.

Finally, Lord, as we prepare to leave this place of encounter with you, help us to seek you out during the week. Meet us and our friends and loved ones in our places of pain and bring us your comfort. Meet us in our places of joy and laughter and help it to be infectious to all around us. Meet us in our places of stress and ease our burdens and troubles. Help us to be those who ease the strain on others too. And meet us in our times of normality, help us to find special moments alone with you or with others. Bring us back here next week ready to tell of how we have encountered you this week.

Lord, give us generosity of spirit:

help us to recognise that everyone we meet is special.

We ask all these things in the name of the God who rejoices in us. Thank you, Lord, for hearing our prayers. Send us out to serve you and others and to find you in all we do.

Amen.

Hymn: This, this is the God we adore (StF 67)

This, this is the God we adore!

Our faithful, unchangeable friend:

his love is as great as his power

and knows neither knows measure nor end.

Tis Jesus the first and the last;

whose Spirit will guide us safe home;

we'll praise him for all that is past

and trust him for all that's to come.

Blessing:

Lord God,

we have chosen to follow you no matter how difficult the road.

Would you bless us now

so that we can face the next steps on our journey.

Amen.

Sunday 9th August 2026 – 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service was compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

Call to Worship:

Come to the One who is always holding out His hands to us,
who is always ready to welcome us, who is always longing to embrace us.
Come together to God our Father and celebrate his goodness. **Amen.**

Hymn: Jesus is Lord (StF 353)

Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,
for by His power each tree and flower was planned and made.
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it;
sun, moon and stars in heaven cry: Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!

Praise Him with alleluias, for Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Yet from His throne eternal
in flesh He came to die in pain on Calvary's tree,
Jesus is Lord! From Him all life proceeding –
yet gave His life a ransom, thus setting us free.

Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,
from death He rose; and all His foes shall own His name.
Jesus is Lord! God sends His Holy Spirit
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

David John Mansell (b. 1936)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Living God, for the hope You have given us in Christ, receive our praise,
thanks and worship.

Teach us to live each day in the light of Your promises, celebrating every
moment that You give us and anticipating the blessings of Your eternal
Kingdom - those joys that no eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor the

human heart conceived, prepared by Your grace for all those who love You. Help us to put our trust in You now and always. Speak to us afresh of Your greatness, your awesome power and glory. Grant us a sense of your splendour - a glimpse of Your infinite majesty beyond words or understanding. Reveal more fully who and what You are, such that we catch our breath in wonder as we stand in Your presence – amazed, entranced and overwhelmed by the magnificence of it all. Instead of faith being a matter of the mind only, may it encompass our hearts and souls as we thrill each day to the miracle of Your love, the extent of Your grace and the generosity of Your blessing. With everything that we are, Sovereign God, we praise You. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Help us, Lord, for though we may pretend otherwise, so often our faith is weak, tossed about on the storms of life. We're carried along by the winds of change, buffeted by the waves that blow us off course. If we are honest even those convictions and principles we consider unshakable could be swiftly swept away if put to the test. Secure our lives in Your love, so that we may think, speak and act wisely, everything we say and do being directed by the breath of Your Spirit. Thank You that You forgive us our weaknesses and failings and help us to remember that we are always held in Christ's love. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen

Bible Reading: Romans chapter 10 vs. 5– 15 NSRV

Introduction:

Paul explains that living by the Law will not save us, nor can we judge whether or not we will be saved by examining our own hearts – instead we must confess Jesus as Lord. If we do that, then we know we are saved through His righteousness. Our reassurance is that all people are given the chance to hear this good news and respond to it.

⁵ Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that “the person who does these things will live by them.” ⁶ But the righteousness that comes from faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) ⁷ “or ‘Who will

descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). ⁸ But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. ¹¹ The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

¹⁴ But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? ¹⁵ And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Comment:

When instant cake mix was first introduced, it was a big flop. The instructions said all you had to do was add water and bake! The manufacturers couldn't understand why until their research showed that the buying public thought a mix that only required water was too easy. So the company changed the formula to call for also adding an egg to the mix. The idea worked – and sales jumped dramatically. Sometimes we over complicate things and what seems simple just can't be trusted.

Good news - that's something we all want to hear and there is good news in our readings today. Sometimes life becomes so complicated that we don't know what to do or believe. The same applies to faith. Are we in a right relationship with God by what we do or by what we believe? The answer comes in the words of our first hymn: if we confess Jesus as Lord, the good news is that we are in a right relationship with God. Paul reminds us that all people need the opportunity to hear this good news and respond to it.

Song: How lovely on the mountains (SoF 192)

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of Him
who brings good news, good news,

Proclaiming peace, announcing news of happiness,
Our God reigns, our God reigns.

*Our God reigns, our God reigns,
Our God reigns, our God reigns.*

You Watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one,
shout for your King, your King.
See eye to eye the Lord restoring Zion;
Your God reigns, Your God reigns!

Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy,
we are redeemed, redeemed.
The Lord has saved and comforted His people:
Your God reigns, Your God reigns!

Ends of the earth, see the salvation of your God,
Jesus is Lord, is Lord.
Before the nations He has bared His holy arm;
Your God reigns, Your God reigns!

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Bible Reading: Matthew chapter 14 vs. 22 – 33 NSRV

Introduction:

Jesus is still trying to escape the crowds and take some time alone following the murder of John the Baptist. He has shown compassion by feeding the large crowd who followed Him to His place of retreat, but He now dismisses them, and He also sends His disciples away, asking them to take the boat to the other side of the lake. While He is up on the mountainside, praying, the boat gets into trouble, and the disciples are terrified. Jesus walks out across the water to reassure them. At first, they think Jesus is an apparition, but then Peter has the boldness to test what he sees. Initially, he steps out in faith, but as his courage fails he begins to sink. Jesus will not let him drown. He reaches out and holds on to Peter, taking him to safety.

²² Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When

evening came, he was there alone, ²⁴ but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

²⁵ And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. ²⁶ But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear.

²⁷ But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."

²⁸ Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water."

²⁹ He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. ³⁰ But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

³¹ Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

³² When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. ³³ And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

'WHAT A DAY!' – Simon Peter

The wind was against us that day,
blowing us ever further from land,
under the waves that rose by the minute,
battering our little boat like so much flotsam.

We weren't landlubbers remember –
we were used to such conditions –
but we were nervous just the same,
feeling lost and alone on the hostile sea ...
until suddenly Jesus appeared,
walking on the water towards us,
hands outstretched in welcome.

Extraordinary!

I responded instinctively,
stepping out of the boat to meet Him.
Only suddenly the reality of what I'd done hit me,
and if Jesus hadn't reached out and caught hold,
I'd have sunk like a stone.

That's true for us all, in a way,

for in life, as at sea, the wind can be equally against us.
We face troubles to test the strongest,
and, on our own –
battered by trials and tribulations –
we'd surely go under, unable to keep afloat.
But, of course, we're **not** alone,
for Jesus is always there through His Spirit,
to help and strengthen in time of need.
Just as He made me feel I could walk on water,
so each day He does similar for others:
instilling faith, inspiring hope, imbuing trust.
Don't look at the problems you're up against,
the sea of doubt, difficulty and despair.
Look to Him ... and walk tall.
His love will not fail.

Reflection: 'I'VE GOT YOU'

At some time in our lives, all of us have experienced fear to some degree. It can paralyse us; we try to scream -but nothing comes out; our words get stuck in our throats.

In the book "If You Want To Walk On Water: You've Got To Get Out Of The Boat", the Minister, John, tells the story of a hot-air balloon ride he gave his wife as a gift. They were joined by another couple, and the pilot. John always assumed that the baskets below the balloon were chest high. No worries. The baskets on this particular balloon however only came up to their knees. Panic - one gust of wind could throw someone over the side. So John hung on with grit determination and white knuckles. His wife was even more afraid. She was acrophobic. She kept a death grip on the sides of the basket and wouldn't look down. John decided he'd like to get to know the pilot and asked the young man how he got into balloon flying. "Well," he said, "I spent most of my time surfing and got into flying hot-air balloons literally by accident." One day he had been driving his car after having too much to drink. He crashed the car and badly injured his brother. While he was recovering, they spent a lot of time together watching hot-air balloons for something to do. "By the way," the pilot added, "if it gets a bit choppy on the way down don't be surprised. I've

never flown a balloon before and I'm not sure how to handle the descent!"

John's wife looked at him and said with feeling: "You mean to tell me we're 1000 feet up in the air with an unemployed surfer who started flying balloons because he got drunk, crashed his car, injured his brother and has never flown this one before, and doesn't know how to bring it down?"

PANIC

Then the wife of the other couple looked at the Minister and spoke the only words she said throughout the entire flight: "You're a Minister, do something religious!"

[You won't believe this!] "So," says John, "I did the first thing that came to mind, I took up an offering."

Most likely, we can all appreciate the feeling of downright panic that these balloon passengers experienced. There have been times when we've been really afraid - for a variety of reasons, and it comforts us to read that the disciples experienced what it was to be afraid too. In today's Gospel reading, their situation was perilous. They're in a small fishing boat on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus needed to escape the crowds and spend some time on His own to pray following the death of John the Baptist. But now it's getting dark and a storm has come up. This was nothing unusual due to the lake's rapid temperature changes and strong winds funnelling through the surrounding hills. Its shallow depth allows wind energy to agitate the water producing large waves very quickly. The boat is a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind is against it, and these experienced fishermen are becoming increasingly anxious. Even in the hands of experienced sailors, a small boat on a treacherous sea can be frightening - and the disciples were panicking. Where was Jesus when they needed Him most?

Then, something extraordinary happens. Jesus comes out to them, walking on the water. Now they are terrified. But Jesus says to them, "Take heart! It is I. Don't be afraid."

But how can we overcome it? That is why the words of Jesus are so important. It is said that fear is our biggest enemy. The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. It is also said that the opposite of faith is not doubt,

but fear. It can limit us, cause us to fail. It can paralyse our lives. It makes us unhappy and unsatisfied with life. It causes sleepless nights as we worry about events over which we have no control.

One way is to keep our eyes firmly fixed on Jesus. Remember how Peter wanted to walk out to meet Jesus? Why didn't he swim – Peter was a good swimmer; remember how after the resurrection Jesus cooked them breakfast on the beach and, recognising Jesus, Peter swam to shore to meet Him? But that misses the point. Jesus was saying to Peter: 'I've got you'. Peter got out of the boat in faith, but his courage started to fail and he made the same mistake that we often do – he took his eyes off Jesus. He looked down at the waves and he began to sink, but Jesus is there to reach out and hold him, 'I've got you'. That is good news for us too. Whatever our situation, we should keep our eyes on Jesus for He is telling us, 'I've got you'.

Do you know someone going through a dark time at the moment who needs to hear those words? Can you share those words of courage to trust Jesus and not be afraid? Can you give them some of your time to listen? Can you put aside some time to pray? In your dark times – will you reach out, like Peter, trusting Jesus to help you?

Jesus is Lord – He's got you. **Amen.**

Hymn: What A Friend We Have in Jesus (StF 531)

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,
is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness:
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Saviour, still our refuge –
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
in His arms He'll take and shield you,
you will find a solace there.

Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819 – 1886)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Lord, You are our God and we worship You. You are with us through fair weather when life is good, and You are with us in the storms when life is so very hard. Thank You that you never take your eyes from us even though we may forget You when things get on top of us. Help us always to reach out to You for support and help. Give us the courage to follow You even when we can't see the way ahead. Increase our faith and strengthen us as we call out to you to hear our prayers.

Lord, when the storms get close:

save us, lift us, and help us keep our eyes fixed on You.

Lord, we bring our world to You. There is so much turmoil and unrest. We see on the news the storms of war. We pray for those who are caught up in conflicts: for soldiers fighting for their country; for their families worrying about their safety; for those living in fear of their homes being destroyed. Lord, help each one to look to You to be their support and guide.

Lord, when the storms get close:

save us, lift us, and help us keep our eyes fixed on You.

Lord, we pray for those who are living through rough seas at the moment: for those who are suffering with constant pain; those facing difficult diagnoses; those who are sad at the loss of a beloved family member or

friend; those who are depressed or anxious. Lord, reach out and lift them. Help them to know Your presence and reassure them that You will never let them go.

Lord, when the storms get close:

save us, lift us, and help us keep our eyes fixed on You.

Lord, as results day comes for many during this month, perhaps this week, we pray for all who have taken exams this summer. We rejoice with those who have been successful, and we ask for your wisdom and guidance for those who have not achieved the grades they hoped for. We pray for all who will be going off to university and college, leaving their comfort zones and entering new pastures and life experiences, and we pray for their families who will have an empty place in their homes. Be with them all as they negotiate the storms and calms of this new season.

Lord, when the storms get close:

save us, lift us, and help us keep our eyes fixed on You.

Lord, we commit this week to you. Go before us into all the places we expect to be and help us to find You in any new and unexpected places and situations. Help us to listen to Your voice beyond our busyness, relaxation, boredom, anxiety, difficulty. Help us to keep our eyes fixed on You; keep us from looking down and seeing only the difficulties. Give us Your perspective to see all the possibilities that You have in store for us.

Lord, when the storms get close:

save us, lift us, and help us keep our eyes fixed on You.

Thank you for being there for us in all the storms of life.

Help us to step out in faith and follow Your lead,
secure in the knowledge of Your promise: 'I've got you.' **Amen.**

Hymn: Will Your Anchor Hold (StF 645)

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,*

grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!

Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your barque o'erflow?

Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds within the veil:

Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore?

Priscilla Jane Owens (1829 – 1907)

Blessing:

Send us out Lord, strong in faith and our desire to serve You, knowing that You are present with us, that we may speak for You, work for You, love for You and live for You, for Your grace, God's love and Your life-giving Spirit go with us and before us. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

Sunday 16th August 2026 – 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Richard Parkes

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;

come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;

his steadfast love endures for ever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

Hymn: My heart is full of Christ (StF 506)

My heart is full of Christ, and longs

Its glorious matter to declare!

Of Him I make my loftier song,

I cannot from His praise forbear;

My ready tongue makes haste to sing

The glories of my heavenly King.

Fairer than all the earth-born race,

Perfect in comeliness Thou art;

Replenished are Thy lips with grace,

And full of love Thy tender heart:

God ever blest! we bow the knee,

And own all fullness dwells in Thee.

Gird on Thy thigh the Spirit's sword,

And take to Thee Thy power divine;

Stir up Thy strength, almighty Lord,

All power and majesty are Thine:

Assert Thy worship and renown;

O all-redeeming God, come down!

Come, and maintain Thy righteous cause,
And let Thy glorious toil succeed;
Dispread the victory of Thy cross,
Ride on, and prosper in Thy deed;
Through earth triumphantly ride on,
And reign in every heart alone.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Prayer of Praise:

God of creation, Source of all being
the heavens declare your glory
and the earth is your handiwork.
For the diverse beauty of all you have made;
Lord of all, **we offer you our praise.**

God of salvation, Eternal Word,
you came amongst your people,
and made yourself vulnerable
to the risky business of human living.
we offer you our praise.

God of life, Holy Spirit,
you move in the church and in the world,
calling the least and the lost
into a deeper fellowship of love.
we offer you our praise.

God of all grace,
Accept our praise, and help us to live as your people in the world.
Amen.

Confession:

Let us confess our sins,
trusting in God's mercy and forgiveness.

Let us keep quiet for a few moments

For those times when we have lost sight of your love,
despairing for ourselves and the world.

Heal us, God, and grant us a new beginning.

For those times when we have lost perspective,
putting our own concerns before the needs of your world.

Heal us, God, and grant us a new beginning.

For those times when we have taken for granted
the gifts that you have given to us.

Heal us, God, and grant us a new beginning.

For those times when we have chosen to ignore injustice,
and neglected those in need.

Heal us, God, and grant us a new beginning.

For those times when we have been simply overwhelmed by the state of
the world, and have been paralysed into inaction

Heal us, God, and grant us a new beginning.

Declaration of Forgiveness:

God has heard our confession,
loves us still and, through Christ,
offers healing and a new beginning.

Hear then, Christ's gracious words: "Your sins are forgiven."

Amen. Thanks be to God.

Bible Reading: Isaiah 56: 1, 6-8

The Covenant Extended to All Who Obey

Thus says the Lord:

Maintain justice, and do what is right,
for soon my salvation will come,
and my deliverance be revealed.

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord,
to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord,
and to be his servants,
all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it,
and hold fast my covenant—
these I will bring to my holy mountain,
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;
their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices

will be accepted on my altar;
for my house shall be called a house of prayer
for all peoples.

Thus says the Lord God,
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,
I will gather others to them
besides those already gathered.

Prayer:

A house of prayer, where all may come;
a house of prayer to be a home;
a house to welcome every one:
this is the house that God builds.

A house for sinner and for saint;
a house for those whose faith is faint
and for the weak to bring complaint:
this is the house that God builds.

A house of prayer, not just of creed:
a house where bread and wine will feed
those hungry souls who come in need:
this is the house that God builds.

A house for strangers and for friends;
a house whose building never ends,
where nations meet and truth transcends:
this is the house that God builds.

©Marjorie Dobson

Hymn: It is God who holds the nations (StF 705)

It is God who holds the nations in the hollow of his hand;
It is God whose light is shining in the darkness of the land;
It is God who builds his City on the Rock and not on sand:
May the living God be praised!

It is God whose purpose summons us to use the present hour;
Who recalls us to our senses when a nation's life turns sour;

In the discipline of freedom we shall know God's saving power:
May the living God be praised!

When a thankful nation, looking back, has cause to celebrate
Those who win our admiration by their service to the state;
When self-giving is a measure of the greatness of the great:
May the living God be praised!

God reminds us every sunrise that the world is ours on lease -
For the sake of life tomorrow, may our love for it increase;
May all races live together, share its riches, be at peace:
May the living God be praised!

Fred Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Bible Reading: Matthew 15:21-28

²¹ Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon.
²² Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³ But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵ But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶ He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷ She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸ Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

To Ponder:

A woman is drawn to Jesus. Who ignores her. And is quite rude about her.

What on earth is going on here? We're so attuned to the Bible being the 'Word of God' that we sometimes gloss over the difficult stories. We assume that, because it's the word of God, there must be a simple explanation. But let's allow ourselves to be shocked by this story.

First, Jesus response. It's harsh. He begins by ignoring the woman. There are other passages in the gospels where Jesus seems to deliberately seek

out the people others are ignoring and to listen to their stories. That's the picture we like – Jesus hearing the voiceless. Listening to their stories, giving them the chance to tell. Like Bartimaeus, the blind man who called out to Jesus. In that story as well, the people try to shut him up – he's ruining the big moment. Jesus seeks him out and heals him. But not here, it seems. The disciples tell Jesus to tell the woman to go away, she's making too much noise and following them. And, unlike the Bartimaeus story, Jesus seems to do nothing.

He doesn't talk to her, he talks about her while she is still there – which is monumentally rude. And he seems to refer to her and the people of her town as 'dogs' – deeply insulting. There was real animosity between the Canaanites and the Jews. Some commentators say that Jesus must have been testing the woman, but there is no evidence for that in the reading. Some people say that Jesus was taught by the woman, and had his vision broadened. No evidence for that either. We do not know.

All we can say is that racism and bigotry are at the heart of this story. And it ends with the child being healed.

To be human means to be part of your culture, to be rooted in time and place. How many of you remember Donovan's song from the '60's, the Universal Soldier? "He's a Catholic, a Hindu, an Atheist, a Jain". But that's impossible – you can only live in your time and place. Martin Luther King, for example, fully engaged with his time and place – and only by doing so is he able to speak to us about our situation. Jesus involved himself totally in the situation of his time – first century Palestine and the surrounding countries. He knew their pride and jealousies, their hopes and aspirations, the prejudices and limitations – and he was deeply moved by them. Sometimes moved to love and sometimes moved to anger. Because for Jesus, people mattered, and their relationship with God mattered. Jesus was not a man of his time, that suggests he was limited – but he was a man who lived fully in that time – and therefore brings hope for all time. We are all affected by the attitudes and values of our time. The greatest people, such as Jesus, rise above them.

Jesus is caught up in this discrimination, and whatever the explanation, by the end of the story Jesus has risen above it all, and the woman's child is healed.

Desperation:

My second point is, this woman is desperate. If you've ever had a child facing death, you will understand this woman's helplessness and despair – and her desperation. Parents will do anything they can for their child. Even risk their children's lives escaping war and tyranny in lorries and boats, paying people traffickers to flee from places like Aleppo in Syria. Or raise money for treatment in the USA. As a senior politician said, 'it's what any parent would do for their child'.

And this woman will argue with Jesus. She won't leave him alone – and I remembered a parable that Jesus told about another woman who was constantly badgering a corrupt judge, until he got so fed-up he gave her the justice she wanted. In that story, Jesus says 'how much more readily will God give us justice'. In our story, the mother gives as good as she gets – and does this exchange open Jesus' eyes to the universal nature of his mission? Not just for the people of Israel?

What are you desperate for? What do you need from Jesus? This woman asks for what she needs – healing for her daughter. Watching helplessly as your child is seriously ill or worse is the hardest thing a parent can do. We can feel for this woman.

What are you desperate for? What are we desperate for? Healing? Justice? Hope? Are we desperate for ourselves, or for our family? For the church or society? I'm not sure we can choose our desperations. They are forced upon us.

So, in our prayers and in our living, let us argue with God, with Jesus. Martin Luther, the German reformer, said 'Not reading and speculation, but living and dying and being damned make a real theologian'. There's that desperation. Faith matters. Arguing with God – wrestling with God - matters.

What is it that makes you want to grab God by the shirt, push against a wall and say 'what's going on, God? Why don't you do something?' what are you desperate for?

Take it to the Lord in prayer. Make God listen to you. And – listen to God.

Hymn: What a friend we have in Jesus (StF 531)

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry

everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge--
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he'll take and shield you;
you will find a solace there.

Joseph Medlicott (1819-1886)

Prayer:

I invite you to take a notebook, or a piece of paper. Write on it one thing about which you are desperate. It could be local, or a world situation. It could be personal, or political. Put yourself in the shoes of the woman in this story. How will you grab Jesus' attention? What do you want to say to him? What do you want him to do? And, what do you think Jesus might be asking of you?

Friend Jesus, so often we come to you as a matter of routine. We maybe have lists, but is our heart really in it? So, we bring to you the situation and people that are really on our heart.

Saviour Jesus, hear our prayers for the people closest to us. We bring to you those who are struggling, or for whom life is unexpectedly difficult.

Saviour of the world, we bring to you our world leaders. Open their eyes to the real needs of the world, challenge them to rise above their own self interest and see instead the true needs of the world's most vulnerable people – and the needs of the planet.

Risen Lord Jesus, by your death and resurrection you bring the world to glorious life.

Pour your Spirit into our hearts so that we may willingly accept our own cross with joyful thanks, knowing that all we do in your name will bring hope to the world and honour you. Amen

Hymn: Hear the call of the kingdom, (StF 407)

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 Getty (b. 1974), Kristyn Getty (b. 1980) and
Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Prayer:

Let us continue to hold before God
the things we care about deeply,
asking for his Spirit's wisdom and guidance
as we act and respond
with generosity and love.

And the Lord bless and keep you,
the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you,
and give you peace.

Amen.

Sunday 23rd August 2026 – 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship?

Come, let us stand before God,
who empowers us to challenge injustice.
Come, let us choose to worship,
choose to seek his wisdom, justice and strength.
Come, let us be empowered by his presence
and inspired by his love.

Hymn: Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation (StF 116)

Sing for God's glory that colours the dawn of creation,
racing across the sky, trailing bright clouds of elation;
sun of delight
succeeds the velvet of night,
warming the earth's exultation.

Sing for God's power that shatters the chains that would bind us,
searing the darkness of fear and despair that could blind us,
touching our shame
with love that will not lay blame,
reaching out gently to find us.

Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion,
tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion;
lifeblood of right,
resisting evil and slight,
offering freedom's transfusion.

Sing for God's saints who have travelled faith's journey before us,
who in our weariness give us their hope to restore us;
in them we see
the new creation to be,
spirit of love made flesh for us.

Opening Prayers:

God of all that exists, you gave us life, forming and nurturing us in the womb.

Empowering God, we love and worship you.

Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, you are the divine Messiah pointing the way.

Empowering Lord, we love and worship you.

Holy Spirit, gentle but powerful, deliverer of strength, you enable us to make changes.

Empowering Holy Spirit, we love and worship you.

Lord God, we don't like it when we are mistreated, taken advantage of, belittled and devalued. But you, Lord God, enable us to endure hard times. You help us when we feel burdened and defeated. Empower us to forgive those who hurt us, and forgive us when we are the ones mistreating others.

Lord God, forgive us our arrogance, our pride and selfishness and when we let hardship shift our focus and trust from you.

Help us always to remember that no problem is too big for you. Help us to realise that together we can make a difference.

Lord God, empower us with strength and courage to always stand for what is right in your eyes. Amen.

Hymn: He's got the whole world in his hands (StF 536)

He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got you and me, brother, in his hands

He's got you and me brother, in his hands

He's got you and me brother, in his hands

He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got you and me, sister, in his hands

He's got you and me sister, in his hands

He's got you and me sister, in his hands

He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got the little tiny baby in his hands
He's got the tiny little baby in his hands
He's got the tiny little baby in his hands
He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got everybody here in his hands
He's got everybody here in his hands
He's got everybody here in his hands
He's got the whole world in his hands.

He's got the whole world in his hands.
He's got the whole world in his hands.
He's got the whole world in his hands.
He's got the whole world in his hands.

Bible Reading: Exodus 1:8–2:10

⁸ Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.” ¹¹ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹² But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad. And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. ¹³ So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves ¹⁴ and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.

¹⁵ Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, ¹⁶ “When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live.” ¹⁷ But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. ¹⁸ So the king of Egypt called the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and let the male children live?” ¹⁹ The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women, for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to

them.” ²⁰ So God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and grew very strong. ²¹ And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families. ²² Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live.”

2 Now a man from the house of Levi went and took as his wife a Levite woman. ² The woman conceived and bore a son, and when she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him three months. ³ When she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child in it and placed it among the reeds by the river bank. ⁴ And his sister stood at a distance to know what would be done to him. ⁵ Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her young women walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her servant woman, and she took it. ⁶ When she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby was crying. She took pity on him and said, “This is one of the Hebrews' children.” ⁷ Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, “Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” ⁸ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Go.” So the girl went and called the child's mother. ⁹ And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, “Take this child away and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. ¹⁰ When the child grew older, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. She named him Moses, “Because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.”

Thought for the Day:

The story of Moses, the baby in the bulrushes, is familiar to many, but there is a quiet rebellion by the women in the story that also flows through it. The king, threatened by the growing number of Israelite slaves, orders baby boys to be killed at birth in an attempt to control their numbers. His insecurity and fear motivate him to act in a way that is cruel and inhuman as he wields his power to try to resolve the problem.

The midwives quietly rebelled against the orders of Pharaoh, who had commanded them to kill the baby boys at birth. They cannot agree to do this as they know it would be wrong in the eyes of God. They are empowered by their beliefs, enabling them to stand up to something they

see and know is wrong. They stand firm when questioned by Pharaoh, explaining that they arrived too late at the birth to carry out his decree. They acted with great courage, standing up to a man with such power, and they are subsequently blessed by God, who gives them families. Moses' mother and sister also quietly rebelled against Pharaoh's wishes. His mother was empowered by her love for her precious baby and by her faith in God, who she trusted to look after him.

Hiding him and putting him in a basket on the river took faith and courage, as did the actions of her daughter, who approached Pharaoh's daughter when the baby was found.

Pharaoh's daughter also quietly rebelled against his orders, although she may not have known the orders or that this baby was subject to them. She acts with compassion when she rescues him, names him and arranges for his care.

Faith in God empowers these women.

We see around us the misuse of power as leaders and regimes promote war, killing and bloodshed. We see the misuse of power creating oppression and fear globally and locally through religious intolerance, slavery and the mistreatment of others. We see the devastating effects of flood, famine and fire, along with the impact of pollution and the disregard of habitats and ecosystems, often caused by poor choices and decisions. We can feel overwhelmed and powerless, but the women in today's story were empowered by what they knew was right and by their faith in God. Let us look for opportunities to stand firm in our faith, knowing that we can make a difference with our actions and our voice – and even through our quiet rebellion.

Hymn: Show me how to stand for justice (StF 713)

Show me how to stand for justice

How to work for what is right,

How to challenge false assumptions,

How to walk within the light.

May I learn to share more freely

In a world so full of greed,

Showing your immense compassion

By the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
Whether given or received
For my need has not diminished
Since the day I first believed.
Let me seek no satisfaction
Boasting of what I have done.
But rejoice that I am pardoned
And accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
Modelled on your living word,
In humility submitting
To the truth that I have heard;
Make me conscious of your presence
Every day in all I do:
By your Spirit's gracious prompting
May I learn to walk with you.

Intercessions:

Lord, we thank you that you are always with us in every situation, whether we acknowledge you at the time or not. Give us eyes to see you at work in our lives.

Lord, give us the insight to see who you are.

Give us the courage to declare it and act upon it.

Lord, we turn our thoughts to the world around us. Where have we seen your glory this week? We thank you for images of your glory in a beautiful sky, a captivating view, the smile of a friend, the laughter of a child. Surprise us this week with something new from your world that we've never seen or appreciated before. Help us to respect the beauty of everything you have made.

Lord, give us the insight to see who you are.

Give us the courage to declare it and act upon it.

We lift to you places of conflict. Give the victims of war hope, we pray. Help them to see glimpses of you, even in the most difficult times. We ask

for your safety on all who support the wounded, the bereaved and the homeless. We thank you for those who work to bring peace between nations. Show us how we can be peacemakers in our own areas of conflict: in our homes, our schools, at work.

Lord, give us the insight to see who you are.

Give us the courage to declare it and act upon it.

We pray for our church leaders, particularly... Thank you for their service and dedication.

We pray for the worldwide Church and its leaders, asking that you keep us all faithful to our calling. Give us the courage to trust you. Give us the willingness to witness to you. Give us the faith to keep following even if we can't see the way ahead. Give us the confidence to proclaim who you are to the world. Give us the wisdom to see when to speak and when to be silent; when to sit in the stillness with people and when to shout from the rooftops.

Lord, give us the insight to see who you are.

Give us the courage to declare it and act upon it.

Lord, we pause to reflect on the gifts and skills you have given each of us. We thank you for opportunities to use our gifts for your glory. Is there something we're good at that we're missing, Lord? Some deep-seated skill that hasn't yet fully grown? Open our eyes to see new ways of being your children. Deepen our insight and give us the courage to step out in new directions following your lead.

Lord, give us the insight to see who you are.

Give us the courage to declare it and act upon it.

Go before us into this new week, Lord, leading us forward into every expected and unexpected situation. Open our eyes and keep us close. Send us out from here to serve you with joy, wisdom and faithfulness as we proclaim that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

Amen.

Hymn: Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy (StF 526)

Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy:

Be there at our waking, and give us, we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.

Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe:
Be there at our labors, and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.

Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace:
Be there at our homing, and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.

Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
whose voice is contentment, whose presence is balm:
Be there at our sleeping, and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.

Blessing:

May we be empowered to show loving resistance,
inspired by Jesus' example
and strengthened by his Spirit.
May we stand strong in our faith,
to challenge injustice,
speaking up for those with no voice,
showing and sharing Christ in our community.

Amen.

Sunday 30th August 2026 – 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

Today is the last Sunday of the Methodist year. Many Churches will have said goodbye to their Ministers, Deacons and Lay Pastors and many will be looking forward to welcoming new Presbyters, Deacons and Lay workers, as the Circuit looks forward to welcoming Revd. Teddy Siwila on Wednesday. May our welcome be warm and sincere and our wish to move forward together in building God's Kingdom in our Circuit and beyond.

Call to Worship:

Come, let us worship the One who calls us, guides us and encourages us.
Let us praise the One who knows and loves us.
Let us join our voices, our hearts and minds, as we listen for God's voice calling us, coming together to worship as God's people. **Amen.**

Hymn: God Is Love [Can be sung to the tune 'Blaenwern'] (StF 103)

God is Love: let heaven adore Him;
God is Love: let earth rejoice;
let creation sing before Him,
and exalt Him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
He who spread the heavens above
He who breathes through all creation,
He is Love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and He, enfolding
all the world in one embrace,
with unfailing grasp is holding
every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,

then they find that self-same aching
deep within the heart of God.

God is Love: and though with blindness
sin afflicts each human soul,
God's eternal loving-kindness
holds and guides and keeps them whole.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love, so Love for ever
o'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Rees (1874 – 1939)

Prayer of Praise and Adoration:

Lord God,
We adore You, the source of all true love.
Your love is pure, without shadow or deceit.
You love without condition, without limit, without end.
You are steadfast in mercy, constant in compassion, and faithful in every
promise.
We praise You for showing us what genuine love looks like
through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
You are the One who teaches our hearts to love sincerely, to cling to what
is good,
and to reflect Your light in a world that longs for truth.
All glory be to You, O God of perfect love. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Merciful God, we confess that our love is not always genuine.
We have clung to what is evil and turned away from what is good.
We have been impatient in trouble, slow to forgive, and quick to judge.
We have withheld kindness from those in need and failed to bless those
who hurt us.
Forgive us for repaying wrong with wrong, for seeking revenge instead of
peace,
and for letting pride and selfishness guide our steps.
Lord, renew our hearts so that we may live in harmony,

overcoming evil with good, as You have called us to do.

Gracious Father,

Thank You that in Christ, mercy triumphs over judgment.

You do not repay us as our sins deserve,

but You cover us with grace and call us Your own.

Protect us from bitterness, envy, and pride.

Fill us with sincere love, patient hope, and enduring faith.

Teach us to bless and not curse,

to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

By Your Spirit, make us peacemakers who reflect the heart of Jesus,

so that our lives may shine with Your goodness and that we may

experience the joy of Your forgiveness. **Amen.**

You may like to join in the words of the modern form of The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your Name,

Your Kingdom come,

Your will be done,

On earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

And deliver us from evil.

For the Kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours

now and for ever. **Amen**

Bible Reading: Romans chapter 12 vs, 9 – 21 NSRV

Introduction:

Paul continues the teaching he began in Romans 12:1 about what it means to offer our bodies as living sacrifices. As Christians, we often think about this as an individual's act and so it is. But the context of Romans 12 makes it clear that we do so for the sake of the community – we give ourselves wholly to the building up of the Body of Christ. We love everyone with a

genuine love, and live in open humility and self-sacrifice towards one another.

Love

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. ¹¹ Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." ²¹

Bible Reading: Matthew chapter 16 vs. 21 – 28 NSRV

Introduction:

Peter's declaration of Jesus' identity in Matthew 16:16 – 'You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God' – marks a turning point in Jesus' ministry: it is time to set His face towards Jerusalem and all that must come to pass. When Peter objects, Jesus calls him 'Satan' – alluding to when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus is not afraid to take up His cross, and He urges the disciples not to be afraid to do so either.

Jesus Predicts His Death

²¹ From that time on, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you."

²³ But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

²⁴ Then Jesus told His disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? ²⁷ "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay everyone for what has been done. ²⁸ Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."

Hymn: All My Days (StF 343)

All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
give my praise to the fountain of delight;
for in my helplessness You heard my cry,
waves of mercy poured down my life.

I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails,
of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
of death defeated and life without end.

*Beautiful Saviour, wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the risen One, heaven's champion,
and You reign, You reign over all.*

I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
yearn to dwell where the glory never fades,
where countless worshippers will share one song,
and cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

Stuart Townend (b.1963)

Reflection: 'TOUGH LOVE'

If you asked *me* to describe myself - you wouldn't recognise that person as me. If I asked *you* to describe me - I wouldn't recognise that person because we don't see ourselves as others see us.

A farmer who had never been to the city was chosen by his Trade Union to represent them at the annual Farmers' Conference, and he found himself in London. After checking in at the hotel, he was directed to the lift, something he had never seen before. He watched as an elderly lady walked into the lift and closed the door and watched as the single hand on the clock swung round. A few minutes later, the door opened again and a young attractive lady got out. This astonished the farmer who ran to the nearest phone, called his wife, and said: "Martha, pack your bag and get here as quick as you can! You won't believe the place I've found. It has a machine that will transform you into what you've always wanted to look like in minutes!"

Does God see the 'me' that I think I am? I doubt it. Does God see the 'you' that you think you are?

In our reading from Romans, Paul paints a picture of the '*us*' Jesus is calling us to be if we are to take up our cross and follow Him. But what did Jesus mean? Many people - even Christians - understand the cross as the ultimate form of punishment in the Roman world. It implies a willingness to endure suffering, ridicule and death. But is that what Jesus is asking of us? He's not asking us to endure personal hardships, rather, it's a call to align our lives with the Kingdom of God in following Jesus' example of love, committing our lives in total obedience and commitment to God's will. And yes, that may sometimes call us to put our own priorities to one side, and yes, it may result in making sacrifices too. It's a call to embrace challenges in living a life of faith and selflessness. Jesus didn't mean that it should imply that living life should feel like a burden, of strained relationships, thankless jobs or difficulties but rather to see the cross as a symbol restoring harmony between humanity and God, a place of forgiveness, grace and living a life of love in devoted response to all Jesus has done for us. It's a personal relationship with Jesus.

Paul was the most unlikely candidate for the task of calling people to live a life of love and sacrifice. It went against everything he'd believed in and lived by as a fervent Jew. But God saw a very different Paul to the one everyone else saw. This radical about turn had a lasting effect on those first followers who 'took up their cross' as he preached his very simple message: love sincerely, love God and love others - not just those who share our faith but those who have none. That is what it means to be a living sacrifice. Paul uses a word for 'love' that has a specific meaning – agape - a Greek word used for the highest form of love which embodies selfless sacrifice and unconditional care for others. Love is a word that we use to embrace all kinds of meanings; we love our families, our pets, our homes, our friends, maybe even special gifts – love, in the way we use the word can cover a whole multitude of feelings. The word 'love' is used 442 times in the Bible and is one of the central themes and driving forces of God's Word. Agape love is the new commandment that Jesus gives to everyone who would 'take up their cross'.

How does Paul see this in action?

In verse 13 he talks of hospitality as a means of spreading the Gospel - not just to family and friends, but strangers, those who are going through tough situations in life. Paul uses the word 'agape' to mean God's purest expression of love for humanity. He defines it as unselfish, unconditional and sacrificial love that can only be expressed and demonstrated through our actions. That's a really hard concept for us to get our heads around.

In verse 10 he tells them - and us - to be "devoted to one another in love", to treat each other as brothers and sisters in God's family; to consider what is really needed - which might be vastly different from what is asked for. He goes on to remind us to continually focus on loving God; to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to keep us faithful to that challenge - and there are so many distractions in life that would try to knock that off course.

Paul says that love leads us to hope when we are faithful in prayer, when it's especially difficult, in times of testing and the trials of life. And it's in those times of need that hospitality is so important. The early Christians wonderfully demonstrated charity to one another and to others in need, something which was vital to the advancing Gospel. In verse 14, Paul

focuses on the need for Christians to love non-believers - even to those who persecuted the Church, which came not just from the Roman authorities but also from Jews who opposed the Gospel. The old law had taught them 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but Jesus had reversed that teaching. Bless and not curse.

Celebrate, Paul says, with those who have something to celebrate and console with those experiencing loss for they are tangible ways to show God's love. Overcome wrong with good. It's only human nature to seek revenge, and we see that happening every day - and situations just escalate and are never fully resolved. Living in peace is one of the greatest challenges we face as Christians living in today's world. But ours is not the final say, that is something we can reassuredly leave in God's good time.

So, Paul is showing us that the key characteristic of Christian life is love; towards God and all humankind, expressed in devotion to Him and acts of selflessness and kindness. All the negative aspects of life we can leave with God.

If you ever have the need to use a lift - please don't be like the farmer and expect to come out a different person than went in. It just won't happen! But what we can be sure of is that God sees a very different person than we do. He sees all the positives, the loving, the caring, the sharing and the giving. He hears the praying. He heals the hurts. He forgives the mistakes.

So perhaps the reflection in the mirror really is better than the one we think we see. **Amen.**

Hymn: Let Love Be Real' [Tune: 'Londonderry Air'] (StF 615)

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go.

*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness;
give me your love in spite of all you know.

Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole
give me your hope through dreams and disappointments;
give me your trust when all my failings show.

Michael Forster (b.1946)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

Lord God, Creator and Redeemer, we often find it difficult to know how to pray when we see so much suffering throughout our world. Yet, Lord, we hold onto Your promise that evil will not prevail against us, that You will deliver us from wickedness and ruthlessness. You call us, Lord, to turn to You, to be faithful and obedient, that Your will may be done in our lives. So, help us to be the answer to our own prayers, to make a difference where we are, with the people You give us to share life with. May we hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good. Help us to rejoice in hope, to be patient in suffering, and to persevere in prayer. Lead us into opportunities to contribute to the needs of Your people; to extend hospitality to strangers and to live in harmony with one another.

We bring before you situations in our world where harmony is particularly lacking at this time.

We pray for wisdom to prevail among the leaders of nations, and for those working for the benefit of others that they may find protection and courage to stand up for those with no voice of their own.

We think of people closer to home who are suffering in many ways, and who find it hard to forgive those who have caused their pain. Lord, help us to demonstrate in our own lives that forgiveness brings healing: that the words 'I'm sorry' can close an open wound. By the power of your Holy

Spirit, help us, in our lives, not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good.

We pray for Your Church; for all who preach and teach the Good News, and for those who listen, that hearts may be touched and minds may be changed and people drawn to the love of Jesus. We pray for those Churches who have said 'goodbye' to Presbyters, Deacons and Lay Workers and thank You for all they have done to enrich the life of their Churches. We pray for all those who will be welcomed into new Circuits and Churches this coming week, especially remembering Revd. Teddy Siwila, his wife Mwlo and family, asking that we may work hand in hand in sharing the Good News.

Through Jesus Christ, who conquers death and gives us life, we make these prayers. **Amen.**

Hymn: Brother, Sister, Let Me Serve You (StF 611)

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
we shall find such harmony,

born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you,
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace
to let you be my servant too.

Richard A. M. Gillard (b.1953)

Blessing:

One more step along the world we go, one more step along the world we
go;

From the old things, to the new, keep us travelling along with You.

And may we travel in the Grace of Jesus Christ, the Love of God and all-
embracing power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

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