

## Circuit Service of Worship 25<sup>th</sup> October 2020 - Mr Symon Turner

Good morning brothers and sisters and welcome to our circuit worship this Sunday. Our call to worship comes from Matthew chapter 5 verses 14 to 16. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden, neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Our service today is a call to be part of God's light, the light that does not and will not ever go out. So we begin with [Singing the Faith 175 Light of the World](#)

<p>1 Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness, opened my eyes, let me see beauty that made this heart adore you, hope of a life spent with you. So here I am to worship, here I am to bow down, here I am to say that you're my God, and you're altogether lovely, altogether worthy, altogether wonderful to me.</p>	<p>2 King of all days oh so highly exalted, glorious in heaven above. Humbly you came to the earth you created, all for love's sake became poor. So here I am to worship ... And I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross. And I'll never know how much it cost to see my sin upon that cross. So here I am to worship ...</p> <p>Tim Hughes</p>
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Our prayers of Adoration and Thanksgiving.

Almighty Glowing Lord, glow in our hearts, flow in our lives. We give you thanks because you do glow in our hearts and in our lives and in the world around us. But in the darkness we can look and see your action in the world. We adore you O forgiving and enabling God. We adore you that you do not judge us or dismiss us. However lost we are, you always come and find us. We give you thanks for all the blessings that you have poured into our lives, for children and grandchildren, for hobbies and occupations. We adore you that you do not forget those who dwell in darkness. Even those who hate you, you love. You gave us a law and you gave us new birth. Through your Holy Spirit we give you our adoration and thanks that when the world was covered almost completely in darkness, you sent your son Jesus Christ to be a light to this world, to lead it through selfishness, through war, through condemnation, to Salvation, to build the Kingdom of heaven right here on earth. Amen

I now call upon our readers to read **Romans chapter 12 verses 1-3 and 19 to 13.**

Our next hymn reminds us that God is faithful forever and he is with us, even on the brink of death.

[Best of all is God is with us. Singing the Faith 610](#)

1

Best of all is God is with us,  
God will hold and never fail.  
Keep that truth when storms are raging,  
God remains though faith is frail.

2

Best of all is God is with us,  
life goes on and needs are met,  
God is strongest in our weakness.  
Love renews, will not forget.

3

Best of all is God is with us,  
hearts are challenged, strangely warmed,  
faith is deepened, courage strengthened,  
grace received and hope reformed.

4

Best of all is God is with us,  
in our joy and through our pain,  
till that final acclamation;  
'life is Christ, and death is gain.'

5

Best of all is God is with us  
as we scale eternal heights,  
love grows stronger, undiminished;  
earth grows dim by heaven's lights.

Andrew Pratt (b. 1948)

Based on John Wesley's final words.

## Sermon

Our sermon is about a challenge to the church. It was inspired the call to worship, which is from a card a minister got me many years ago to mark me going to University. It was about being a light unto others and through difficult times and challenging times I remember that card and I especially remember it because I personally and theologically did not agree with the minister at that time. I was still very very law focused. I decided to focus on our differences and not what united us and that's what I want to talk about. When I, we, recently had the passage from Romans 'Do not conform yourself to this world', it reminded me of something I wanted to preach on, and this is the divisions of the church.

There are two responses to divisions in the church. One is to deny there are any, which is ridiculous, and the other is to play into them. But these divisions are a reflection of the world outside. The various camps- traditionalists, the modernists, the liberals, the conservatives, they all oppose something in the world outside though they differ on what it is they dislike and they all use God to try and support their side and they ignore passages they don't like and they don't listen to challenges in scripture that they don't want to. They paint the picture of Christianity that is not true. I will say that the conservatives tend to paint a picture of God who has no mercy, and the liberals, a God who never says no. Both of these are an empty vision of God. We may not like it, but God occasionally has laws that we have to abide by, and we may find it difficult but God loves people that we don't always find it easy to love.

This is the challenge of God. So how do we overcome this? The key can be found in verses 9 to 13 are equally important. Love must be sincere; hate what is evil; cling to what is good; be devoted to one another in love; honour one another above yourselves. And I'm afraid when we take the sectarian 'teams' that we are not doing this. We fall into the patterns of the world. We hate one another because someone is high church, someone else is low church. We literally schism the church over whether allowing to allow same sex marriage or divorce or one of a million things that we decide are important. But if you look at the history the church, these divisions often pass. They are of the age. I'm afraid the divisions of the church currently are reflection of the world outside and not of the love of God. And the reason I think this links in with the call to worship, is that the call to worship is an image of the church as it can be, if it actually allowed God to work at it on it in its heart.

We are called to be a light unto the world. 'Let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify the Father', but what do people see when they look at the church? Judgmental, overly tolerant: they see this schizophrenic institution, at war with each other, echoing the wider cultural wars. I'm not saying division hasn't been always part of church history. You only have to read the book of Acts to see that there were differing views on things. On whether to allow gentiles to convert with or without circumcision, whether the Greeks were being treated as fairly as the Roman citizens. There are all these cultural divisions but the reason the church prospered in those times was because it followed the Holy Spirit even through persecution, even through hate and intolerance. It showed the Romans a different way of being: a radical and revolutionary way of being.

Not at each other's throats but united in Christ. We all know that familiar passage in Christ there is no Jew nor Gentile, no slave or free. There is no liberal, there is no conservative, there is no modernist, there is no traditional. We have a choice who to follow in this world. God gives us that choice. We can follow these modern trends and the leaders who seek power through our separation or we can show the world a united face of mercy and forgiveness. A shine city of people trying to live their best lives together in unity with an identity that is given to us through Christ? Our identity is of disciples, trying to follow Jesus as best we can. That identity requires sacrifice, and in here we are called to be a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, and each side will say 'Oh yes, of course I'm holy and pleasing to God but the lot aren't.' And every other side will say well I'm not patterning myself according to the world, the others are though. While the liberals, yes, they don't pattern themselves economically, but they pattern themselves according to the modern morals of this world. The Conservatives yes they don't do morally, but they often do economically and certainly show a tendency toward putting law above mercy.

The patterns of this world is how we define ourselves. Even if we define ourselves against them, that's allowing them to define us in a way. We aren't being a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, we aren't giving ourselves to God, we aren't allowing him to change us, and the whole gospel is about this transformation from living to dead. This transformation, lost to found, of a world in need of Jesus who is God made flesh and came into that world and died to change it, to allow others to change through that process of death and rebirth.

A new Kingdom came when Jesus died. The Kingdom of God established its first foot hold and this passage from Matthew talked about what the Kingdom of God should look like to those who look at it. A light to the world and beacon to lost. Not divided. Not unthinking. Not unblinking. When scripture says we should be of one mind, that mind should be Jesus. It doesn't mean we have to agree with one another. It doesn't mean we have to be single minded zombies. When it talks about sheep it doesn't mean we all have to be in one mind in some sort of controlled flock. God gives us free thought. His mercy is big enough for a Church of difference; a church that disagrees but a church still remembers that God is a centre of everything it does. That God is its definition; that God's mission of forgiveness, of redemption, of new life, that God's power to change us and the church into what He wants it to be, is still ongoing.

So I ask you brothers and sisters, are sectarian differences so important that in this time of crisis, and this is what we are living through, a time of crisis, that we cannot put them aside? The world is waiting, waiting for someone to show in a different way of being. I recently saw the presidential debates. Yes I make myself go through these things! If the world continues this partisan, crazy way, it will never recover. The world is broken are the only cure is Jesus. We have to lead this change. We have to allow the Holy Spirit into our hearts and into our churches to transform

us. We have to reject the world and its call. We have to make ourselves- no, no- we have to allow the Holy Spirit to make ourselves a living sacrifice. Not tied to the things of this world, not tied to our past, our histories, not tied to our divisions or the divisions of the world outside but tied through God in love. And by this and by the work of the Holy Spirit we will be transformed. That call from Matthew ' You are light to the world. A town built upon a hill cannot be hidden. A lamp on a lampstand gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'

This is what the church can be transformed into. In this age of challenge and division through unity, and that's the word scripture uses, unity with Christ, unity of the Holy Spirit, we have unity with God. So be transformed. Die to this world's divisions. Become citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven. A light unto the nations. A light that dark cannot overcome. In the same way let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven. Amen

**Our next hymn is a call to act out our faith in Christ.**

**[It is Singing the Faith 547 Beyond these walls of worship.](#)**

1

Beyond these walls of worship  
in the stress and joy of life,  
can we offer you our bodies  
as a living sacrifice?  
Will we keep you at the centre  
far beyond the Sunday call?  
Will we turn to you,  
be transformed by you,  
still declare you God of all?

2

Beyond these walls of worship,  
in the times of work and rest,  
will we display your love for all  
when our faith's put to the test?  
When the people that surround us  
deny that you are there,  
will we display our faith in you —  
in life, in praise, in prayer?

3

Beyond these walls of worship  
may your Spirit strengthen us  
to make the whole of life our worship  
as we witness to your love.  
From this hour in your presence  
send us out now to proclaim  
that we'll live our life as a sacrifice  
to the glory of your name.

Ian Worsfold(b.1974) and Paul Wood (b.1967)

**Our prayers of confession.**

We confess Almighty Lord that we have built walls of bigotry and hate; that we have risen our theology as a false god against you. When your Word has irked us or challenged us, we have deafened ourselves to it. When your light has shown on our dark deed, we have become ashamed of it and tried to block out the light. We confess that we have worked against you; worked against your transformation and worked even against the coming of your Kingdom. We have done all this Lord because we are weak and narrow beings and the awesomeness of your truth terrifies us sometimes.

But God says you're always forgiven, always welcome to come back to me, you're always welcome to step into my Almighty light. I came into flesh and took to the cross so you could be forgiven, so you could be transformed and raised into new life and I raise you again. Amen

It is my habit, especially with online services, for our prayers of intercession to say somethings you may wish to pray about and then leave you with some moments of silence.

So specially today we pray for our divided world; for the President Trump and for Joe Biden, that they may see wisdom and mercy for their supporters and that they may accept victory and defeat with a Christian heart. We also pray for those who have fear of losing their jobs or those who are currently jobless and hungry and for those who are homeless and in need of your help O Lord.

We bring these prayers together with the prayer that Jesus taught us which is the Lord's prayer in the traditional form.

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 forever and ever. Amen

We remember that we are servants one of another, servants of Jesus Christ and servants of each other's brothers and sisters with our last hymn

[Singing the Faith 611 Brother sister let me serve you.](#)

1

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.

2

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.

3

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.

4

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.

5

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.

6

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)

And a  **blessing** before we leave.

Lord baptise us with your saving light. Transform us from division into unity. Transform us so we can be that light unto others that city on a hill. Come into our hearts and bless us all so we can be a light unto others as we go about our day. Amen