

CIRCUIT WORSHIP — 7TH FEBRUARY 2021

CALL TO WORSHIP Psalm 147:1

Praise the LORD.
How good it is to sing praises to our God,
how pleasant and fitting to praise him!

1ST HYMN **32 StF** *Charles Wesley (1707-1788)* **H&P 501**

Meet and right it is to sing,
In every time and place,
Glory to our heavenly King,
The God of truth and grace.
Join we then with sweet accord,
All in one thanksgiving join!
Holy, holy, holy Lord,
Eternal praise be thine!

Thee, the first-born sons of light,
In choral symphonies,
Praise by day, day without night,
And never, never cease;
Angels and archangels, all
Praise the mystic Three in One;
Sing, and stop, and gaze, and fall,
O'erwhelmed before thy throne!

Vying with that happy choir,
Who chant thy praise above,
We on eagles' wings aspire,
The wings of faith and love:
Thee they sing with glory crowned,
We extol the slaughtered lamb;
Lower if our voices sound,
Our subject is the same.

Father, God, thy love we praise,
Which gave thy Son to die;
Jesus, full of truth and grace,
Alike we glorify;
Spirit, Comforter divine.
Praise by all to thee be given,
Till we in full chorus join,
And earth is turned to heaven.

PRAYER

O God, give us a vision of your glory, that we may worship you in spirit and in truth, and offer the praise of glad and thankful hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Almighty and sovereign God,
great and wonderful,
all powerful, all loving, all forgiving,
we make time to worship you.

We come to remind ourselves of your mighty acts across the years —
your coming to our world in Jesus Christ,
your transforming of countless lives won for him over the centuries,
your saving purpose constantly being fulfilled.

Almighty God,
forgive us for the smallness of our vision,
the feebleness of our worship,
the weakness of our faith.

Enlarge our vision.
Deepen our faith.
Restore our sense of wonder before you.
Teach us that you are a great God above all gods,
Lord of the nations.
sovereign over space and time.

So may we offer to you our worship,
with glad and grateful hearts,
in Jesus' name.
Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

2ND HYMN

418 StF

Edward Joseph Burn (born 1938) H&P 465

We have a gospel to proclaim,
Good news for all throughout the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
Not in a royal house or hall,
But in a stable dark and dim,
The word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary:
Hated by those he came to save,
In lonely suffering on the cross,
For all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for he was free,
He broke the power of death and hell,
That we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his church,
To live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
We sing his glory, tell his worth.

READINGS

Mark 1:29-39.

Jesus heals many.

- 29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.
30 Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her.
31 So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.
32 That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all who were ill and demon-possessed.
33 The whole town gathered at the door,
34 and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

Jesus prays in a solitary place.

- 35 Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.
36 Simon and his companions went to look for him,
37 and when they found him, they exclaimed: 'Everyone is looking for you!'
38 Jesus replied, 'Let us go somewhere else – to the nearby villages — so that I can preach there also. That is why I have come.'
39 So he travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

1 Corinthians 9:16-23.

- 16 For when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, since I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!
17 If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me.
18 What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel.

Paul's use of his freedom.

- 19 Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.
20 To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.
21 To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.
22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

REFLECTION

In recent weeks, many of us have followed the Mission Planning Course which has taken place on zoom. It has been excellent, being informative and thought-provoking. Now we need to think and pray to see how best to apply it through local churches.

In our Scripture readings today we learn something of Jesus' and Paul's mission strategies. What can we learn from them? How do they apply to us twenty centuries later? The world is very different now, but have our deepest human needs changed?

In the first part of **the reading from Mark's gospel** we notice that it was the Sabbath; Jesus, James and John, Peter and Andrew had all been to the synagogue where Jesus had been teaching as well as healing a man. Then they went to Peter's home, presumably for the Sabbath meal. Peter's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever and Jesus healed her. We are told that she then began to wait on them so we may assume that this means that she prepared food for them. Amazing! Remember back to when you've had a fever, which meant a high temperature. When the temperature comes down and one gets out of bed for the first time, one's legs feel wobbly that day and one needs to be sitting in a chair. Busying oneself preparing food for a group of people is not a possibility, yet that is what she did.

In the evening, Jesus was confronted with large numbers of sick people who were brought to the door to be healed. What an exhausting day! Yet Jesus was up very early the next morning and went out to a solitary place for prayer, as there would not have been a place in the house to be alone. Then he was off to other villages to teach in their synagogues and to heal those brought to him. In normal circumstances, we might hope for a lie-in after a long and hectic day.

There is much that we can try to apply to our own lives, although not beat ourselves up or give up when we find it difficult or sometimes fail.

First there is prayer and studying the Scriptures. Prayer was a priority for Jesus, so how much more it should be for you and me.

Secondly Jesus worshipped in the synagogue with others. We need to be part of a worshipping community of Christians in whatever way is possible according to our circumstances and state of health.

Thirdly Jesus taught the people about God and how the message applied to their lives. We can share with others what Jesus means to us in our lives. Briefly referring to an example from your own faith story may be an inspiration and help to others.

Fourthly we should show compassion to others in their various circumstances, thus demonstrating God's love for all people.

In our reading from 1 Corinthians we get a picture of Paul's priorities in his interactions with people in order to witness and to win people for Christ.

Paul, the son of a Pharisee, had been brought up a strict Jew. He came to Jerusalem to be taught by Gamaliel and became a strict Pharisee himself. However, his life was completely transformed by his dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus. Following that, he went to Arabia, probably to think, pray, study and to re-orientate his life. He subsequently became a missionary, spreading the message of Christ.

For someone who had been a strict Pharisee adhering to several hundred rules and regulations, the freedom Paul experienced in Christ to spread the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles was incredible liberation. He wrote:

To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's

law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

For the sake of winning Jews for Christ Paul was prepared to live as they lived and was prepared to observe customs and key commands of the Jewish law even if this meant his freedom in Christ was restricted. This was out of respect for the Jews and to give him more opportunity to bring the gospel message to them.

However, when living alongside the Gentiles, he would disregard the regulations of the Jewish law and give them the gospel message. Paul is under a completely new kind of law consisting of the Messiah and his whole way of life.

Paul goes on to say:

I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.

This does not mean his conduct was unprincipled. However, Paul felt no longer any necessity to comply with Jewish regulations and ceremonies as matters of divine obligation. But, he did not go to the other extreme and regard these things as forbidden to a Christian. They just ranked as morally and religiously indifferent things, to be observed or not as occasions might indicate. Where no principle was at stake he was prepared to go to extreme lengths to meet people. He felt it vital to be able to get alongside people. It is important for us all to be able to do the same, by understanding the heart and mind of others, and to talk in such a way as to reach them for Christ.

Some have suggested that this statement meant that Paul was acting like a first century spin-doctor, twisting the message this way and that to suit different audiences, but of course he was doing no such thing. He merely adapted his approach to different groups. When he preached to the Jews, he commenced with the patriarchs whom we read about in our Old Testament, but when addressing the Gentiles his approach was through God's creation.

Similarly, Jesus' conversation was always relevant to the individual circumstances of the person he was talking to. Perhaps you would like to go through the gospels and look at the conversations Jesus had with individuals.

Not everyone will feel they have the gift to say the appropriate things to other people about their faith, but there are other ways. You have probably all heard me give the example of how Billy Graham became a Christian, but it is well worth repeating. A friend of his found the appropriate way.

"Albert McMakin was a twenty-four-year-old farmer who had recently come to faith in Christ. He was so full of enthusiasm that he filled a truck with people and took them to a meeting to hear about Jesus. There was a good-looking farmer's son whom he was especially keen to get to a meeting, but this young man was hard to persuade — he was busy falling in and out of love with different girls, and did not seem to be attracted to Christianity. Eventually, Albert McMakin managed to persuade him to come by asking him to drive the truck. When they arrived, Albert's guest decided to go in and was 'spellbound' and began to have thoughts he had never known before. He went back again and again until one night he went forward and gave his life to Jesus Christ. That man, the driver of the truck, was Billy Graham (aged 16). The year was 1934. Since then Billy Graham has led thousands to faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot all be like Billy Graham, but we can all be like Albert McMakin — we can all bring our friends to Jesus."

Ref. Questions of Life: Nicky Gumble — P.195-196.

The Christian message remains constant. The messengers now; each Christian individually as well as whole churches, must swallow their pride and set aside customs for the sake of the gospel message. Can we dream dreams and make plans for the future?

Behold the servant of the Lord!
 I wait thy guiding eye to feel,
 To hear and keep thy every word,
 To prove and do thy perfect will,
 Joyful from my own works to cease,
 Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

Me if thy grace vouchsafe to use,
 Meanest of all thy creatures, me,
 the deed, the time, the manner choose;
 Let all my fruit be found of thee;
 Let all my works in thee be wrought,
 By thee to full perfection brought.

My every weak though good design
 O'errule or change, as seems thee meet;
 Jesus, let all my work be thine!
 Thy work, O Lord, is all complete,
 And pleasing in thy Father's sight;
 Thou only hast done all things right.

Here then to thee thine own I leave;
 Mould as thou wilt thy passive clay;
 But let me all thy stamp receive,
 But let me all thy words obey,
 Serve with a single heart and eye,
 And to thy glory live and die.

INTERCESSIONS

Loving God,

We pray for all those whose dreams have been destroyed, perhaps made worse by the pandemic.
 those who no longer have the heart to look forward and have lost their vision for the future.
 So many people known and unknown —
 whose happiness and hopes have been dashed by tragedy,
 who face unemployment, poverty, homelessness,
 and live in fear of this pandemic bringing illness and death to their loved ones or themselves.

We pray for those who plod wearily through life with no sense of purpose,
 those who feel the future is empty, bereft of promise.

We continue to pray for those in the medical profession,
 together with all other key workers.
 Uphold them and strengthen them, we pray, and enable them to sleep soundly each night,
 so that their strength and sound judgement are renewed,
 to equip them for the challenges of each new day.

We pray for our leaders and their professional advisors in various fields,
 so that they are equipped to make wise decisions
 for the good of all people during these challenging times.

We pray for ourselves,
 that we may live according to the will and purpose you have for each one of us,
 and that we may be your loyal disciples,
 and reflect your love to others.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Amen.

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;
We will follow, bringing hope to the world,
Filled with passion, filled with power to
proclaim,
Salvation in Jesus' name.*

BLESSING

God grant to the living, grace; to the departed, rest; to the Church, and the world, peace and concord; and to us and all his servants, life everlasting; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**