

**BASINGSTOKE AND READING METHODIST CIRCUIT
WORSHIP, 10TH SEPTEMBER 2021**

Prepared by Peter Frank

Opening Words

Welcome to worship today, as we continue to journey with Jesus Christ, who is alive and dwells with us, wherever we are today. Together we enter the presence of God and of each other.

Reading: Psalm 25.4-7

Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths;
guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.
Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good.

We pause to consider the great mercy and love of God, whom we meet together now to worship.

Hymn: HP 13; StF 83: Praise, my soul, the King of heaven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i3dHeRB2c3g>

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour
to our fathers in distress;
Praise him, still the same as ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hand he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely yet his mercy flows!

Angels in the height, adore him;
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

Henry Francis Lyte

Prayers of Thanksgiving

Let us praise our God in thanksgiving.

We thank you, generous and loving God, for your provision to us:

for the great abundance of your creation, given to us for food, shelter, companionship, beauty, and an ever-present reminder of your goodness and glory;

for those around us who give us their love, understanding, dependence and acceptance;

for Jesus Christ and his work in revealing your nature and person, for his suffering and death that defeats the power of evil and sin in the world, and for his enduring life in our lives bringing with it forgiveness of our sins and assurance of that forgiveness;

and for our church, its ministers and people all called to serve you as part of the one great body of Christ in this time and place; for their work amongst us in revealing your word, sharing your love, bringing your peace and healing.

We thank you, gracious and merciful One, for your gifts into our personal lives: for..... (quietly, or noisily, name before God those gifts for which you have personal reason to be extra thankful today!)

As we start to count our blessings before you, our Lord, we can only become more and more aware of the extent of your generosity and love, grace and mercy, and we worship you.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Humility – 1

“Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way; I can't wait to look in the mirror, cos I get better looking each day... Oh Lord, it's hard to be humble, but I'm doing the best that I can”

You may be familiar with this chorus, and, in fact, it really is quite a challenge to be humble! When we're right about something, we take enormous pleasure in that being recognised by others. But when we're wrong, it would be so much better if nobody noticed! And when they do comment, it's too easy to take it as criticism and get upset. Oh Lord, it is hard to be humble!

Because humility means seeing ourselves as we really are. How often do you look into the mirror? Really look at yourself. For me, this might involve getting over the funny red face, the lack of hair (and what there is growing in all the wrong places), and examining myself within. The mirror of glass needs to pale into the sub-consciousness and I need to see what God sees. Ouch, that's hard! It's not all that pretty on the inside, either!

Perhaps we all worry too much about how other people see us, and not enough about how God sees us. The amazing thing is, that what God sees is not all the problems, hang-ups and dishonesty in our lives – God knows about them all, of course – but what God sees and loves is the good person you were made to be. It's not hard to accept what God sees, and looked at from God's viewpoint, you're perfect. Now, see *that* side of yourself – what God sees – and work on the rest. And that's humility!

Hymn: HP 257; StF 322: How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoPlwPUYWaw>

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

Dear name – the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding place,
my never failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace!

Jesus! My shepherd, brother, friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
how cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise you as I ought.

Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.

John Newton

Reading – 2 Corinthians 4.7-12

Reading – Matthew 6.22-23

Humility – 2

The young David Copperfield, on engaging with Uriah Heep for the first time, asks him, “I suppose you are quite a great lawyer?” “Me, Master Copperfield?” says Uriah, “Oh no! I’m a very ‘umble person.”

In Charles Dickens’ David Copperfield Uriah Heep is clearly, from the outset, portrayed as something of a sinister person, well aware of his social disadvantage having come from a poor family, but with a determination to better himself by whatever means are necessary. His humility, which he discusses at every possible opportunity, is a cover for his dishonesty and ambition, and displays itself as obsequiousness, a cloying mock humility of the worst sort. Nobody could be entirely comfortable in his presence – he’d have them feeling falsely guilty and in his debt about something in no time. Uriah Heep, in typical Dickens manner, is at the same time a laughing stock and a figure to be reviled, for Dickens hints at his insincerity from his introduction in the novel by giving him unfortunate physical tell-tale features – a Cadaverous appearance, and oh! – what a clammy hand was his.

Humility and sincerity are not always what they appear to be in people. The “me” I like to project is not the “me” I know I really am, and even that is probably a distortion of the “me” that God knows because I like to look on bright side of matters!

True humility is about getting to know the “you” God created you to be. The “you” God sees and loves and gives up his life – in Jesus death – to spend eternity with. There’s no

false modesty in humility: in reality, the caricature that is the “very ‘umble” Uriah Heep is not in the least bit humble. Humility is a Christian virtue which opens our eyes in honesty to our faults and limitations and acknowledges these, and at the same time sees our merits, gifts and talents as they are and renders all glory to God.

And, as with every Christian virtue, humility needs work supported by prayer – time spent with God so that we can indeed see ourselves as God sees us.

I recently finished reading Richard Rohr’s book *Falling Upward*. I recommend it, and not only because it’s relatively short, although that’s a helpful attribute for any book in my world. Rohr talks about us needing our God-sent humiliations: “pray for one good humiliation per day”. Our humiliations are always uninvited – it’s part of the inherent tragedy of being human: when something reveals to others a truth about ourselves which we’d rather to have kept to ourselves. It’s the difficult stuff, and we instinctively hide it to save ourselves the pain of disclosure – the humiliation. In reality, even we may not fully acknowledge the *shadow self* in ourselves, as we’re not fully self-aware. As Jesus says in our brief reading from Matthew, “If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.” It’s the moments of humiliation that reveal those shadowlands in our lives to ourselves, and we can work on them with God.

The relationship between humility – the way we see ourselves, and humiliation – the event that reveals something of ourselves, is worth considering in this light. The pathway to humility is littered with humiliations. Both are about becoming who we really are in God’s sight. Humility is not self-abasement, it is the self-knowledge which equips us to embrace the true us and drop the projected persona (Richard Rohr again!).

In writing to the Corinthian church, Paul has been talking about the freedom the Spirit gives us as the glory of God is fully revealed in our lives, building up into a great crescendo at the end of chapter 3, “...and we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” We read from the beginning of chapter 4 how Paul sees this impact his own ministry (v.2): “We have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.” He goes on to recognise that our human frames are merely clay jars, fragile and unattractive; they were hard-pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down – it really does sound like “one good humiliation per day”! But in such falling, we carry with us the death of Jesus Christ, so that our lives may more fully reveal his life in us.

Oh Lord, it is hard to be humble. May our humiliations only be so harsh as to set us on paths of righteousness, that we might more fully reflect your glory in our lives and more fully know your peace in our hearts.

Amen

Hymn: Mission Praise 454: Open our eyes, Lord

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fwNIEMJ8r3Y>

Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus,
to reach out and touch him,
and say that we love him.

Open our ears, Lord,
and help us to listen.

Open our eyes, Lord,
we want to see Jesus.

Robert Cull

Prayers of Intercession

We remain for a while in the presence of almighty God, source of all life and giver of eternal life to us through the death and resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ. We remain with you, living One, we abide in you, for apart from you is no life worth living. We take your living being into ourselves: we know you live for you live in our hearts.

Living Lord, you look upon the world you have created and see what we have made it with our pollution, our carelessness of the plants and animals and climate and space, and our slowness to moderate our actions and seek to put things right. Inspire and empower our politicians to act to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, to cooperate in restoring a natural balance of sharing, consumption and distribution of resources.

Living Lord, you look upon the people of this world all loved and known by you and see how we treat one another. Inspire and empower each one of us to love our neighbours near and far away, to support those who campaign for human rights and justice. We pray for all who compromise the quality of their lives for the benefit of others who have few resources and no voice.

Living Lord, you look upon us and our cares. Be close to those known to us for whom we carry concerns: the bereaved, the unwell, the anxious, the lonely. Bring them relief, healing and comfort, and where the answer to our prayers relies on use, living Lord, encourage us and show us what to do and grant us the faith and strength to carry it out.

We offer you our prayers, those spoken and those which are the aches of our hearts, in the name of our living friend and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: HP 74; StF 317: At the name of Jesus

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OI2rKRCWmOU>

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him King of Glory now.
'Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season, to receive a name
from the lips of sinners unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious, when from death he passed.

Bore it up triumphant with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead, to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him; there let him subdue
all that is not holy, all that is not true;
crown him as your Captain in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus shall return again,
with his Father's glory, with his angel train;
for all wreaths of empire meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel

Blessing

Trusting in what is unseen,
believing the best is to come,
in hope the universe waits:
God's purpose shall be revealed.

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May you know the enduring friendship of the Christ who dies for you, the close companionship of the Spirit who dwells with you, and the eternal love of God who holds you close, today and every day.

Amen.