

Circuit Service 22nd JANUARY 2023 (prepared by Rev L Martin)

Call to Worship: Into the stillness of this place, into the quiet we are creating, into the open cavities of our hearts come God of Serenity, Spirit of Wisdom, Brother of love.

We join our hearts and voices in singing our praise to God, to the tune of *Ode to Joy*

STF 8 God with us; Creator, Father

[StF 8 God with us: Creator, Father. - YouTube](#)

<p>1 God with us : Creator, Father, bringing everything to birth ; Mother of the whole creation, fire of stars and life of earth : down the countless years composing, from the earth's evolving night, love's response to love, and forming mind and soul to seek your light.</p> <p>2 God with us : Redeemer, Brother, Friend for ever at our side, here, in flesh, you walked among us, taking up your cross, you died. Crucified, despised, rejected, Perfect Love, who shared our shame, streaming from the cross, your judgement, full of mercy, clears our name.</p>	<p>3 God with us : Unwearing Spirit, from the birth of time and space, surging through unconscious being, joyful, Life-Creating Grace : through the centuries you find us ; you, as God, inspire our prayer ; Life and Power at work within us, Love for ever, everywhere !</p> <p>4 God, Transcendent, far beyond us, closest Friend, unfailing Guide : through the ages, wronged, affronted, in your poor, still crucified ! God with us : convict, forgive us ; by your holy love destroy all that hinders peace and justice : fill this aching world with joy !</p> <p>Alan Gaunt (b. 1935)</p>
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Prayers of thanksgiving

Holy and gracious God, may the glories of your creation awaken our hearts to beauty and peace. Dispel the wintry coldness and anxiety by the incoming of your Spirit that we may know your true peace. Refine our souls by that same Spirit and make us more aware of the things of true worth. Help us indeed to attend to your still small voice.

Prayer of Confession

Jesus tells us what it will take to follow him, and we want to argue. Jesus shows us the way to the Kingdom and we look for another path. Let us put down all that keeps us from following Jesus, as we confess to God, praying,

Jesus Christ, We confess our struggle to be transformed into disciples. The desires of the world would shape us into people you would not recognize. The demands of our society pull us away from your heart. Forgive us, Merciful God, for looking for you in all the wrong places. Reawaken us with your voice that calls us to service; revive our weary hearts with your vision of creation; refresh our fatigued spirits that we might boldly proclaim Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, and go forth to serve your people, in Christ's name.

Silence is kept

May God transform our hearts and spirits into the likeness of Christ, so we may be faithful disciples. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven! Amen.

STF 470 Lord for the years

[Lord, For The Years - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided, urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way, sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided, Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.</p> <p>2 Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us, speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze, teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us, Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.</p> <p>3 Lord, for our land, in this our generation, spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care ; for young and old, for commonwealth and nation, Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.</p>	<p>4 Lord, for our world ; when we disown and doubt him, loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain ; hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him, Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.</p> <p>5 Lord, for ourselves ; in living power remake us, self on the cross and Christ upon the throne ; past put behind us, for the future take us, Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.</p> <p>Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)</p>
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RECORDED: STORY OF JONAH

You already know this but the bible is made up of 39 separate books in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. They are all written in different styles, some are history, some prophesy, poetry/psalms, some letters, some gospels... and we read them with the understanding of what style they are written in. That is to say that you wouldn't read a letter and assume it is history. Or read a prophecy and accept it as historical fact. Prophecy is the making known of the will of God through authorised and inspired individuals.

Now the lectionary for today is from the book of Jonah, which I find rather apt, as I feel that God has been placing the story of Jonah before me constantly over the last 6 months, and here it is again. So here is a recap for you of the 4 chapters of Jonah, God's Prophet.

The word of the Lord came to Jonah "Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it because its wickedness has come up before me". But Jonah thought: 'What, go to that Gentile, multi-cultural city and be ridiculed at best or put my life at risk at worse?! No fear'. And Jonah went in the opposite direction, bought a ticket and sailed for Tarsish 'to flee from the Lord'. Then the Lord sent a great wind and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up. All the crew of the ship – non-Israelites – cried out to their own Gods to be saved but Jonah finally acknowledged that it was the God of Israel who was angry with him and that the captain and crew should throw him overboard to calm the storm, to sacrifice him to save everybody else.

The ship's crew sacrificed Jonah to the Lord of Israel and made vows to that God, and threw Jonah overboard. But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah... one great gulp and there he was, alive in

the dark belly, bobbing about amongst octopus tentacles, the odd fish bone, and praying like he'd never prayed before.

And after 3 days the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land. And my word didn't he scurry off to Nineveh warning them of God's destruction if they didn't change their ways.... So they did. These Gentiles repented and turned to God. Which of course made Jonah greatly displeased and angry, so he figuratively stamped his foot in what seems quite a childish way – but I suspect we have all done it as adults – and Jonah made a shelter for himself to sit in... to sulk it seems; to make his point to God, effectively saying he wasn't going to do anything else as God's prophet because God double crossed him, didn't play fair. And God provided a vine to grow round it and shield him from the sun and wind ... but only for a little while, cos God soon sent a worm to eat the vine and Jonah was furious, saying "I am angry enough to die"

And there we will leave Jonah, by the side of the road where he has sat for millennia.

STF 524 *Listening God, you hear us when we cannot speak* (possible tune *Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the street*) [Listening God, you hear us HD 720p - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Listening God, you hear us when we cannot speak, when despair and turmoil leave us faint and weak. In love you call us back to you again and your grace reminds us how you feel our pain.</p> <p>2 Searching God, you find us when we go astray, as self-centred living takes us from your way. In love you seek us, show us what we've lost, and your tears remind us what forgiveness cost.</p>	<p>3 Suffering God, you lift us from our deepest grief, when emotion blinds us to our own belief. In love you touch us with your nail-torn hand and your wounds remind us why you understand.</p> <p>4 Risen God, you show us love too strong for death, evil deeds defeated by your living breath. In love you teach us never to despair, your new life reminds us, hope is always there.</p> <p>Marjorie Dobson (b. 1940)</p>
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From the Old Testament, to the New. We hear how Jesus is being verbally attacked, if that is not too strong a phrase, by the Pharisees and teachers of the law, who address him not as "Lord" – which is how his disciples address him, but just as "teacher" Almost the equivalent of 'hey you'.

Matthew 12: 38 – 42 ³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."³⁹ He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. ⁴²The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here.

RECORDED SERMON

The scribes and Pharisees ask him for a sign to prove His authority. But Jesus answers that "no sign will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah." (This is also recorded in Luke's gospel chapter 11). The gospels were written after the resurrection, so the writers know that Jesus will indeed – as he predicts - be

'in the heart of the earth' for 3 days. This for the gospel writers is all they need to connect Jesus with Jonah. Jonah sacrificed to save the gentile sailors. Jesus the far greater sacrifice for all

It is interesting how sometimes the stories we think are for children go much deeper. Just think...

- God tells Jonah to send a warning to the people of Nineveh. Jesus comes as a warning to all generations.
- Jonah does not do as God commands but sails in the opposite direction. Jesus obeys God.
- Jonah's words to the people of Nineveh save them through their repentance, Jesus words save us.
- Jonah's preaching to the Ninevites resulted in their repentance. But Jesus' words and miracles have no effect upon the scribes and Pharisees. Jesus warns them that even though they are the elite Jews they are not automatically within God's favour. They need to stop trying to trick Jesus and listen. Jesus tells them that even the Queen of Sheba travelled miles to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and here is the son of man, one greater than Solomon or Jonah.

There is a straight line through the gospels from this point that leads to the moment when Jesus weeps over Jerusalem because, unlike Nineveh it has ignored the warnings, refused the way of peace, and we know that the story of Jesus continues to the crucifixion and resurrection and onwards.

But where is the story of Jonah left? Oh yes... Jonah is still sitting, moping, furious by the side of the road. His story has frozen in time. Some stories do that; freeze frame and ask the reader or viewer: what will happen next. Charles Dickens used to do this writing in Household Words, ending on a metaphorical cliff hanger so that the next edition would be bought to see what happened next. Writers of tv Soaps do it. But we never know with Jonah.

How would we like it to end? What would we like the rest of Jonah's story to say? (pause)

Can we associate with how Jonah was feeling... have we felt like that – really angry about the way others have benefitted undeservedly (as we perceive it?).

Imagining Jonah sitting by the side of the road, angry, indignant with how God has forgiven the people that Jonah thinks are undeserving, we see human nature not at its worst but at what is probably quite a common state. We know perhaps how he feels!

Let us not leave this sermon concentrating on Jonah. Let us leave concentrating on God. Where was God at this point in Jonah's life? God has sent the worm to destroy the shade and increased the heat of the situation, as if Jonah wasn't hot and bothered enough already. Was God being unkind? Surely not. Teaching him a lesson? Perhaps. I think God was simply waiting.....

Prayer of intercession

Drawn to worship by God let us bring to God our concerns. There is a response to: "Thy Kingdom come, **Thy will be done**"

Loving God, your Kingdom is ruled by Justice and Mercy. We pray for the leaders of the nations that they might rule fairly and with compassion, respecting the rights and needs of all people and promoting peace.

In a time of silence we think of places in your world where justice and mercy are the last things on people’s minds....

“Thy Kingdom come, **Thy will be done**”

Loving God, your kingdom is full of hope and joy. We pray for the lives of people who endeavour to follow your ways. May all homes and households make plenty of room for kindness and forgiveness; clear the clutter of discontent and make us more thankful. May all who ache with sadness, anxiety or physical pain be comforted and know they are cherished by you and by those around them.

“Thy Kingdom come, **Thy will be done**”

Loving God your Kingdom is full of light and life. We pray for ourselves that you will guide us safely on our journey through life so that we might help others to live with you too. We ask these prayers through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray together: The Lord’s Prayer

Psalms 62 verses 1 - 2: My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I shall never be shaken.

STF 639 Through the love of God our saviour, all will be well

[Through the Love of God our Saviour - YouTube](#)

<p>1 Through the love of God our Saviour all will be well. Free and changeless is his favour ; all, all is well. Precious is the blood that healed us, perfect is the grace that sealed us, strong the hand stretched forth to shield us ; all must be well.</p> <p>2 Though we pass through tribulation, all will be well. Christ has purchased full salvation, all, all is well. Happy still in God confiding, fruitful, if in Christ abiding, holy, through the Spirit's guiding ; all must be well.</p>	<p>3 We expect a bright tomorrow ; all will be well. Faith can sing through days of sorrow all, all is well. On our Father's love relying, Jesus every need supplying, then in living or in dying, all must be well.</p> <p>Mary Peters (1813-1856)</p>
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Blessing May the road rise to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face. May the rain refresh you on your way. May you go with God for all your journey, now and for ever. AMEN