

Call to Worship Psalm 116: 5

Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

Hymn StF 186/ H&P 86

1. Tell out my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.
2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!
Make known his might,
 the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, the age to age the same;
his holy name – the Lord, the Mighty One.
3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;
proud hearts and stubborn wills
 are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.
4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

Timothy Dudley-Smith

Prayers of Praise and Confession

Loving God, we come before you once again, with all that is in our hearts and minds already known, yet we take delight in expressing our awe at all that you are and do for us and our world. Forgive us, we pray, when we cannot see you in the heart of any situation; when we blame you for absence, yet it is us who are unaware; when we deny you, for fear of ridicule or rejection. Forgive us, we pray, when our humanity hides your divinity and lift us to walk in your way again, as we are sorry and will amend our ways in your name and for your sake. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whichever version you find most helpful.

Readings: James 3: 1 – 12

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

Mark 8: 27 – 38

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' And they answered him, 'John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.' He asked them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Peter answered him, 'You are the Messiah.' And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.'

He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.'

Hymn StF 462

1. Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world
where strangers might smile or where stones may be hurled;
come leave what you cling to, lay down what you clutch
and find, with hands empty, that hearts can hold much.

Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!

Sing hey for the pharisees leaving their rules!

Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!

Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!

2. Come walk in my company, come sleep by my side,
come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide;
come sit at my table and eat with my friends,
discovering that love which the world never ends.

Sing hey...

3. Come share in my laughter, come close to my fears,
come find yourself washed with the kiss of my tears;
come stand close at hand while I suffer and die
and find in three days how I never will lie.

Sing hey...

4. Come leave your possessions, come share out your treasure,
come give and receive without method or measure;
come loose every bond that's resisting the Spirit,
enabling the earth to be yours to inherit.

Sing hey...

John L Bell and Graham Maule

Thoughts

I love this passage from the letter of James (thought to be Jesus' brother) as he tells us in no uncertain terms to watch what we say. What is said cannot be unsaid if it is witnessed. Words can uplift and encourage or hurt and condemn. The telling phrase, for me, is verse 9: 'With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.' We cannot profess to be Christians, followers of the Way of Jesus Christ, if we are nasty to God's people, any of God's people, for we are all made in God's likeness.

Not that this is easy, but in nature it is only humanity that is this duplicitous, most animals are straight forward. We are intelligent and aware, but not always aware enough. We use words, speaking or writing, without thinking and often we speak too hastily or too much. We give in to impulsive, kneejerk reactions, rather than being considered, prayerful or mindful. In this fast moving world, speed is often seen as good, but what do we sacrifice for it?

Living with the pressures of the modern world isn't, however, an excuse. We find in Mark's Gospel that whatever age we live in, we can speak without really thinking about what we are saying. Peter, as so often is the case, stands for all humanity, as he gets things wrong again and has to be corrected. Before this, nonetheless, he is spot on. Jesus is not anyone else, he is himself, unique and of God. He is not to be contained, fully understood or pigeonholed, but is to be allowed to be his individual self. It is only when this is perceived and spoken aloud that the future can be contemplated, even if it is unexpected and difficult.

I find, in this passage, such hope for ourselves. If we are allowed and encouraged by others to be ourselves, our true selves, and not afraid to do so, because then we can move forward in Jesus. We can throw off the shackles of conformity and expectation to be free to voluntarily follow the new way of Jesus Christ that leads to peace and joy. If we want to 'save our lives', to keep up others' definitions of what we should be, then we will lose ourselves and our connection with God, who made us and knows us. If we concentrate on what the world thinks is important – money, power, outward respectability, being on top – then we lose what God in Jesus shows is important – love, compassion, inner cleanliness and helping others.

Let us set our mind on the divine; let our words and actions reflect God; let our lives be of benefit to others so we can move forward to whatever the future may hold, knowing Christ walks with us.

Hymn StF 452

1. Show me the way of the cross once again,
denying myself for the love that I've gained.
Everything's you now, everything's changed;
it's time you had my whole life,
you can have it all.
*Yes, I resolve to give it all;
some things must die, some things must live,
not 'what can I gain,' but 'what can I give.'
If much is required when much is received,
then you can have my whole life,
Jesus, have it all.*
2. I've given like a beggar but lived like the rich,
and crafted myself a more comfortable cross.
Yet what I am called to is deeper than this;
it's time you had my whole life,
you can have it all.

Matt Redman

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Loving God, we try not to come before you with a list,
because you already know what we are thankful for and what our needs are;
we take a few moments to recognise then for ourselves and to try and empty our minds into yours.
We allow our senses to take in our surroundings and be thankful for the natural world we have
outside and the care of neighbours;
inside to be thankful for the comforts of food, shelter, warmth and possessions to make our lives
easier;
in our hearts and minds to feel the love of family and friends, to relive experiences.
For all these – past, present, and future opportunities we give thanks.

Then we consider again and offer a prayer for all the people closely and remotely involved in our
lives, those we know and those we don't, that we, with you, will help them, care for them, and enable
them, in your name and for your sake. Amen.

Hymn StF 563/ H&P 704

1. O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
Lord, be for ever near me,
my master and my friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if you will be my guide.
2. O let me feel you near me;
the world is ever near;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but, Jesus, now draw nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.
3. O let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
Lord, speak, and make me listen,
O guardian of my soul.
4. O Jesus, you have promised
to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory
your servant shall be too;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end;
O give me grace to follow
my master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode

Blessing

Bless us, all of us, as we do our best,
be our best, love to the uttermost
and hold God always in our minds
on our tongues.
This day and all days. Amen.

