

## Dorset South and West Circuit

Service for Sunday 24 July 2022 by Tim Wells, Local Preacher .

As you begin to focus on and in God's presence, you might like to breathe in and out slowly, or simply keep silent - or to prepare in whichever way seems best for you.

I suggest that you then read the following service slowly - there is no need to rush! And so, firstly ...

### **Revelation 5 v 11-14**

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they were saying: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!". Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, saying: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power for ever and ever!". The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped.

### **Hymn (STF449)**

1 Lord of creation, to you be all praise! Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!  
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell, and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

2 Lord of all power, I give you my will, in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfill.  
Your bondage is freedom, your service is song, and, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.

3 Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind; rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;  
What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard is taught by your Spirit and shines from your Word.

4 Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart; I praise and adore you for all you impart:  
your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide, your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

5 Lord of all being, I give you my all, for if I disown you, I stumble and fall;  
but sworn in glad service your word to obey, I walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

*Jack Copley Winslow (1882-1974)*

### **A prayer of approach**

Look upon me, O Lord, and let all the darkness of my soul vanish before the beams of Thy brightness.

*St Augustine (354-430) (alt)*

### **Psalms 119 v 97-106 KJV**

**97** O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. **98** Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. **99** I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. **100** I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. **101** I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word. **102** I have not departed from thy judgments: for thou hast taught me. **103** How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth! **104** Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. **105** Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. **106** I have sworn, and I will perform it, that I will keep thy righteous judgments.

### **Luke 4 v 16-24 NIV**

**16** He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: **18** "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." **20** Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. **21** He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." **22** All spoke well of him and were amazed at the

gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. **23** Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" **24** "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

### **Hymn (StF248)**

1. I heard the voice of Jesus say "Come unto me and rest;  
Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast."  
I came to Jesus as I was, weary and worn and sad.  
I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.
2. I heard the voice of Jesus say: "Behold, I freely give  
The living water; thirsty one, stoop down and drink and live."  
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream;  
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.
3. I heard the voice of Jesus say: I am this dark world's light;  
Look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright."  
I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my star my sun;  
And in that light of life I'll walk, till travelling days are done.  
*Horatius N Bonar (1808-1889)*

### **Reflection - A Word for All Seasons**

1. The two Bible readings are both about the Word of God ... about God speaking to people.

The person who wrote Psalm 119 (the longest of the Psalms) records a lot about what God was saying to him through the scriptures, and especially about the meaning of the words to him, and the impact of them in his life: v98 'Your commands make me wiser than my enemies', v99 'I have more insight than my teachers', v100 'I am even wiser than my elders', v104 'Your commandments give me understanding', v 105 'Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path'. We might think he is being boastful in writing these words, but, if you read them carefully, he is giving God the credit for the understanding he has. Notice that he's not saying simply "Thank you for all the things you are teaching me" (which perhaps is what we might say). He is giving thanks for the insight which God is leading him into.

2. We live today in an age of information – day by day, month by month, year by year we have access to far more information than anyone ever had previously. It is certainly far easier now to find out details of anything we want to know than it has ever been in the past. We are fed so much information from newspapers, books, magazines, the internet, television and the radio. Perhaps we wonder how much all this information actually improves our world. Do we ever feel that we are being told too much, so much so that we can't take it all in?

3. So, it's perhaps interesting that the writer of Psalm 119 wasn't thanking God for information he was receiving from Him – notice the words he uses - words like 'insight', 'understanding', 'wisdom' and 'light'. He was looking beyond the gathering of more and more facts into what that information was doing for him, in his case, what this knowledge of God was doing in his life. Perhaps we think that he's just being poetic, and yet what he wrote all those years ago is echoed by some words once spoken by one of Tony Blair's advisors (Professor Michael Barber), who said while Blair was Prime Minister: "*We are drowning in information while starving for wisdom.*". I'm sure that's even more true today, more than twenty years later.

4. We also hear about the Word of God in the reading from Luke's Gospel.

Luke writes that Jesus was in His home city of Nazareth, and, as was his routine, He went to the synagogue on the Sabbath ... and stood up to read the Scriptures. We don't know if it had been planned for Jesus to read that day, or whether He chose the reading or not. But, however it came about, Luke says that the scroll containing the messages of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him, and Jesus found the place where it says:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has appointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim: that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the downtrodden will be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favour has come." Jesus read these prophetic words of Isaiah and then carried on to say "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing".

5. Jesus didn't give His listeners lots of new information. In fact, what he read had been written about 500 years before His time. He simply (but profoundly) said that He was the deliverer of the Good News prophesied in Isaiah. And He clearly didn't need to say any more than that - His reading electrified the people who were listening because they understood the implications of what Jesus was claiming – Luke says that when Jesus sat down, all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on Him. It seems as though you would have been able to hear a pin drop.

And Jesus also knew who would be the most willing hearers of His message – those who most needed it and those who were open to it: the poor – the spiritually poor, those who needed to be enriched by God, the prisoners – those who felt themselves tied to this world, those who needed the freedom which God could bring, the “blind” who needed to see God in their lives, the oppressed - who needed God's release.

6. It seems that, as they heard Jesus read the words of Isaiah, and heard His claim to be the fulfilment of this prophecy, the congregation in the synagogue recognised that they were in the presence of someone special. Luke says: “They were astonished that words of such grace should fall from His lips”. “Is not this Joseph's son?” they asked.

Now, I thought until recently that this meant they were scorning Him, but, in fact, I think they said these words, not because they were criticising Him, but rather because they were amazed that someone of such authority could be living in their midst. Someone they'd known all their lives.

In fact, all was going well so far.

7. But it was when Jesus went on to refer to the work of God in the lives of the widow of Sidon and of Naaman the Syrian that people started to become restless. These two Old Testament examples were both Gentiles (non-Jews), and for Jesus to link them to the words of Isaiah was simply unacceptable to His Jewish listeners. Perhaps it's hard for us to understand, but Luke writes that these references to God's work in the lives of these Gentiles simply infuriated His audience. Jumping up, he says, they mobbed Jesus and took Him to the edge of the hill on which the city of Nazareth was built. They intended to push Him over the cliff, but He slipped away through the crowd and left them.

8. Why did they suddenly turn on Jesus? According to Luke, they seemed comfortable when Jesus spoke of announcing good news to the poor, of release for prisoners and the oppressed, of sight to the blind. They even seem to have been fairly comfortable with Jesus's claim to be the outworking of this prophecy. What they couldn't take was the idea that God would accept anyone – Gentile as well as Jew – who was willing, not just to hear His words but to act on them as well.

Because both Naaman and the widow at Zarapheth in Sidon (Gentiles though they were) had been willing to take in what God had said to them through the prophets, and to act on what they were told. God couldn't possibly accept Gentiles – they believed it was the Jews alone who were chosen by God, who were special. And so, being unhappy with the message, they tried to destroy the messenger.

9. I wonder what our attitude is ... do we believe that God will work in the life of anyone who accepts Him ... or do we believe that there are people who are beyond the pale, people whom God can't reach? This congregation in Nazareth no doubt knew these words of Isaiah which Jesus read ... and yet His application of them was unacceptable. It seems to me that they had the information from Isaiah but not the wisdom, or perhaps the willingness, to interpret that information.

I wonder how much we know about God through what we've read or heard read in the Bible? How much do we think about these words which God has given to us? How much are we prepared to go on learning? I remember my Physics teacher at school saying to the class “You are not just here to learn - you are here to learn how to learn”, and I still think there is truth in that. So then, do we look beyond just the words of scripture and ask God for understanding of them so that both they and He can make a real impact in all parts of our lives? And finally then, if God gives us insight into His word, how willing are we to apply it in our lives, and to do what He is asking us to do?

### **Hymn (StF416)**

1. There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;  
There's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty.

2. There is plentiful redemption In the blood that has been shed  
There is joy for all the members In the sorrows of the Head.

3. There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this  
There is room for fresh creations In that upper home of bliss.
  4. For the love of God is broader than the measures of man's mind  
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
  5. But we make His love too narrow by false limits of our own  
And we magnify His strictness with a zeal He will not own.
  6. If our love were but more simple we should take Him at His word  
And our lives would be illumined by the presence of our Lord.
- Frederick W Faber (1814-1863)*

#### Prayers of Intercession

God of love, whose compassion never fails, we bring before thee the troubles and perils of people and nations, the sighing of prisoners, and captives, the sorrows of the bereaved, the necessities of strangers, the helplessness of the weak, the despondency of the weary, the failing powers of the aged. O Lord, draw near to each; for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. **Anselm (1033-1109)**

#### The Lord's Prayer

#### Hymn (StF255)

1. The kingdom of God is justice and joy, for Jesus restores what sin would destroy;  
God's power and glory in Jesus we know, and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.
2. The kingdom of God is mercy and grace, the prisoners are freed, the sinners find place  
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share, and hope is awakened in place of despair.
3. The kingdom of God is challenge and choice, believe the good news, repent and rejoice!  
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross, our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.
4. God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal, in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;  
The heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call, and all things cry glory to God all in all!

*Bryn Rees (1911-1983)*

#### Final prayer

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in Him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (based on Romans 15 v 13)

Amen