

Circuit Written Service 31st August 2025 by Revd Steph Jenner

Call to Worship – Hebrews 13: 1 – 2

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hymn StF 372

Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear, and kindle it,
thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn,
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path
illuminating.

Let holy charity
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with
loathing.

And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human
telling;
for none shall guess its grace,
till they become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes their
dwelling.

Bianco da Siena (alt)

Prayers of Praise

Lord, for all our earthly days
we meet to offer you our praise,
for every good thing ever brought,
for growing through the word you taught,
for all your people we can love,
here and now, or gone above,
a planet on which we can all live
and all the kindness we can give,
for personal help bringing us care
and fruitful living everywhere.

Help us still to spread your joy,
neither love nor peace destroy.
Keep us singing of your might
and keep us on the path of right
so we may follow all our lives
and mercy holds us when we die.
We're not our own but wholly yours,
so in our busy world we pause
to praise, and honour, pray, and bring
all that we are, to you, our King.
Amen.

Prayers of Confession

We stand small before your might and realise how insignificant each of us is, but what harm
a small thing can do to another individual, a community, or the world, by a careless,
thoughtless word or action.

So we are here to bring to mind all that we are sorry for and are ashamed of, in our recent
past or further back, that still needs reparation.

We are sorry when we have fallen short in our lives as Christians and seek forgiveness
from those we have hurt or harmed, from our God, and from ourselves, so that we may
grow towards your kingdom coming on earth, bringing justice and mercy, peace and
understanding among our sisters and brothers who call you their God, and beyond to those
yet to experience the word made flesh, yet to experience inclusive, unconditional love.

Help us, as flawed but striving humanity, to be the conduit by which all are brought to God's
loving kindness not excluded by our prejudice, our unfair judgement.

Forgive us as we forgive others, is our prayer, help us to turn our words into our lived
actions.

Lord's Prayer – please pray whichever version you prefer

Hymn StF 401

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast,
let every soul be Jesu's guest;
you need not one be left behind,
for God has called all humankind.

His love is mighty to compel;
his conquering love consent to feel;
yield to his love's resistless power,
and fight against your God no more.

Sent by my Lord, on you I call,
the invitation is to all;
come, all the world and witness how
all things in Christ are ready now.

See him set forth before your eyes;
behold the bleeding sacrifice!
His offered benefits embrace,
and freely now be saved by grace.

Come, all you souls by sin oppressed,
you restless wanderers after rest,
you poor, and maimed, and sick, and
blind,
in Christ a hearty welcome find.

This is the time; no more delay!
This is the Lord's accepted day;
come in, this moment, at his call,
and live for him who died for all.

Charles Wesley.

Reading Luke 14: 1, 7 – 14

On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, "Give this person your place", and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, "Friend, move up higher"; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'

He said also to the one who had invited him, 'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

Reflection

You may have noticed, if you looked through our hymns today, that each of them has as its first word, the invitation 'come'. Sometimes, however often we say everyone is welcome, we need to go to them and say 'come', and often 'come with me'.

Hospitality can mean everything from a welcome, to a full on, five-star, looking after, but it's usually somewhere in between.

Jesus' parable in Luke's Gospel above reminds us that we need to bring humility into our hospitality whether we are giving or receiving. I expect you have your own examples of when someone thinks they are the most important person at an event, only to find out that they're not. Sometimes that person is merely embarrassed, other times it can turn nasty if they feel slighted. And often there are people who are just overlooked, not necessarily deliberately, but just not noticed.

But, as we are told in the letter to the Hebrews, an anonymous letter written to the Christian converts, we should not exclude anyone because of our ignorance, our prejudices, our worries, because these are the very people who could be angels.

Children often used to be excluded at family gatherings – have you ever had to sit at the 'children's table' at a wedding, or at Christmas? And we know how Jesus felt about children being at the centre of things and he redefined what we may think of as family.

When we go to the Dorset County Show, (this year 6th and 7th September) as we have done for over 10 years, and offer hospitality by way of a safe, quiet, space for babies and toddlers to be changed and fed, while older siblings and the wider family have free activities, we see all sorts of families. None of them are excluded, even though some may approach with caution. But we demonstrate welcome inclusivity as Christ taught us. We help where we can, whomsoever we can, in whatever way they need it. So far thousands of babies, Mums, and Dads have found refuge and comfort with us, and seek us out in subsequent years, when there are additions to the family.

Many churches offer activities, companionship, food, and help to anyone who needs it, as well as the opportunity to join in worship. They may not be ready for the last part yet, for a variety of reasons, but if we don't invite them to the former with a welcome smile and an outstretched hand and 'come', they and we will never know the mutual love of hospitality within a wider church family, a community family, where strangers become friends, and we may never know where the angels are.

May God bless us as we continue these works of hospitality.

Hymn StF 678

Come, all who look to Christ today,
stretch out your hands, enlarge your mind,
together share his living way
where all who humbly seek will find.

Come, all who will from every place;
find here new powers of unity,
accept the Spirit's strong embrace
which binds us in community.

Come, you and old from every Church,
bring all your treasures of prayer,
join the dynamic Spirit's search
to press beyond the truths we share.

Bring your traditions' richest store,
your hymns and rites and cherished
creeds;
explore our visions, pray for more,
since God delights to meet fresh needs.

Come, trust in Christ and live in peace,
anticipate that final light
when strife and bigotry shall cease,
and faith be lost in praise and sight.

Richard G. Jones

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We thank you, our God, for the opportunities to offer hospitality as places such as the Tolpuddle Festival, the Melplash Show, the Dorset County Show, and in our own churches and homes. We thank you for the times we have received hospitality from others.

In our chaotic world and busy lives, we take time to think of all the people, circumstances and situations that we would like to pray for. There may be things known only to us and God, and there are situations laid bare for the world to see.

So in our hearts and minds we pray for:

Places and people caught up in conflict, domestic, national and international...

Places and people suffering through fire and floods, and all the difficulties of climate change...

Places and people living and dying with preventable diseases through malnutrition and lack of medicines...

Places and people when poverty impacts communities, especially innocent children...

Places and people where decisions are made that affect all of us, that all consequences may be considered...

Places and people who are close to us, our families and friends, our neighbours and our churches, for whatever they need to flourish...

For ourselves, as you know what lies in our hearts and minds, our bodies and spirits, we pray that all our prayers today are met together, and answers may be found within us and outside ourselves. Amen.

Hymn StF 443

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love,
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to
dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walmsley

Blessing

Bless us by our mutual love,
that our hospitality to strangers
and angels alike,
may be a blessing to the world. Amen.

