

## **Dorset South & West Circuit - Written Service for Sunday 23 October 2022 – 'One World Week' - by Revd David Cuckson**

### **Opening Sentences** (*Psalm 84:1-4*)

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.

### **HYMN Singing the Faith 107** (*Isaac Watts*)

1. I sing the almighty power of God,  
that made the mountains rise,  
that spread the flowing seas abroad,  
and built the lofty skies

2. I sing the wisdom that ordained  
the sun to rule the day;  
the moon shines full at his command,  
and all the stars obey.

3. I sing the goodness of the Lord,  
that filled the earth with food;  
he formed the creatures with his word,  
and then pronounced them good.

4. Lord, how your wonders are displayed  
where'er I turn mine eye,  
if I survey the ground I tread,  
or gaze upon the sky!

5. God's hand is my perpetual guard,  
he guides me with his eye;  
why should I then forget the Lord,  
whose love is ever nigh?

### **Prayer**

Lord God, we come to adore you. You are the ground of all that is. You hold us in being, and without you we could not be. Before we were born, before time began, before the universe came into being, you were. When time is finished, when the universe is no more, you will still be. Nothing can take your power from you. And in your presence we can only be silent before the mystery of your being, for no words can do justice to your grandeur.

*(A silence)*

Let you have spoken to us. Out of the universal silence your living word has sprung. You have spoken, and given form and beauty to the world. You have spoken, and given purpose to human life. You have spoken, and declared the forgiveness of our sin. You have spoken, and freed us from the fear of death.

Lord Jesus Christ, divine Word, speak to us now. Show us the beauty of life; unite us to the eternal purpose; remove our guilt; conquer the fear of death in our hearts. Speak and let us hear, for your name's sake. **Amen**

## **Luke 18:9-14 (NRSVA)**

### *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax-Collector*

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt; ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax-collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, “God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax-collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.” But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.’

### **Reflection**

The Pharisee in Jesus’ parable was supremely self-satisfied. He was focused entirely on how good he was being. He would have known the Jewish law inside out – that goes without saying, for all Pharisees were trained to learn and rehearse, in particular, the elements of rules and guidance contained in the scriptures of our Old Testament and other traditional Jewish writings. Here he picked out a couple of the detailed provisions, the benefits of fasting and of tithing, giving away one tenth of his income. But beyond that his mind seems to have been closed. Why should he need to look further when he fasted twice a week and as long as he gave away a tenth of his income? So his prayer is one of self-congratulation. He needs nothing further from God, no new insights into God’s purpose for the world, no inspiration for new ways to respond in God’s service. And as a result he receives nothing from God. Despite his protestations of holiness and righteousness he has separated himself from God.

By contrast, the tax-collector makes no claims at all for himself. He does not look for plus points in his life, he does not seek to make any excuses. He simply offers himself to God, ‘warts and all’. He acknowledges his need of God, initially of his forgiveness. In this very act of opening up himself totally to God in prayer he becomes receptive to what we know as inspiration, the sense of guidance as to what he can do better, and what he can start doing that he has not so far attempted. He will become aware of the needs of the world around him in a way that the self-satisfied Pharisee just could not manage. His world has become bigger, he can begin to see the people around himself as individuals, each with his or her own concerns and needs. He has become closer to God, with the potential to become one with God.

Today we are asked to mark One World Week, an occasion when we can particularly focus on the concerns and needs of the people around us and in the wider world. Many of them have very different lives from our own. In the past we have often viewed many nations as isolated from us, living their own lives but only interacting with us at limited points, trade for many centuries and, more recently, global tourism, but such contacts as existed have been largely superficial, kept to the minimum. These days, however, we have become much more aware of the extent to which we are all dependant on one another. We have become

conscious of the number of mass migrations of people around the world – some driven by conflicts and wars, some by hunger, some by simple poverty trying to better their lives, There are also migrations by invitation, by the desire to recruit more workers – think of the number of doctors, nurses and care workers that our country has consciously sought, from countries in Asia, from the Philippines, to help meet our needs. At one time many of these migrations happened almost without people noticing, before there were border controls of the type we have today, and it was only with hindsight that it was realised what had happened. Some, I know, have been striking, and condemned widely now as unjust, as, for example, whole communities of Jews have been expelled from countries. So how should we respond today – ‘pull up the drawbridge’ in order to protect our own interests, or try and understand what the underlying causes, the motivation, in order to respond positively on behalf of the interests of the whole world?

One of the driving factors in migration and possibly the greatest issue facing all the peoples of the world today is climate change. As the weather changes, many countries suffer extended droughts and people starve. As general global warming heats up the polar ice caps and the glaciers, vast areas of land are being lost to water. Here again, it is easy to be selfish and make our own lives as easy as possible, without taking full account of the potential impact on lands in other parts of the world. Do we congratulate ourselves on what we have achieved, or do we offer our whole futures to saving the planet, to God’s future for our world?

The ‘every man for himself’ approach is not God’s way – that is the primary message of Jesus’ parable. God’s way is that of humility, open to seeing all that is good in life, in a balanced world, where each person living on the globe matters equally, where the world itself is saved from destruction and given a future, ultimately a way of love.

### **HYMN Singing the Faith 618** (*Ruth C Duck*)

1. Sacred the body God has created,  
temple of Spirit that dwells deep inside.  
Cherish each person, nurture creation,  
Treat flesh as holy, that love may abide.

2. Bodies are varied, made in all sizes,  
pale, full of colour, both fragile and strong.  
Holy the difference, gift of the Maker,  
so let us honour each story and song.

3. Love respects persons, bodies and boundaries,  
Love does not batter, neglect, or abuse.  
Love touches gently, never coercing.  
Love leaves the other with power to choose.

4. Holy of holies, God ever loving,  
make us your temples; indwell all we do.  
May we be careful, tender and caring,  
so may our bodies give honour to you.

### **Prayers**

Great God, forgive the narrowness of thinking that keeps you small and domesticated, a predictable and private God, that seeks to turn your promise and power to our own advantage. Forgive our blinkered understanding of the gospel of your greatness, where there is no preferential treatment simply because we believe; where the challenge of your good news is intended especially for those who live outside our comfortable community.

Enlarge our vision of your kingdom in which we shall readily drink the cup with its bitter taste and eagerly risk being ransomed, so that the church becomes daring and dangerous in its seeking and serving.

‘Everything is possible for you, God’; we hear ourselves say in shaky words, like a child’s first steps. There is comfort in ownership, a fulfilment that helps to secure us until our reluctant pockets are nudged to share. Reluctant, not because we do not care, but because we fear total exhaustion of giving more of ourselves than we can manage. We worry that our dreams will become a misshapen web of ‘I want, I deserve, I need’. We lose vision of your plans for the earth and the people who live here. Lord, we pray that we may be willing and thoughtful givers knowing that what we selflessly offer can lay foundations for your kingdom.

‘Everything is possible for you, God’; words we hear ourselves say without knowing how to fulfil them, words that require sensitivity as well as an enthusiastic heart, because it is hard sometimes to accept what is given in love. There is a worry that gifts exchanged between fingers and a cupped palm can create a hand that beckons and suppresses the taker. We lose the vision of your plans for the earth, that we should help to care for the future of the planet and all those who live here. Lord, we pray that we may have the courage to accept gifts freely shared and to give gifts to share with others, and in this may we be reminded that these are your hands offering the love of Christ and embracing us, with all mankind, as part of your family. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever. **Amen.**

### **The Blessing**

May the peace of God, which is beyond our utmost understanding, keep guard over our hearts and thoughts, in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

*[Prayers taken and adapted from Contemporary Prayers for Public Worship published by SCM and the URC Prayer Handbook 1999-2000, ‘Justice, Joy and Jubilee’]*