

**Psalm 121:**

I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?  
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.  
The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

**Hymn StF 406**

*Have you heard the good news?  
Have you heard the good news?  
We can live in hope  
because of what the Lord has done.  
Repeat*

There is a way  
when there seems to be no way,  
there is a light in the darkness:  
there is a hope,  
an everlasting hope,  
there is a God who can help us.  
*Have you heard the good news?...*

A hope for justice  
and a hope for peace,  
a hope for those in desperation:  
we have a future,  
if only we believe  
he works in every situation.  
*Have you heard the good news?...*

Stuart Garrard

**Introduction**

A little while ago I came across something that I found interesting and it got me thinking that in these very uncertain times we can either accept the status quo and live as best we can, or we can question what is happening and why, then we can ask these questions of others. We may never get answers, but we will never be frightened of asking:

“In the gospels, Jesus is asked 187 questions. He answers (maybe) 8 of them. He himself asks 307. Maybe faith isn't about certainty, but learning to ask – and sit in the complexity of – good questions.”

So today our hymns and readings all ask questions for us to ponder.

**Prayers of Praise and Confession**

We praise you, loving God, for questions and answers, that we may never be afraid to ask, and grow, strengthen our faith and our commitment to you.  
We praise you that you question us too, our motives, our courage, our very surety, because we know that you love us no less when have uncertainties and queries, but rather love is more for our searching and struggling humanity.  
Continue to bless us, we pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, himself no stranger to questions.

But, ever present God, we ask your forgiveness when we think we have all the answers and don't listen to one another, and therefore do not listen to you.  
When we are set and settled, instead of curious and growing in wisdom, forgive us.  
Forgive us when we shut down questions as tiresome and irrelevant, and when we respond in a less than Christian way.

For all our faults – yesterday, today and tomorrow – we humbly repent and ask your forgiveness.  
Amen.

### **Hymn StF 635**

My troubled soul, why so weighed down?  
You were not made to bear this heavy load.  
Cast all your burdens upon the Lord;  
Jesus cares, he cares for you.

Jesus cares, he cares for you.  
And all your worrying  
won't help you make it through.  
Cast all your burdens upon the Lord.  
And trust again in the promise of his love.

*I will praise the mighty name of Jesus,  
praise the Lord, the lifter of my head.  
Praise the Rock of my salvation,  
all my days are in his faithful hands.*

My anxious heart, why so upset?  
When trials come, how you so easily forget  
to cast your burdens upon the Lord;  
Jesus cares, he cares for you.

Jesus cares...

*I will praise...*

Robert Critchley

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

We offer our thanks that whenever we are in trouble, in pain, in doubt, we can call on you God, Jesus, Spirit, and you will ease our anxiety, bring us help, shoulder our burdens. No matter how deep or trivial the issue, no matter the frequency of the request, our prayers are heard, answers are provided. Help us to keep searching, keep alert, and keep listening, to you and to our neighbours. Amen.

### **Lord's Prayer**

#### **Readings: Luke 20: 27 – 38**

Some Sadducees, those who say there is no resurrection, came to him and asked him a question: "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies leaving a wife but no children, the man shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother. Now there were seven brothers; the first married a woman and died childless; then the second and the third married her, and so in the same way all seven died childless. Finally the woman also died. In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had married her."

Jesus said to them, "Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed, they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection. And the fact that the dead are raised Moses himself showed, in the story about the bush, where he speaks of the Lord as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Now he is God not of the dead but of the living, for to him all of them are alive."

#### **Romans 8: 31 – 39**

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son but gave him up for all of us, how will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ who died, or rather, who was raised, who is also at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long;  
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## Reflection

A few years ago people used to wear wristbands with WWJD? on them (What Would Jesus Do?). I was reminded that getting angry and overturning tables was an option.

We often leave Jesus in the manger as a meek and mild baby and forget that he was a full grown, mature, learned man who wanted to help people, and help them help themselves, and each other, by making them think and question.

It is very easy to believe what we are told in the media, by family and friends, even in church, without question. But we have seen, and continue to see, that there is so much fake news, spin, deception (deliberate and otherwise) that it is very difficult to know what is true, and even what 'true' means.

In court people swear to 'tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth'. The whole truth is the bit that interests me; it means holding nothing back, giving the complete picture, not hiding anything. For example: I could tell you that I came second in my running race, and you might be impressed, but if I then tell you the whole story that there were only two of us in the race and I didn't bother running, only walked, you may see it differently and be less impressed!

The whole truth gives us a bigger, better picture so that if we just look on the surface, glance even, we miss out. We need to delve deeper, ask questions, evaluate the answers, use our reason, and our experience, to decide on what we believe.

In our readings today we have examples of questions asked centuries ago, but still relevant today in differing ways:

The questions asked in the Gospels of Jesus are always insightful – obviously a problem, but potentially a trap. Jesus' answer is one that we should take notice of today – 'you are asking the wrong sort of question. This is irrelevant in the kingdom of God. Live your best life on earth and let God deal with the rest.'

When Christians, particularly fundamental ones, say that God condemns, God hates, God rejects, you sin, you're excluded, I remember with gladness that God is judge, not humanity so I err on the side of love and inclusion knowing that God will sort it out if I am mistaken, but I find that better than hate, condemnation and exclusion as I may well be on the wrong side of the kingdom of God, if I follow that path of my own taking.

Our reading from Romans confirms this: 'if God is for us, who is against us?' Nothing, and no one can separate us from the love of Christ.

So, this week, whenever you can, in prayer and in practice, ask questions of yourself and of what you see and hear; ask questions when you read your Bible and the media stories, taking nothing at face value except the love of God in Jesus Christ, which never fails, is never false and is within and around each and every one of us, we just need to be open to the call.

### Hymn StF 662

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,  
though the way be rough and narrow?

*Will you walk the path that will cost you much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow?*

*Will you trust in One who entrusts to you  
the disciples of tomorrow?*

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down  
when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground  
when the crowds are turning violent?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships  
start,  
will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith  
and believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of  
grace?

Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

*We will walk the path that will cost us much  
and embrace the pain and sorrow.*

*We will trust in One who entrusts to us  
the disciples of tomorrow.*

Jacqueline G Jones

## Prayers of Intercession

We see suffering and ask: 'why?'

We hear of troubles and struggles and ask: 'why?'

We feel cold, hungry, scared, and ask: 'why?'

We know all these problems: wars, troubles, injustices inequalities, indifferences, neglect, poverty, selfishnesses, are of humanity's making – we pray that we may be part of the solutions to offer compassion, sympathy, empathy, justice, generosity, love, and peace without judgement.

Help us bring Christ's light into the darkness every way we can; never stop challenging the cruel and unnecessary action of humans with the all-encompassing love of God for all people, with exception. Amen.

## Hymn StF 345

And can it be that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above -  
So free, so infinite his grace -  
Emptied himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus and all in him, is mine!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
And clothed in righteousness divine,  
Bold I approach the eternal throne,  
And claim the crown, through Christ, my own.  
Charles Wesley

## Blessing

I walk in the joy of the Creator.  
I walk in the love of the Son.  
I walk in the power of the Spirit.  
God the Creator, bless my eyes as they see,  
God the Son, be ever close to me,  
God the Spirit, protect and guide me, Amen.

# ask, seek, knock

