

DSW Circuit Written Service 5th February 2023 prepared by Rev Ruth Lownsborough

Welcome to this act of worship. Know that although you may be on your own, you are part of God's church, worshipping God together with others at this time.

Call to worship Psalm 112: 1, 4-5,7

Praise the Lord! Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments. They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful and righteous.

It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord.

Hymn StF 186 Tell out my soul

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

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his
Name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm
has done;
His mercy sure, from age to age to same;
His holy Name--the Lord, the Mighty One

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
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

Prayer of praise & thanks – *you may like to light a candle as a focus during prayers*

Father God, thank you that you have prepared for us far more than we can ever hope, believe or imagine;

no eye, no ear, no heart can conceive what you have prepared for those who love you.

That is so amazing!

Thank you that you restore us and transform us to become the people you have made us to be.

Thank you that you are the light of the world.

Thank you that you are the salt of the earth.

Thank you that in you we can be salt and light too; that by our prayers, words and actions, we can bring hope and renewal to our families, our friends, our neighbours and our churches. Amen.

Prayer of Confession – sit quietly and bring to mind those things for which you know you need to ask God’s forgiveness. Tell Jesus you are truly sorry and want to make a fresh start. Be assured that our prayers are always heard and in thankfulness, claim God’s promise of forgiveness in your heart. Amen

Readings: Isaiah 58: 1-9a False and true worship
Matthew 5: 13-20 Salt and Light, The Law and the Prophets

Reflection Being salt & light are very powerful images of how we can be effective in discipleship. We know what the effects of light are in a dark place and, we have heard, in John’s gospel, about the darkness never being able to overcome the light of Christ. We know the capacity of just a small amount of salt to transform the flavour of food, or for salt to have preserving qualities. We can get the sense of what Jesus means when everyday things are used to explain how his disciples should live out life.

Matthew places these images of salt and light right alongside a passage which describes the ineffectiveness of the scribes and Pharisees in interpreting the Law, which governed how the people should live. The Jewish religious authorities had become so tied up in the details of rules and regulations that they could not see a bigger picture, have a wider understanding. They were unable to see that they were burdening the people. Jesus was, in no way, denouncing the Law, just the way it was held up to the people as a long list of rules and regulations that did not liberate people for better living but weighed them down with restriction.

The commentator, William Barclay, sums up the principles of the Jewish Law as respect or reverence for God, for others and for self. Jesus fulfils the Law by coming and demonstrating how to live out these principles through his compassion, mercy and love. Jesus calls for his followers to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees for hypocrisy cannot be part of life for a disciple.

In the OT reading, Isaiah lays a similar accusation of hypocrisy before Israel. What they were doing was not enriching their lives with God. Instead, whilst fasting, their oppression of others and fighting between themselves continued and then they were annoyed that God wasn’t patting them on the back for the outward activity of fasting!

Isaiah calls the people to the kind of fast that God is really interested in:

‘To loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?’

Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not hide yourself from your own kin?

Then your light shall break forth like the dawn and your healing shall spring up quickly.’

Here is the kind of light that Jesus is talking about when he calls his followers to shine out: the light that seeks to protect and shelter the vulnerable in society, the light that is not hidden under a basket but placed where everyone can see.

Spend some time thinking about what kind of fast God might be calling you to as a disciple of Jesus.

Often our discipleship falters and we stumble and fall. We can turn to Jesus and ask forgiveness but the call to be salt and light will not lessen; it demands everything that we have and are. How often in the Bible are God's people called to worship in ways which are echoed in Isaiah: to make a difference in the lives of others, especially those who are vulnerable, on the margins of society?

The call to be salt and light in the world, as disciples of the risen Christ, is a real challenge, especially as we're called to be those things with real openness and authenticity, being open to God's love and prepared to take risks in order to live up to our potential as God's children. Our desire may be to withdraw, to escape from the seeming chaos that streams to us daily via whichever media you connect with.

Escape is not on God's agenda; it's not an option for us for we need to stay connected with God and with society, however difficult & challenging it is..... but we can rely on God's promises of his presence with us, guiding and enabling us by the Holy Spirit.

It is today and tomorrow, and the day after that we're called to be a light, right in the place where we are, called to live Christ flavoured lives amongst the people we connect with, so that the hope, the love, the truth to be found in Jesus is proclaimed, and others may give glory to God. Amen

Hymn StF 693 Beauty for brokenness

Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in the suffering, this is our prayer:
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace
Sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!

Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
Work for the craftsman,
Trade for their skills
Land for the dispossessed
Rights for the weak
Voices to plead the cause
Of those who can't speak

*God of the poor, friend of the weak
Give us compassion we pray
Melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain
Come, change our love
From a spark to a flame*

Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
Cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share,
Peace to the killing-fields
Scorched earth to green
Christ for the bitterness
His cross for the pain

Rest for the ravaged earth
Oceans and streams
Plundered and poisoned
Our future, our dreams
Lord, end our madness
Carelessness, greed
Make us content with
The things that we need

Refrain

Lighten our darkness
Breathe on this flame
Until your justice
Burns brightly again
Until the nations
Learn of your ways
Seek your salvation
And bring you their praise

Refrain

Prayers of intercession

Think of your local area together with places around the world where people are called to be Salt & Light.

Lord, we think of all the people in this world
who seek to share your light, often at great personal cost:
those near to us, and those far away;

We pray especially for the leaders of nations as we journey through tumultuous times, that they may govern upholding justice and peace for all.

Lord in your mercy.....hear our prayer

We think of your body, the church, that in all her ministry and witness, she seeks to be authentic, honest and relevant in the world.

We think of the map marking the places where we live and we pray that you would enable us, your disciples, to be salt & light in our communities, the places where we live and work

Lord in your mercy..... hear our prayer

We give thanks for our family, friends and colleagues;
people in our lives who are special to us, especially those who have shone the light of Christ for us.

and to whom we are special...

Lord in your mercy..... hear our prayer

We think of those in our church family who are facing difficult times:
illness, unemployment, family problems, and other needs perhaps known only to them...We pray for them.....

Lord in your mercy..... hear our prayer

We think of ourselves, that we might bring your flavour to the world.

We pray that we may daily touch base with you,

and always be prepared to share our knowledge of you with others, pointing them to Jesus.

We ask all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord & Saviour. Amen.

You are invited to pray the Lord's Prayer in whichever version you are most comfortable with

Blessing & sending

Christ leads us amongst the people whom we shall meet or talk to in the coming week, to live by his word, and to reflect his light and love, in the days ahead.

So may the blessing of God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer be with us always.

Amen.

