

Call to Worship

John 10: 10 Jesus says that he is the gate for the sheep and then:
“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.
I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

Introduction

Today is Methodist Homes Sunday. Their new strapline is ‘later life, lived well’ which seems to me to fit in very nicely with our lectionary readings today. So while we won’t, this year, be exploring MHA, please bear in mind their work as we worship together.

Hymn StF 71

Even as the world began,
the stars they sang
and all the angels shouted for joy,
shouted for joy.
And looking back through history,
your people they have always had
a song they must sing,
a song they must sing.
We are the people of God;
we’ll sing your song here in the earth.
All over the world, your song will resound.
All over the world, your praises ring out.
We’re living to see you name and renown
all over the world.

Young and old, near and far,
there’s a place for every heart
to join in your song, join in your song.
Every nation, tribe and tongue
come together, join as one,
give glory to God, give glory to God.
We are the people of God;
we’ll sing your song here on the earth.
All over the world...

Great is your name
and great will be your song.
Great is your name
and great will be your song.
We lift up our hands and pray,
we lift up our hands and pray,
for holy is your name.

Matt Redman and Martin J Smith

Prayers of Praise and Confession

God, our creator, we praise you for all that you bring to us and share with us throughout our lives. We adore you for the world we inhabit and the people we share our living with – the families we’re born into, the friends we choose and who choose us, the professionals and volunteers we encounter in the everyday who reflect your love and care, whether they realise it or not. We can never know what you have in store for us in our futures, so we look forward in hope and anticipation.

But we confess that we sometimes look forward with dread and let our past cast a shadow – we doubt too much and don’t trust in God enough. Help us to cast our cares onto you and forgive us when we don’t share our troubles, past, present, and future, with those around us and with Jesus, our guide and our redeemer. Let God’s Spirit show us to where we need to be – forgiven and moving onwards, ever onwards. Amen.

Lord’s Prayer – please use whichever version or language you prefer

Reading Romans 4: 13 – 25

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Therefore "it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Reading Matthew 9: 18 – 26 just after the call of Matthew we read:

While he [Jesus] was saying these things to them, suddenly a leader came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." And Jesus got up and followed him, with his disciples. Then suddenly a woman who had been suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak, for she was saying to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be made well." Jesus turned, and seeing her he said, "Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that moment. When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But when the crowd had been put outside, he went in and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And the report of this spread through all of that district.

Hymn StF 653

O Christ, the Healer, we have come
to pray for health, to plead for friends.
How can we fail to be restored,
when reached by love that never ends?

From every ailment flesh endures
our bodies clamour to be freed;
yet in our hearts we would confess
that wholeness is our deepest need.

How strong, O Lord, are our desires,
how weak our knowledge of ourselves!
Release in us those healing truths
unconscious pride resists or shelves.

In conflicts that destroy our health
we diagnose the world's disease;
our common life declares our ills:
is there no cure, O Christ, for these?

Grant that we all, made one in faith,
in your community may find
the wholeness that, enriching us,
shall reach the whole of humankind.

Fred Pratt Green

Reflection

In our readings we hear about three different people and families who needed help and, through faith, they found the solutions they needed. Although for one it was instantaneous, the others had to wait for twelve years and many decades respectively. But, it seems to me, they didn't give up, their faith kept them going through immeasurable pain and sadness to the point where we wouldn't have been surprised if they had given up on themselves and on God. But they didn't. They didn't either blame God for what was wrong in their lives, they carried on trusting and hoping. I think we can probably expect that their families and friends supported them, because it is human nature, although, with that same reasoning many would have turned away too.

There are many times in our lives, and in the lives of people we know, when we go through difficult and/or sad things. When we are in pain, or stressed, or anxious, when we are grieving a loss, when things aren't going how we wanted, how we planned.

It would be very easy to say; 'God doesn't answer my prayers' or 'why does God let people suffer?' or something similar, and they are hard questions to respond to without sounding trite or insincere. But, from these readings, it feels as if we need to have patience, as the good times or at least the better times are coming, if we have faith. But we never know when that is and in what form it will come, and until it does, we can't just stand still and put our lives on hold.

The MHA strapline of 'later life, lived well' also demonstrates that whatever is happening, however bad, whatever we are waiting for, we have to do our best to live well, with the help of others, within the love of God.

Julian of Norwich, the English anchoress of the Middle Ages, had a saying in her writings known as *Revelations of Divine Love*: "All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well". And, although this can seem overly optimistic, it is a great frame of mind to have as we travel through the ups and downs of life.

So whether we relate to Abraham and Sarah, the woman with 12 years of affliction, or the leader and their daughter, we can know that together we can face anything that this life throws at us, because we have God with us, always.

Hymn StF 250

Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult
of our life's wild restless sea,
day by day his voice is sounding,
saying: 'Christian, follow me.'

As of old apostles heard it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.

Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store,
from each idol that would keep us,
saying: 'Christian, love me more.'

In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures:
'Christian, love me more than these.'

Jesus calls us! By your mercies,
Saviour, may we hear your call,
give our hearts to your obedience,
serve and love you best of all.

Cecil Frances Alexander

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Loving God, you have created all things and made us in your own image. We give you thanks because you have called us together in our fellowship and given us your Name to bring to the world, so that your loving nature might be revealed.

Please use the prayers below for the people and situations that rest on your heart and mind.

We pray for a world in need of healing...

We pray for a society in need of healing...

We pray for a church in need of healing...

We pray for individuals in need of healing...

We make our prayers in the name of Jesus who came to seek and save the lost, to heal broken bodies and lives. Amen.

Hymn StF 317

At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now.

'Tis the Father's pleasure
we should call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.

Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed:

Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father's breast;
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

In your hearts enthrone him;
there let him subdue
all that is not holy,
all that is not true;
crown him as your captain
in temptation's hour:
let his will enfold you
in its light and power.

For this same Lord Jesus
shall return again,
with his Father's glory,
with his angel train;
all the wreaths of empire
meet upon his brow,
and our hearts confess him
King of Glory now.

Caroline Maria Noel

Blessing

Bless us as we move on with our lives as individuals and together, in communion with God, Father, Son, and Spirit. Help us to bless each other in our conversations and interactions, through the name of the one who calls us and walks with us always. Amen.