



Call to Worship

Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.

Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them.

Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.

He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate.

He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.

He has shown his people the power of his works, giving them the lands of other nations.

The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are trustworthy.

They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.

He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever—holy and awesome is his name.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, all who follow his precepts have good understanding.

To him belongs eternal praise.

Psalms 111. New International Version

STF 88

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!

All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,

praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;

surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:

ponder anew what the Almighty can do,

who with his love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,

fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,

then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,

spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,

who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,

sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,

saints with his mercy surrounding.

Prayers of adoration and confession.

Lord God, faithful in Your love, we come before You as we are, to worship You.

We give You thanks and praise for a world of wonder and mystery,

with so much to discover, and so many ways of doing that.

We give You thanks and praise for every good thing that has happened this past week,

for people whose kindness never meets the media, for prayers which have been answered,

for situations which have resolved.

We give You thanks for opportunities to praise and rejoice, for opportunities to learn and to grow,

for opportunities to reflect and be quiet.

We give You thanks and praise for all that makes our life so special.

Especially we praise you for your unending love and goodness. **Amen.**

Confession

Lord God, faithful in Your love. We confess that we have not been so faithful in our love.

We have thought too much about ourselves, and too little about Your ways.

We confess that we have lived too much for ourselves, and too little for the sake of others.

We confess that we have been taken up too much with ourselves, and too little with the needs of Your kingdom.

Forgive us when we go the wrong way or the foolish way.

Have mercy on us, and help us to act wisely and live well, for Jesus' sake, **Amen.**

Mark 1:21-28. Jesus Drives Out an Impure Spirit

They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an impure spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God!" "Be quiet!" said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him!" The impure spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching—and with authority! He even gives orders to impure spirits and they obey him." News about him spread quickly over the whole region of Galilee.

Reflection:

We are nearly one month into the new year and I am not going to ask you how your new year resolution is going, if you made one? No, instead, I want to ask you...what has amazed you in a good way, in this first month of the new year? What made you , "Wow!"

In the gospel reading on two occasions we hear that the people are amazed at Jesus' words and actions. Also the psalm for today is a psalm of praise but with an interesting style. One of it's descriptions is that it is one five Hallelujah Psalms, because it begins with an exhortation to Praise.

So what so far this year has made you want to shout "Hallelujah"? Or perhaps just in a quiet way, give thanks to God?

Do you recall the lovely old Hymn, 'Count your blessings', which in the chorus says, 'name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord has done'. I will include it later in this service for you to sing or read. The words are so timeless. If we stop and count our blessings, like the people in our gospel reading, we will be amazed. Or as the psalmist says we will want to praise God with all our heart.

As I write this, we are only just a few days into the new year. The weather has been appalling. Japan has had a terrible earthquake. Wars and hostilities in the world have not ceased. We face in the coming days, still more economic challenges and the inevitable price hikes. Perhaps people we have known and loved have been seriously ill or died and that always feels more raw at Christmastime.

Yesterday was Holocaust Memorial Day and in the material published by the trust we were reminded by the theme, of the fragility of freedom. Not only did the publication's for the memorial reflect on the atrocities of the Nazi persecutions, but of each subsequent genocide. This year in particular the peoples of Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

So it could be quite natural to say, counting your blessings is just a 'rose tinted glasses' view of reality. Or is it?

Psalm 111 is also an acrostic. It uses the letters of the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet in sequence to say a number of different things about what the psalmist wants to praise and thank God for. The things that amaze him daily about the constancy of Gods love.

Acrostics are something we probably all have been familiar with in many different ways. Perhaps you know the song about love made popular by Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Michael Bubl  and many others.

L is for the way you look at me
O is for the only one I see
V is very, very extraordinary
E is even more than anyone that you adore.

The Psalmist it's believed, uses an acrostic to help his people to not only in remember their Scriptures; but also Gods faithfulness to them, throughout their history.

Like the people of the gospel story and those the psalmist wrote for, we know evil and difficulties are all around us. Now perhaps more than ever we must remember that God is faithful and is always with us, no matter what we face. Otherwise what was the point of the recent celebration of Christmas and our hopes that will be invested in the forthcoming celebration of Easter? God sent His Son into the world to redeem us.

I was talking recently to a Christian artist from Nottingham and we mused on how many depiction's of the nativity have incorporated the shadow of the cross. One artist even has a carpenter's tool box which he includes because it would be used later to build Christ's cross. We can get lost in a rosy unrealistic view of the scriptures. Jesus came to a world where he was not, even from His birth, given an unquestioning welcome. Born in a stable, no room at the inn. All because of an occupying force's demands for a census and all the upheaval and difficulties that created. In our gospel reading, we read of just one of the many occasions that Jesus' authority and teachings are questioned. The shadow of a cross hung over Jesus from his earliest days. However he inspires us to look beyond ourselves and the smallness of our cares, to the greater good and to the wonders of God's love. Maybe the retail stores have in a strange way got things right

by beginning to sell Hot cross buns immediately after Christmas and stocking up on Easter eggs. We perhaps cynically remark, "oh! It must be Christmas because look what's on the supermarket shelves!" Wouldn't it be wonderful if they really were trying to remind us that despite the joyful tinsel and festivity of Christmas, Christ was in fact born to die for our sins and to redeem the world. Remember the wise men brought gifts in which two foreshadowed his fate.

The acrostic that the aforementioned crooners have made popular on love is so appropriate when we consider God's gracious gift. His love and mercy to us.

So in the shadow of Christmas and in the early stages of this new year what would be your acrostic for praising God? The L.O.V.E. song works beautifully for Gods love of us and how we see Him. However there are 29 days in this year's February and we have 26 letters in our alphabet. I wonder if you could each day of February, tackle a letter and find something to complete a month long acrostic of praise? A is for? and so on . If you manage even just a few days, in the words of the hymn, '... it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.'

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I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
should set his love upon us, now or then,
or why, as Shepherd, he should seek the
wanderers,
to bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
when Bethlem's manger was his only home,
and that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
and so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.

I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
how he will claim his earthly heritage,
how satisfy the needs and aspirations
of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
and he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
and some glad day his sun shall shine in splendour,
when he the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is
known.

I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
as with his peace he graced this place of tears,
or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
the crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
and stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
and lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
for yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.

I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
when at his bidding every storm is stilled,
or who can say how great the jubilation
when every human heart with love is filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
and earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will
answer:
'at last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!'

Prayers of intercession and the Lord's Prayer.

We begin with a moment of silence, to wonder at the mystery of prayer,
to reflect on our lives and needs and the lives and needs of others, and to collect our thoughts before
God . . . [pause]

In our prayers let us remember that we and all people, are the body of Christ on earth. So I invite you to think about the different parts of the body as we pray for ourselves and the world.

Head

Thank You, God, for giving us minds with which to think.

We pray now for those in our families, in our communities and in the world, who use their minds to help us understand things – teachers, researchers, scientists, engineers, those who use their minds to write and create – authors, actors, builders, artists, musicians, inventors, and those who use their minds to help us tackle difficult questions –strategists, politicians, professors, community development workers.

We pray that You will enable them and us all to use our heads wisely.

Shoulders

God, we know that there are many people in our families and communities that feel as if they are carrying the weight of the world on their shoulders.

Those who are constantly worrying about whether they will be able to feed their family this week, or if they have enough money to keep the heating on this winter.

Those who are making the difficult decisions as to which employees to make redundant, or how to tackle the climate crisis. Those who are working to improve the economy and the needs of our nation.

We pray that You will be with them as they carry those burdens on their shoulders, that they may feel seen and known by You in their time of struggle, and that we too may come alongside them, offering what support we can.

Knees

God, it can sometimes seem as if certain organisations are on their knees and not in a good way. We pray for those organisations in the news today which seem as if they are on their knees. Struggling to care for their staff as well as the people they serve.

We pray for all those who are on their knees because of some natural disaster. The people of Japan in the wake of the earthquake. So many places and people in our world are suffering and struggling because of the harshness of nature. Help us to find ways to be more responsible in the care of our planet. In controlling climate change and how we use the earth's resources.

Give to those in crisis the strength to get through these difficult days.

Toes

God, sometimes we think our toes are not an important part of our body, but without them our lives would be much harder.

We pray now for those who bring us joy through their use of the toes – for dancers, sports people and gardeners – and for those who keep our society moving by using their toes – for bus drivers, taxi drivers, train drivers and lorry drivers.

We pray that You will nurture them and that we will become better at not taking them for granted.

Be with us too, as we seek to walk alongside people, bringing beauty into unexpected places and sharing something of our knowledge of You with them.

Heart, hands and emotions.

God, we pray for those who see the world through eyes of compassion and compel others to do likewise – we pray for the work of all the various aid agencies as they seek to respond to the situations they see around the world of trauma and injustice.

On this particular Sunday following the Holocaust Memorial Day We remember before you all those who bear the inner and outer scars of the Holocaust and of subsequent acts of genocide.

Let them not be overwhelmed by the horrors that engulfed them. Help them to see that you suffer with those who suffer, and that no wickedness can ever extinguish your infinite love. Restrain those who are filled with hatred and use violence to pursue their ends. Change their hearts. May remembrance make us alert to the reality of evil and its deceptive allure. Help us to recognise our own capacity for evil and allow your Spirit to purge it from our beings.

Help us also to be ready to bring the light of your truth into the dark areas of human experience.

Deepen our respect for everything you have made, and help us to share in securing the maximum good of every person in your world.

We ask this in the Name of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, carries our sorrows, heals our wounds, and is risen for our freedom.

And in whose words we say together, **The Lord's Prayer** .

Hymn: Count your Blessings

1 When upon life's billows you are tempest tossed,
When you are discouraged, thinking all is lost,
Count your many blessings, name them one by one,
And it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.

Refrain:

Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your blessings, see what God hath done;
Count your blessings, name them one by one;
Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.

2 Are you ever burdened with a load of care?
Does the cross seem heavy you are called to bear?
Count your many blessings, ev'ry doubt will fly,
And you will be singing as the days go by. [Refrain]

3 When you look at others with their lands and gold,
Think that Christ has promised you His wealth untold;
Count your many blessings, money cannot buy
Your reward in heaven, nor your home on high.
[Refrain]

4 So, amid the conflict, whether great or small,
Do not be discouraged, God is over all;
Count your many blessings, angels will attend,
Help and comfort give you to your journey's end.
[Refrain]

Blessing

May God lead you in paths of righteousness and peace –
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and always, **Amen**.

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