

Written Service 17 August - Prepared by Rev'd Peter Clark

Call to Worship

Come people of the Risen One, you who delight to praise God,
come and tune your hearts to sing. We come to worship God.

Come you who find joy in the morning sun,
dry your nighttime tears and tell of God's victories!
Come and follow the One whose love never changes and whose mercies never end.
We come to worship God.

Come, young and old, people of faith, come!
Come with empty hands to find the riches of God's grace;
Come and rejoice, O Church of Christ, rejoice!
We come to worship God.

*(After Come People of the Risen King
by Kristyn & Keith Getty and Stuart Townend)*

Hymn - Singing the Faith 30 - Jesus, stand among us

1 Jesus, stand among us
at the meeting of our lives,
be our sweet agreement
at the meeting of our eyes.
O Jesus, we love you, so we gather here,
join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.

2 So to you we're gathering
out of each and ev'ry land,
Christ the love between us
at the joining of our hands.
O Jesus, we love you, so we gather here,
join our hearts in unity and take away our fear.
Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Prayers of Approach & Preparation

We come to worship You, O Most High,
for You have planted, nurtured, and cared for
us, as a farmer cares for the crops.
You have ensured we are rooted in Your Word,
watered by Your own hand, and bathed in Your
light.

For this we thank You.

We come to worship You, O Risen Lord,
to ensure we grow right, to see where we
need pruning, and to confront the fact that
often we produce rotten fruit.

Where we hoped to provide sustenance, we
have yielded only wormwood.

Where we desired to be good, we have
become bitter.

Where we once showed such promise, we
have failed to follow.

Forgive us, Good Lord,
where our wealth has made others poor,
where our greed has led to others' hunger,
where our lifestyles despoil the earth, our
mother.

Forgive us, and give us time to change!
We come to worship you, Most Holy Spirit,
in the faith that we can be forgiven,
in the hope that we can change,

in the promise of Your guiding presence,
and in the expectation that, in Your good time,
we will yield good fruit. Amen.

May God, the vinedresser continue to nurture
you.

May God, the Good Shepherd, continue to
lead you.

May God, the forgiving one, hold you in divine
arms.

May God, the Eternal Trinity of Love, give you
time to change. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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 us 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 forever. AMEN

Theme Introduction

I remember visiting Grandad in Bristol where grew runner beans in his back yard. It was a small area but, boy were his canes prolific and he always pressed us to take some 'Kidney Beans' (as he called them) when we left.

It wasn't until my 40s that I started to grow my own in the garden - initiated by having bought a range of seeds for a sermon on the mustard seed, and, not wishing to waste them, planted them in the manse garden. To my delight I had a crop of carrots, runner beans, radishes ... and ironically only about 5 pods of my favourite vegetable - peas!

I have, however, grown vegetables in my garden even since and delight at eating beans, courgettes and more - this year I'm excited by some butternut squash developing! I am always hugely disappointed when seeds don't germinate or slugs and aphids destroy my crop. Ah but when stuff grows, there is a particular joy in eating something that I planted and grew myself, investing time in watering and nurturing them and I always think of my dear old Grandad as I harvest the runner beans! I was minded of this when I read today's Old Testament reading.

1st Scripture Reading - Isaiah 5:1-7

1 Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard: My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. 2 He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watch-tower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. 3 And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. 4 What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. 6 I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns; will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

2nd Scripture Reading - Luke 12:49-56

49 'I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50 I have a baptism with which to be baptised, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51 Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52 From now on, five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53 they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.' 54 He also said to the crowds, 'When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, "It is going to rain"; and so it happens. 55 And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, "There will be scorching heat"; and it happens. 56 You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

Hymn 2 - Oh the life of the world is a joy and a treasure,

1 Oh the life of the world is a joy and a treasure,
unfolding in beauty the green-growing tree,
the changing of seasons in mountain and valley,
the stars and the bright restless sea.
2 Oh the life of the world is a fountain of goodness
overflowing in labour and passion and pain,
in the sound of the city and the silence of wisdom,
in the birth of a child once again.

3 Oh the life of the world is the source of our healing.
It rises in laughter and wells up in song;
it springs from the care of the poor and the broken
and refreshes where justice is strong.
4 So give thanks for the life and give love to the maker,
and rejoice in the gift of the bright risen Son,
and walk in the peace and the power of the Spirit
till the days of our living are done.

Words: © Kathy Galloway (b. 1952)

Reflection - Of Vines and Vineyards

It's worth recapping on the context of the original prophet Isaiah in the 8th Century BC when the hebraic people lived in two nations - northern Israel (aka Samaria) and southern Judah. They were living under the shadow of the threat from the burgeoning Assyrian Empire to the north - one that ultimately conquered Israel and came precious close to overrunning Judah too.

And you might think that the threat was caused by military might but Isaiah is adamant that it was a judgement from God on those ruling the southern kingdom. And like Jesus many centuries later, he spread his message by telling a parable - a simple story that often sounds simple and unthreatening ... until its punchline circles like a parabola back to bite the listener!

Imagine the audience sitting and hearing Isaiah talk of a vineyard that sounds positive and full of the promise of a bumper crop, only to find subsequently, despite all the hard work of the vine-grower, that all the bunches are bitter and useless. They would have all nodded their heads in sympathy for, like me, when my garden crops fail to grow, they would have had similar experiences? What more could he have done, he asks, having listed all the right things that have already been carried out?

They possibly continued head-nodding ... until, the story starts to bite. The story, it turns out, isn't about a vineyard at all but, rather, about a greedy and oppressive elite. The vineyard isn't one run by Isaiah but the state of Judah ... and the vineyard owner is none other than the Lord their God!

They'd all agreed that such a useless and unproductive vineyard should be dug up and destroyed and one wonders whether the heads were still nodding at the prospect of the Assyrians being the ones who come to destroy Israel and Judah? The instruments of God in judgement of their behaviour and God's gross disappointment at their disobedience to the way of the Lord!

It is worth saying that this is not Isaiah's only prophecy of the period and the first 39 chapters of the book cover it. It is also worth adding that there was a degree of success in response to his message, which included encouragement to turn away from these failing, unjust ways and towards God's loving and righteous ones. Perhaps summed up by 'In quietness and confidence shall be your strength' (Isaiah 30:15)? That confidence being in trusting in God and not human ways of greed, hunger for power and injustice! According to the books of Kings and Chronicles, the nation repented wholesale and the Assyrian army besieging Jerusalem turned around and returned home.

In our text from Luke, we find an uncharacteristically judgy and threatening Jesus giving a similar message to Isaiah's about responding to the call of God, and warning that not everything goes smoothly in a path of sweetness and light.

In a world that lies in the shadow of deeply threatening and worrying world events, there is a temptation to look in despair and give up all hope. And I suspect we can all imagine God looking at it all too, and sadly shaking the divine head in disappointment at the way we have messed that wonderful vineyard that is God's creation.

It is also worth remembering that there have been many past periods which have looked similarly hopeless? Perhaps our calling as followers of Jesus is to continue to do our best to live our lives in that better way ... and to tell all we know why God's way is better? Amen.

Prayers

As God's people longing for justice in difficult times, we bring our prayers to the Holy One for the world, the Church, and ourselves. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer!

Merciful Judge, we live in a world of so much disparity between rich and poor, where unimaginable wealth insulates the lives of the super-rich, and where the poor struggle along from hand to mouth.

We live in a world of so much disparity between north and south, where developing countries are enslaved by debt and foreign policy, exploited by the developed who squander their resources and people so they can live in ease.

We live in a world with so much disparity between what we know we should do and how we live; burning oil, exploiting natural resources, and failing to read the signs of the times the Earth gives us.

Give us time to change, Merciful Judge, that we don't need the coming calamity to change our minds. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer!

Living Lord, we pray for your Church, called to be a sign of Your salvation yet often mired in scandal and sin; a place supposed to be safe becoming a place of danger to so many.

We pray for your Church, called to be a sign of Your love, yet often filled with judgement and hatred, where those who lead protect their backs and advance their careers, while the world looks on in horror.

We pray for your Church, called to be a sign of reconciliation fighting long lost battles, stoking hatred in return for political power, and forgetting that it, too, will one day have to give account.

Give us time to change, Living Lord, that we don't need the coming calamity to change our minds. God, in your mercy, hear our prayer!

Troubling Spirit, we pray for ourselves, so often complacent, unable to read the signs of the times, and knowing Your will but refusing to follow...(pause)

We pray for those we love, in any kind of need... (pause)

We pray for those we struggle to love...(pause)

God, in your mercy, hear our prayer! Amen

Hymn - Singing the Faith 519 Father I place into your hands

1 Father, I place into your hands
the things I cannot do.
Father, I place into your hands
the times that I've been through.
Father, I place into your hands
the way that I should go,
for I know I always can trust you.

2 Father, I place into your hands
my friends and family.
Father, I place into your hands
the things that trouble me.
Father, I place into your hands
the person I would be,
for I know I always can trust you.

3 Father, we love to see your face,
we love to hear your voice.
Father, we love to sing your praise
and in your name rejoice.
Father, we love to walk with you
and in your presence rest,
for we know we always can trust you.

4 Father, I want to be with you
and do the things you do.
Father, I want to speak the words
that you are speaking too.
Father, I want to love the ones
that you will draw to you,
for I know that I am one with you.

Jenny Hewer (b. 1945) © 1975, Thankyou Music.

Blessing

May the One who inspired prophets to speak truth to power,
the One who taught us to understand the signs of the times,
and the One who urges us to be justice seeking people,
inspire you, give you the grace to understand, and the desire to pursue justice,
that you may bless others as you have been blessed yourselves.
And the blessing of Almighty God,
Eternal Majesty, Enfleshed Word, Energising Spirit,
be with you, now and evermore, Amen.

(Prayers from URC Daily Devotions % Rev'd Andy Braunston)