

Dorset South & West Circuit. Written Service.
Sunday 19th July 2026 .
Third Sunday of Bible Month: 'Press on.'

Prepared by Revd Jean Quick.



Call to Worship. 'Rejoice in the Lord'. Philippians 3:1

STF 21

Born in song!
God's people have always been singing.
Born in song!
Hearts and voices raised.
So today we worship together;
God alone is worthy to be praised.

Praise to God!
For he is the one who has made us.
Praise to God!
We his image bear.
Heaven and earth are full of his glory;
let creation praise him everywhere.

Christ is King!
He left all the glory of heaven.
Christ is King!

Born to share in our pain;
crucified, for sinners atoning,
risen, exalted, soon to come again.

Sing the song!
God's Spirit is poured out among us.
Sing the song!
He has made us anew.
Ev'ry member part of the Body;
given his power, his will to seek and do.

Tell the world!
All power to Jesus is given.
Tell the world!
He is with us always.
Spread the word, that all may receive him;
every tongue confess and sing his praise.

Prayers of adoration and confession

Praise be to You Lord Jesus, for You fill my soul with joy and gladness. Joy because I know that You will be alongside me in all I do, and gladness because You bring the best out of every situation that comes my way. Your gifts enable me to stand above the problems that I encounter in this world; for when these troubles touch me, Your love restores my soul, and leads me back again to You in joy and gladness! You cause me to rejoice in so many ways. As I look around me there's so much surrounding me that speaks of your love and faithfulness. In this time of worship help me to press on and to discover even more about your love. **Amen**

The apostle Paul longed to be found in Christ. I know that should be my constant longing. Despite knowing that Jesus' presence is the greatest treasure I possess. I know how easily I allow the fears, troubles, woes and anxiety of life to cloud my view. I allow so much that is unnecessary to clog up my life, and halt me on the ways that lead to being found in Christ's presence. That presence is love, and I praise you for constantly showing this love to me, despite the many ways I falter and fail. Forgive me for my many mistakes and help me to press on in the direction you want me to go. **Amen.**

Bible reading. Philippians 3:12-16

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.

Reflection

I recently watched a wonderful performance by the musician and comedian Richard Digance. He is 77 years old now and still as sharp witted as ever. Early on in his performance he said with a cheeky grin, he was going to play six encore's now because by the end of his show he would be far too exhausted to come back on stage and play an encore and he wanted to give us the opportunity to brag that he played six encore's for us! The false exit at a concert is a bit of a lark. We know the performer is going to come back on. A little like some preachers who say 'and finally', but really?

Paul begins what we know as chapter three of his epistle with "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." Then proceeds with another chapter of exhortation. Paul writes to encourage the Christians at Philippi to live joyfully in every circumstance. The most joyous book in the Bible comes from the pen of the author chained to a Roman guard. The NIV Student Bible says, 'many scholars believe Paul wrote Philippians in Rome just about the time Nero began feeding Christians to ravenous lions and burning them as torches to illuminate his banquets. In such an environment, how could joy possibly thrive? Paul points to Jesus' death to show that God can take even the darkest moment in history and turn it into good. The cross and Jesus' triumph over death prove that nothing is powerful enough to stamp out a reason for joy "in the Lord," as Paul says.'

His finally in chapter 3 verse 1 is not a false exit or an additional point to his thoughts. It's a pivotal point in his letter. He is pivoting to his main point that contains crucial truths. Joy is a command, not a suggestion. When Paul writes "rejoice in the Lord," he uses an active command. He isn't suggesting that the Philippians feel happy; rather, he is commanding them to actively direct their joy toward God. True joy is independent of your circumstances, financial status, or health, it is a secure, unchanging position found only in Christ.

I like to watch the TV reality show, 'Rich house, Poor house.' Where families from both sides of the wealth divide, exchange houses, lives and income for a week. You marvel at the self made rich folks and their extravagant lifestyle and wonder what on earth will they gain from this exchange? Nearly always it's a realisation that wealth doesn't make you happy and can rob you of some of the joys in life and family.

I am often reminded of the character in one of Jesus' stories who overwhelmed with his riches remarked on how he would just have to build bigger barns. His wealth didn't bring Joy but stress. Jesus called him a fool.

When we think about the saints and their lives, I would not want to exchange places with Paul or any of the Christians of his time. We can only scratch the surface of understanding how they really suffered for their faith. Tortured facing death all in the cause of being a follower of Christ. For them the alternative is unthinkable. And despite their terrible experiences they still found joy in the Lord. I wonder what it was like for St Paul as he wrote this letter? He was imprisoned, I guess I would have my own survival concerns uppermost in my mind. Paul takes time to write to encourage a congregation he had established. Not with assurances to not worry about him, but to keep focusing on Christ and to be joyful. What could he possibly be joyful about? About being a Citizen of Heaven. About pressing onward no matter what.

In the tv programme we have yet to see someone from the poor side who is embittered about their circumstances. They are hopeful of better times and often the rich couple step in and help them on the ladder to a better life. Paul was not arguing for better times, just in what ever circumstances we find ourselves, we must rejoice. Not be embittered or even happy, but to have a quality of joy that comes from faith in Christ.

Paul does seem to repeat himself frequently and he says he makes no apologies for this. In verse one he says that it's no trouble to him to write the same things again. Then in verse eighteen he says that he has told them before and he is repeating it again and with deep emotions. The message he is repeating is that so many reject the ways of Christ but we are citizens of heaven. That's a great encore!

When we look around the world and especially how life impacts on us. There's plenty to grumble about. Higher prices, people's lack of respect for others, the weather! I am writing this in the latest red heatwave alert. Is this how citizens of heaven behave? Will we still be grumpy in heaven? "Clouds are too cold, too much harp playing!"

Ok that's silly but honestly do we live like citizens of heaven now? I'm as guilty as the next person of having my grumbles. I was cleaning out a cupboard that probably hasn't been touched in years and moaning about all this stuff. It was going to be donated to a Ukrainian charity and when I read the latest charity newsletter I like St Paul had tears in my eyes. Here am I with so much stuff and an abundance of cupboards that get overlooked and in many countries around the world people barely have enough to give them shelter. What they once had was stripped away by warfare and devastating situations that are unimaginably cruel.

So the crux of his penultimate chapter to the letter is that we must press on. Never give up. We might feel our age, we may feel forgetful at times. We can never sit back and say I have done my bit, I have arrived and offer other such excuses.

St Paul outlines how to the world he is, well a saint. He achieved so much for the gospel sake and yet he still doesn't believe that he has achieved his goal. The goal that can only be achieved by full commitment to the ways of Christ. We have to forget our past triumphs or failures and we are called to keep going. Keep striving to be the disciples of Christ, Citizen's of Heaven.

Have you ever looked at the questions people have to answer if they want to become citizens of a country? I would fail every time. Here's a couple of questions for you from the test for British citizenship.

Which country's flag is not part of the Union Flag?

When did the Habeas Corpus Act become law?

Did you get 1679? The Act guaranteed that no one could be held prisoner unlawfully. Every prisoner has a right to a court hearing. I had to look it up and my apologies to the Welsh I didn't realise that your flag is not

part of the Union Flag. I am not telling you how many questions in the British citizenship test I failed! But I can rest assured that by birthright I am a British citizen. To be a good citizen comes with responsibilities and certain duties to our country and the community we live in. Being a citizen of Heaven is so much easier. There's no test to pass. Saint Paul talks about how Christ chose him. We are chosen and we just need to respond to Christ's gracious call and live lives worthy of that calling.

To strain toward. It's a bit like a tug of war and we might find ourselves pulled towards living unlike a citizen of heaven, compromising, but we must keep straining towards the goal that is ours in Christ. To live His ways and joyously.

I recently read a Dystopian novel, not my favourite works of fiction. They are always so bleak about how society in the future has collapsed. The world is destroyed and people live vengeful savage existence's. Thankfully they are at the present, works of fiction. However if we were to step back from being citizens of heaven, what would happen to humanity?

We see humanity's inhumanity every time we watch the news or even read our local newspapers. We so need to hear and act on the message to keep pressing forward and sharing by our example the blessings that living as a citizen of heaven brings.

STF 660

Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits &
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we serve a faithful Master,
faithful service may we give.

Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue:
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce,
college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning,
may we see your kingdom come.

Hard decisions may confront us,
urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword-
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned
in submission to our King.

Prayers of Intercession

Heavenly Father, I Pray for my friends and family, and those I meet daily in the community. I pray that they may come to know Christ and experience the life giving power of His resurrection. May they find fellowship with Him even in the midst of hardships. May the temporary struggles of this world fade in light of the priceless joy of walking so closely with You. For Freedom from the Past and Grace to Press On I pray for those close to me and for myself.

Heavenly Father, I Pray for those who are weighed down by guilt, past mistakes, or former failures. I ask that Your Spirit would grant them the grace to forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead. Help them to accept that they are forgiven by your grace and mercy. Help them to keep their eyes fixed on the call to press on toward the finish line with renewed hope and determination. To set right what is in their power to amend and to find peace in themselves.

Heavenly Father, I pray that You would guard the hearts and minds of Your people against earthly distractions and worldly mindsets. Open their eyes to recognise the beauty of Your truth. Remind us daily that our true citizenship is in heaven, and help us to live lives that reflect who we are. We thank you for our Circuit and it's churches and we pray for all the many activities that remind people of your love.

Heavenly Father as we have considered the call to perseverance we pray for those who have no other choice but to persevere through unimaginable difficulties. We pray for the many areas of conflict in our world. For those who have lost everything, we pray that they might persevere in hope. We thank you for the many aid agencies around the world, guide them and sustain them in all their efforts. We pray for those You have put on our minds this week and pray especially for them that they might know the comfort that you can bring to them in their difficulties.

We gather our thoughts and prayers together as we say **the Lord's Prayer**.

STF 345

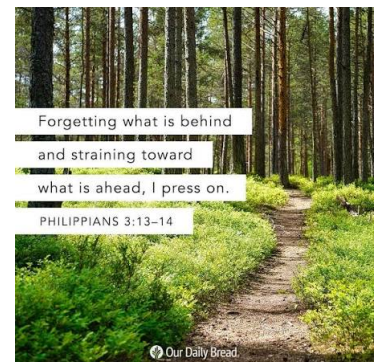
And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my God, should die for me?
Amazing love! How can it be
that you, my God, should die for me?

2. What mystery here! The Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the highest angel tries
to sound the depths of love divine!
What mercy this! Let earth adore;
let angel minds enquire no more.
What mercy this! Let earth adore;
let angel minds enquire no more.

3. He left his Father's throne above-
so free, so infinite his grace-
humbled himself in all his love
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
What mercy this, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me!
What mercy this, immense and free,
for, O my God, it found out me!

4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night:
then shone your glorious gospel ray;
I woke! The dungeon flamed with light!
My chains fell off; my heart was new,
I rose, went forth and followed you!
My chains fell off; my heart was new,
I rose, went forth and followed you!

5. 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;
bold I approach the eternal throne
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.



The Blessing

May we forget what is behind and press on towards the path that Christ calls us to follow. Mindful that we are Citizens of Heaven. Loved and affirmed by God's grace and mercy. Let us press ahead, with the knowledge of God's grace and blessings. **Amen.**