

Forget what lies behind, strain forward to what lies ahead, the goal, the heavenly call of Christ

Call to Worship

As we gather, we come together as people of the cross and resurrection.

We come as children of the Father

Reconciled by grace through the Son

And filled with God's love through the Spirit

Praise the Lord! **Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!**

Praise him for his mighty deeds; **Praise him according to his excellent greatness!**

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! **Praise the Lord!**

Let us worship God with joy!

StF 24 Come now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time

To give your heart

Come, just as you are to worship

Come, just as you are

Before your God Come

One day every Tongue will confess You are God One day every knee will bow Still the greatest treasure Remains for those Who gladly choose You now

Prayers

Creator of all, Sustainer of all, Saviour of all, Your glory and majesty are beyond our understanding, Your power too awesome to behold. And yet your love enfolds us as a gentle breeze. Saviour of all, Sustainer of all, Creator of all, we bless your holy name

For the love you have shown us as sometimes reluctant disciples, your patience in being with us when we decide to go our way, your hand that is there for us as we stumble or are anxious, your gentle whisper reminding us that you will never let us go, for all of this and more besides what can we do but offer you the worship of our hearts and lives.

Prayer of Confession

You have given us a world of beauty, and we have spoilt it.

A world to feed us, and so many go hungry.

A world of riches, and we are unwilling to share.

A world to care for, and we think only of ourselves.

Forgive us, gracious God, for those times your heart is saddened

by our selfishness. For those times we have no thought for others, no cares but ours.

Hear the words of our hearts as we lift up silent prayers.

Here then, God's words of grace, your sins are forgiven.

Because God has forgiven us Jesus is waiting for us with open arms.

May we love God and each other as much as God, first loves us! Amen

Readings:

Matthew 21: 33-46

'Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect

his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So, they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes"?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Philippians 3: 4b -14

even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow, I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Sermon

In 2013 my friend Louise was diagnosed with motor neuron disease aged 39. When she first was given the devastating news, she was understandably angry with God and for a few days contemplated giving up her faith. Then she realized that she could not do life (or death) without Christ. This was the passage of scripture she wanted at her funeral to celebrate that she had

forgotten what lay behind, strained forward to what lay ahead and pressed on towards the goal, the prize the heavenly call of Christ. Put another way she pressed on, fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith (2 Timothy 4 verse 7).

Philippians is a letter written by the apostle Paul when he was imprisoned (probably in Rome). The Philippian congregation resulted from Paul's first missionary endeavours in Europe. The majority of the people in the Philippian church were likely from a gentile, rather than Jewish, background. Such an assumption fits with the history of the city in Macedonia, north of Greece. Macedonia was a province of the Roman Empire. In the half century before Christ's birth, the Roman Emperor gave the city special legal status that privileged its citizens with many of the rights of Roman citizens. It was on the main route that brought together travellers from the west and the east. The Philippians had a variety of religious options, Roman imperial worship, Roman gods, Judaism, and a host of other religions, from which to choose.

As with every letter, we only have part of the story - we don't know what was written to Paul that made him respond the way he did. Scholars suspect that Jewish missionaries visited the Philippian congregation in Paul's absence. These missionaries conveyed the message that circumcision and the practice of Jewish purity laws were necessary. Their preaching caused confusion among the small Christian congregation.

Paul discusses his own achievements in light of his Jewish heritage but then emphasises his loss or voluntary surrender of all things in light of his encounter with Christ. Paul writes, "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ." The wording here indicates that the "loss" is real. The imprisoned Paul has genuinely lost or surrendered what he had previously worked hard to obtain. The English word "rubbish" does not convey the sharpness of Paul's language. He views his accomplishments as having the value of excrement, rotten food, or filth.

Paul had status in the Jewish faith, circumcised on the right day, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, he kept the law blamelessly kept the rules zealously like a Pharisee, did everything he should was a model Jew, for goodness' sake he even persecuted the church! In Jewish terms he had made it. Yet all this, Paul said, was horse shit, dung, utterly worthless in comparison to knowing Christ as Lord. I deliberately use language to shock you there, but it is in the original language the Greek term skybalon means dung.

Nothing matters but Christ, knowing Him, loving Him, being in Him.

Trying to be a nice person, dung, having position and status in the church, dung, be valued and trusted for what you do, skybalon. Do you like me often hear people say of those who have died Oh they did so much for the church they will be in heaven. They may be, they may not but reliance on status and churchianity is no good. Are you like Paul bent on the ruthless pursuit of Christ? The ONLY thing of value is knowing Christ as Saviour and Lord and living like that and in that. Knowing Him, being in Him, dwelling in Him, pressing into Christ and being found in Him. Pursuing Him and His Kingdom coming in you, it is all that matters.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, skybalon, dung. A good athlete does not keep looking over their shoulder but instead forgets "what lies behind" (v. 13). Maybe Paul is here referring not only to his life before he encountered Jesus, but also to the earlier part of his Christian discipleship. Paul cannot simply 'rest on his laurels' (to use another image with roots in ancient Greek athletics) as a result of what he has already done as

a Christian in the past. A good athlete is focused on the finishing line and strains 'forward to what lies ahead' (v. 13). Christians are not called to live in their own strength - but equally Christians are called to be focused on the work of God's kingdom and on their own growth in discipleship. This is in God's strength - but it does require a focussed and a disciplined life. A good athlete has the prize in view. For Paul, this prize is the "heavenly [or "upward" in the NRSV footnote] call of God in Christ Jesus" (v. 14). This image may refer to the way that victorious athletes were called "upwards", that is up the steps in the athletics stadium, in order to receive their prize. The detailed meaning of the phrase itself is debated, with some seeing the prize as a relationship with Jesus Christ which is experienced in this life, and others seeing the phrase as a reference to the invitation to be in God's eternal presence at the end of this earthly race. What is clear in this image is that Paul is running this race with a single-minded focus (verses 12-14)

To Ponder

What will it mean for you today to forget "what lies behind "and to strain "forward to what lies ahead" (v. 13)?

What do you understand by "the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus"?

Prayers of Intercession

God of sorrow and joy, we bring before you the ache of our world and the wounds of our own communities.

Hold in your tender mercy all who live with the memory of violence and loss, and all places where fear and harm overshadow daily life. In Christ, who promises that pain will turn into joy, stand with those who serve your Kingdom in challenging and fragile times.

By your Spirit, guide us in the work of healing, reconciliation and peacemaking.

Renew our courage, deepen our compassion, and weave our lives into your great tapestry of hope, that your risen joy may yet be known among us. Amen. Lord, we pray for all who are depressed and feel defeated by life. Bring your healing to all who are broken, ease their pain and touch them with your Holy Spirit, that their sorrow will turn into joy. We ask that you will wrap your ever-loving arms around all who suffer, that they may rejoice and walk in the redeeming light of loving and being loved by you. Faithful God, source of all our aspirations and ground of all our believing; let us risk everything in the service of your kingdom and trust all things to the strength of your Holy Spirit; through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Lords Prayer

We join in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples: - **Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom, thy will done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread Forgive us our trespasses As we forgive those who trespass against us, Lead us not into temptation But deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory for ever and ever, Amen.**

Blessing May the love of Jesus Christ bring us wholeness, the grace of God the Father grant us peace, the breath of Holy Spirit instill passion and the unity between them give us strength for this and every day. Amen. **The Blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest, remain and abide with you all, with those you love and those you are called to love, now, in the name of Christ. Amen**