

Call to Worship – Psalm 111

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart,
in the company of the upright, in the congregation.
Great are the works of the Lord,
studied by all who delight in them.
Full of honour and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures for ever.
He has gained renown by his wonderful deeds;
the LORD is gracious and merciful.

Opening Prayer

Gracious and Loving God, we come before you today, pausing in our travel on our Christian journey for a spiritual top up. We know that you are always there with us, wherever we may go, whatever we may do, and so we stop and recognise your powerful and awesome influence on our life, and the lives of those whom we love. We cannot offer a lifetime of praise except by following your teaching and mimicking your actions, each and every day, each and every opportunity, however hard it may be. We praise and bless you for the times you hold us up, keep us going, give us extra encouragement. And we also praise you and bless you for the times when we can stop and reflect, recharge, feel your presence in our silence. We do not understand your ways, guiding God, but we trust in you, in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, to continue to fulfil their promises as we fulfil ours, to follow you all the days of our lives, making disciples as we go, and loving our neighbours as ourselves. Amen.

Hymn StF 639

Through the love of God our Saviour
all will be well.
Free and changeless is his favour;
all, all is well.
Precious is the blood that healed us,
perfect is the grace that sealed us,
strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;
all must be well.

Though we pass through tribulation,
all will be well.
Christ has purchased full salvation,
all, all is well.
Happy still in God confiding,
fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
all must be well.

We expect a bright tomorrow;
all will be well.
Faith can sing through days of sorrow all,
all is well.
On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
then in living or in dying,
all must be well.

Mary Peters



Prayer of Confession

There are too many times, loving God, when we fail, fall down; when we through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault, chose a path not of your making. When we retreat into our humanity, rather than embrace our spirituality, when we take the easy, wide road, going along the crowd, rather than choosing the narrow path of righteousness. When we let you down, guiding God, please forgive us. Allow us to recognise our mistakes, make amends where and when we can, forgiving ourselves and others, and hoping that we too are forgiven by them. When life is hard, help us not to blame the world, others or even you, but pray more fervently for your forgiveness and blessing to set us right again. We long to hear those wondrous words 'your sins are forgiven', help make us worthy, we pray. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please prayer whichever version in whatever language you prefer.

Reading – Luke 17: 11 – 19

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'

Hymn StF 641

When circumstances make my life
too hard to understand,
no doubt or fear, no pain or strife,
can snatch me from God's hand.

In valleys where the path is steep,
with shadows dark and long,
I know the Shepherd leads his sheep –
his grace will keep me strong.

Though sorrow and perplexity are
often what I feel,
Gethsemane and Calvary
affirm God's love is real.

It is enough for me to know
God's promise and God's care:
wherever on life's path I go
my Saviour will be there.

Martin Leckebusch

Reflection

Our reading is hopefully familiar to you – the story of the ten lepers, outcasts from their own societies, gathered together for mutual support, even though in normal circumstances they would not associate with each other. They are not in a regular community, but are in between towns, areas, regions, yet obviously keeping an eye on the travellers in case they may solicit some help, probably looking for money to exchange for the basic of food and drink. So maybe when Jesus and his entourage pass by they hope for a good day, a profitable day, a prosperous day. Here is someone known to be generous, surrounded by people who follow his lead, so something good might come from this encounter.

They are careful not to approach, as are the rules of the time, but shout loud enough to be heard, to be seen. He, Jesus, doesn't interrogate them, ask them their history or their backgrounds, who their family are, what they did for a job, their ages or their names. He simply says to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' Because the priest would have to verify their cleanliness before they could rejoin their families and communities.

They don't even get to the priest before they notice that they are healed, so nine go on to get their verification to restore their lives, and one, only one, returns to Jesus first to say thank you and praise God, even though he, it was emphasised, was a foreigner, and outsider, a Samaritan. This is duly noted, as an example of faith, but we don't know what happens next, frustratingly.

I think it is highly unlikely that the other nine had their healing revoked, even though that might be our immediate human reaction – they didn't say 'thank you' so I'm going to take back their gift. Jesus is not as petty as we might be. And as the one who did return possibly didn't meet with the others again, as you may expect from a Samaritan amongst Jews, he probably didn't get to share his story with them, but would have done so with his own people, as did the woman at the well.

As all ten knew, or found out, who Jesus was, their story of his healing powers will have spread, he didn't tell them not to say anything, so we can easily see how Jesus' fame and story would have spread. More converts, more followers, more believers. But only half the story.

The Samaritan was healed because of his faith, unfortunately a passage used to berate modern day sick people who 'won't get well' because they 'do not have enough faith'. But Jesus had already performed the healing, without asking about faith, he could see their hope, and their desperation, and that was enough. The one returning was able to attribute their healing to God, the others, we don't know.

As someone who has a chronic illness, which can leave me outside mainstream society, I have never wondered if I don't have enough faith, and that's why I have never been miraculously cured, because I know that this wasn't inflicted on me by some malevolent force, it is something that happened to me regardless, as many other illnesses and conditions happen to others. I don't believe I am being punished, but I do know that God, Jesus, and the Spirit, still help and guide me on my daily journey, on good days and bad. It is a hard road, but made easier by faith, because I know that I am never alone, outcast, marginalised, by condition, because Jesus always welcomes me in.

As the Tim Hughes hymn (StF 632 v 2) says:

In the lone hour of my sorrow,
through the darkest night of my soul,
you surround me and sustain me;
my defender forever more.

Our faith holds us to God, as long as we allow it. Amen.



Hymn StF 518

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

Not forever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would strike the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side.

Love Maria Willis

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

May we never forget to give thanks for the little things, and for our very lives, each unique and purposeful in God plan, each delightful in God's sight. May we always remember to thank those around us, for the little things, and how we can live our lives, each important and necessary, and appreciated in so many ways. Whether in our hearts or with our voices, let the thank yous ring out in sincerity. Amen.

And on this day, in this place, at this time, we bring to you, gracious God, the troubles of the world, the worries of our lives. We do not need to list them, as you already know them, but let us be aware, listening to what we can do to help ourselves, and others. Let us be the support, the encouragement, the practical giver of time, money, skill, advocacy to all who need it. And when we ask for your aid, make sure that we take the time to listen and understand what is required of us, however doubtful we may be.

We pray for faith for those of us who are wavering...

We pray for strength for those of us who feel alone...

We pray for comfort for those of us who suffer pain and illness...

We pray for hope for those of us who are afraid...

We pray for peace for those of us who are warring...

We pray for love, unconditional love, for the whole world. Amen.

Hymn StF 322

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

Dear name – the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace!

Jesus! My Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.

John Newton

Blessing

Bless us always, gracious God,
through the hands that care for us,
and the ones we care for,
living and hopeful, in Jesus love. Amen.