

**DSW Written Service**  
**Sunday 26 October 2025**

**Call to worship** *From Psalm 87:*

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

My soul longs to enter your courts.

With my whole being, heart, body and soul,

I will sing joyfully to the living God!

Blessed are the people who put their trust in you.

**Hymn [STF 545]**

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Be all else but naught to me, save that Thou art;  
Be Thou my best thought in the day & the night,  
Both waking and sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, be Thou my true word,  
Be Thou ever with me, and I with Thee, Lord;  
Be Thou my great Father, thy child let me be;  
Be Thou in me dwelling, and I one with Thee.

Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
Be Thou my whole armour, be Thou my true  
might;  
Be Thou my soul's shelter, be Thou my strong  
tower:  
O raise Thou me heavenward, great Power of my  
power.

Riches I need not, nor man's empty praise:  
Be Thou mine inheritance now and always;  
Be Thou and Thou only the first in my heart:  
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright Sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won;  
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be Thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

*Irish, 8<sup>th</sup> century, translated Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931)*

**Prayers**

Eternal Father, your love echoes throughout  
history,  
Jesus, our Risen Saviour, you promised never to  
leave or forsake us,  
Holy Spirit, who comforts and counsels us,  
we praise and adore your holy name.  
we praise and adore your perfect presence.  
we praise and adore your eternal spirit of  
enlightenment and encouragement.

**Amen.**

**Gospel Reading – Luke 18: 9-14**

*To some who were confident of their own  
righteousness and looked down on everyone  
else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the*

*temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax  
collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed:  
'God, I thank you that I am not like other people—  
robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax  
collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I  
get.'*

*"But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would  
not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and  
said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'*

*"I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went  
home justified before God. For all those who exalt  
themselves will be humbled, and those who humble  
themselves will be exalted."*

**Reading: 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18**

*For I am already being poured out like a drink  
offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have  
fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have  
kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown  
of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge,  
will award to me on that day—and not only to me,  
but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

*At my first defence, no one came to my support, but  
everyone deserted me. May it not be held against  
them. But the Lord stood at my side and gave me  
strength, so that through me the message might be  
fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it.  
And I was delivered from the lion's mouth. The Lord  
will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me  
safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for  
ever and ever. Amen.*

**Reflection**

Have you ever experienced something that didn't  
quite live up to your expectations - perhaps a long  
anticipated film or TV programme that wasn't as  
good as you hoped it might be, or a disappointing  
meal? Perhaps like me you've received a big parcel  
in the post which, when all the packaging is  
removed, turns out to be a lot smaller than it  
looked from the outside!

Perhaps you've felt disappointed by celebrities  
who offer advice to others about lifestyles which  
it transpires they don't follow themselves, or  
politicians who make promises they don't deliver,  
or get caught doing things they shouldn't be  
doing.

I imagine that's the kind of thing Jesus was alluding  
to in this story from Luke's gospel about two  
people praying at the temple. One is the Pharisee  
standing praying & boasting about his good works,  
full of pride in himself and his own achievements,  
and full of disdain for others he considers beneath  
him, including the nearby tax collector.

The tax collector meanwhile knows he's messed up and made wrong choices, and is being honest with God as he seeks forgiveness.

Jesus reminds us that what matters is not what we look like on the outside, but what we look like on the inside, and that we shouldn't look down on anyone. Instead we should look to God, the one who always delivers, who gives our lives true meaning, offering forgiveness and a new start and purpose in our lives, through our living personal relationship with him.

In the Epistle Paul is writing with some final advice to his young protege and successor Timothy, and I imagine he embraced the idea that we shouldn't judge or write off someone else as being beyond the possibility of transformation, having initially been rejected (perhaps understandably) by the apostles after his conversion on the road to Damascus.

Paul openly acknowledged himself as "previously the foremost of sinners" who was famous for persecuting the early followers of Jesus, and at that point in his life it probably was hard to imagine anyone less likely to be an encourager of people in their Christian faith, or a builder of the kingdom of God wouldn't it? And yet Paul's legacy is the spread of Christianity across Europe and Asia.

I find myself wondering how Paul must have felt as he wrote these words. He probably knew he was going to die soon, imprisoned in Rome for the second time as part of Nero's campaign to eradicate Christianity, and here he's writing his last letter to his "son" Timothy, passing on the baton of leadership, reminding him of his teaching, of what's really important, and encouraging him in the faith. Some scholars suggest this second letter to Timothy is one of Paul's most intimate and moving epistles.

I wonder too how Timothy felt as he read this letter from his beloved mentor, knowing this might be the last one he might receive?

As Paul nears the end of his life, he can confidently say "I've finished the race, I've fought the good fight."

I'm haven't run many races, but I did join a "Race for Life" some years ago to raise money & awareness of breast cancer, with my younger sister who is a breast cancer survivor and a group of friends and family. There were several hundred

runners, who all ran – and walked – at our own pace. Some ran the whole course, some walked all the way, some, like me, did a mixture, but what I remember is that everyone who crossed the line was made a fuss of - even those who finished several hours after the first ones, we all got a goody bag and a medal and it was a great celebration.

Friends and family members who've taken part in and supported loved ones in half and full marathons testify that it's often emotional for everyone taking how emotional it can be, especially when they finally cross the finishing line. The important thing is the finishing – not how fast you ran, or what place you came in at – but just that you had run the race and you'd finished it.

As someone once said, "The world has a lot of starters but very few finishers."

And as someone else said, "Saints are sinners who kept on trying."

I find it inspiring that having the end in sight, which wasn't going to be a pleasant one given the likelihood of execution, Paul is convinced of where he's going and confident in his faith that he will meet Jesus and that this race will all be worthwhile.

As he reminds Timothy of God's faithfulness to him in all his trials and tribulations, perhaps Paul is seeking to support and encourage Timothy that just as the Lord had stood at Paul's side and enabled him to preach the good news, so he will do the same for Timothy, who no doubt was feeling daunted by the task that lay ahead of him, without Paul.

For Paul, knowing where he was going when he died (i.e. to meet Jesus) made all the difference. And I suspect that probably made all the difference for Timothy too. Just imagine how hard it would have been for Timothy to continue his mission without Paul if Paul had been afraid or unsure about what was going to happen to him when he died. Paul's confidence about where he was going must also have filled Timothy with confidence as well.

Knowing where we're ultimately going makes a difference to our lives and our outlook, doesn't it? But perhaps that's something that occupies minds less now than in previous centuries.

When studying the life and times of John Bunyan, author of "Pilgrim's Progress" (still one of the bestselling Christian books of all time) at

theological college, it was interesting to reflect that people who were living in a time when life was hard and short, with an average life expectancy was 42, were worried about what would happen to them when they died, and whether they were going to heaven or to hell, than most people today. Being faced daily with their own mortality heightened their concern about whether they'd done enough to get to heaven or would be consigned to hell than many people are today.

Consequently there was a lot of emphasis on doing good works, but Luther, and Paul before him, insisted that faith is what matters and will get us to heaven, not good works. Doing good is not a passport to heaven but a natural response to the love and grace we freely received from God.

Today many things distract us from considering our death and questions about where we might end up when we die; such things often only come into focus when death is close at hand like it was for Paul.

Paul had no doubt about his own failings, like the tax collector in the gospel story, but he also had no doubt about the eternal love of God shown in Jesus, nor about the forgiveness he'd been offered and had accepted. And for him that meant he knew what his final destiny was.

Jesus said to his disciples: "You know the way where I'm going, and I'm going to prepare a place for you, so that where I am you may be also."

Knowing where we're going ultimately helps us to persevere, to fight the good fight, as Paul puts it, to continue to run the race for as long as it takes until we finish.

So, as Paul urges Timothy, let's take courage, keep our eyes fixed on Jesus each day, and remember our final destination, trusting in the love of God and may our faith spur us on to continue running the race, until we cross that final finishing line.  
Amen

### **Hymn [STF 634]**

Fight the good fight with all your might;  
Christ is your strength, and Christ your right;  
Lay hold on life, and it shall be  
Your joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace,  
Lift up your eyes, and seek his face;  
Life with its way before you lies;  
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside; upon your guide  
Lean, and his mercy will provide;  
Lean, and the trusting soul shall prove  
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

Faint not nor fear, his arm is near;  
He changes not, and you are dear;  
Only believe, and prove it true  
That Christ is all in all to you.

*John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811-1875)*

### **Prayers – thanksgiving**

Loving living God,  
Thank you for your Word in scripture and your Word in Jesus Christ, your Son, who came to show us your love and your willingness to give all for our sakes;  
Help us never to take that amazing gift of grace for granted, and to rejoice each day that we are new creations in Him.  
Thank you for the gift of your Holy Spirit, who leads us daily into new discoveries about you and about your plan for each of our lives;  
We thank you too for the example of those who have gone before us – Paul, Timothy, and others who have fought the fight and run the race faithfully, putting their trust and hope in you;  
Help us to follow their example Lord  
Keep us open to your leading,  
Give us ears to hear your call, and the wisdom of friends to help us discern your will;  
Help us not make assumptions about others, whether young or old, but to see them all as children of yours;  
Give us a willingness to learn what you want to teach us, fill us with your love for others, and keep us safe from pride;  
Give us courage when our hearts fail us, and help us to become the people you want us to be  
We ask in Jesus' name AMEN

### **Intercessions**

Loving God we pray for our church communities in this circuit and nation and around the world, and for all those who seek to help others to come to know you,  
Give us deeper faith and trust in you, teach us all how to live out our faith in Jesus with courage and perseverance;  
And help us to share the good news of your saving love with the people we meet in our everyday lives, through our words, actions and attitudes.

*Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer***

We pray for the many situations of conflict around the world, where those in positions of

power and authority have been motivated by  
greed, ambition, fear or anger;  
we remember conflicts in the Middle East,  
Ukraine, parts of Africa and Asia, and pray for a  
lasting peace which reflects your love for each  
person regardless of race or background.  
Please soften hardened hearts, through your Holy  
Spirit and instil in them instead a deep desire for  
peace and reconciliation, for justice, fair trade and  
a fair sharing of the earth's resources for all.  
*Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer***

We pray for refugees and those who have no  
access to a safe place of shelter, clean water,  
adequate food, medication and education;  
For those held captive by addictions to drugs,  
power or money;  
For those who feel bound up by fear, anxiety,  
anger or pain;  
for young people feeling anxious, vulnerable,  
wondering what their role in life will be;  
for middle aged people, striving to meet the  
demands of their different roles at work and  
home;  
for older people, burdened with feelings of  
loneliness, or regret, wondering if they have any  
useful role to play anymore;  
Please surround those who are in pain, whether  
in heart, mind, soul or body, with your healing  
presence and love,  
Please transform situations which seem to be  
without solution or hopeless into circumstances  
which bring hope and freedom to live life  
according to your ways of grace and love;  
*Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer***

As we remember those dear to us who have died  
we ask that you will bring us and them to eternal  
life with you.

Please empower us through your Holy Spirit to  
see and respond to the opportunities you give for  
us to be the answer to our own prayers, and to  
remember that with you all things are possible;  
*Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.***  
**Amen**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Hymn Hymn: And Can it be? (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 thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
To sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
Let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above -  
So free, so infinite his grace -  
Emptied himself of all but love,  
And bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray -  
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

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.  
*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

### **Closing Prayer and Blessing**

May God make us brave and strong  
And help us to fight the good fight  
May God give us his strength and his grace  
And help us to finish the race  
May we go in faith and trust in Him  
Who is our Creator, our Redeemer and our  
Sustainer,  
And may the blessing of God, Father, Son and  
Holy Spirit remain with us always.

**AMEN**

*Rev Jane Wilson  
October 2025*