

**A service of worship for use at home**  
**Prepared by Phil Colbourn**  
**Sunday 29 May 2022. Ascension Sunday**  
*Hymns in Singing the Faith (StF)*

Nottingham North East  
Methodist Circuit

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**Call to worship Psalm 97**

The Lord reigns, let the earth be glad!

**Hymn StF 312 - *The head that once was crowned with thorns***

1 The head that once was crowned with thorns  
is crowned with glory now;  
a royal diadem adorns  
the mighty victor's brow.

2 The highest place that heav'n affords  
is his, is his by right,  
the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
and heav'n's eternal light:

3 The joy of all who dwell above,  
the joy of all below  
to whom he manifests his love  
and grants his name to know.

4 To them the cross, with all its shame,  
with all its grace, is giv'n;  
their name, an everlasting name,  
their joy, the joy of heav'n.

5 They suffer with the Lord below,  
they reign with him above,  
their profit and their joy to know  
the myst'ry of his love.

6 The cross he bore is life and health,  
though shame and death to him:  
his people's hope, his people's wealth,  
their everlasting theme.

**Prayers of Adoration and Thanksgiving**

Lord, our God, we bless you with a full heart. You are joy beyond all joy, peace above all peace, love above and beyond all love. All good comes from you and we praise your name. We praise and adore you and thank you, Lord our God, for all your mercies that are renewed to us each and every day and for your unfailing generosity; for the wonder and diversity of creation; for redemption and forgiveness; for provision and for fellowship; and for giving us our eternal home.

**Amen**

Let's share the prayer Jesus taught us: *Our Father ...*

**Readings**

**Acts 16: 25-34**

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. <sup>26</sup> Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. <sup>27</sup> The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. <sup>28</sup> But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

<sup>29</sup> The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. <sup>30</sup> He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

<sup>31</sup> They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." <sup>32</sup> Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. <sup>33</sup> At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. <sup>34</sup> The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.

**John 17: 20-26**

**20** “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **21** that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. **22** I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— **23** I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

**24** “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

**25** “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. **26** I have made you[a] known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

**Hymn StF 323 - I will sing the wondrous story**

1 I will sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me.  
How He left His home in glory  
For the cross of Calvary.  
I was lost, but Jesus found me,  
Found the sheep that went astray,  
Threw His loving arms around me,  
Drew me back into His way.

2 I was bruised, but Jesus healed me;  
Faint was I from many a fall;  
Sight was gone, and fears possessed me,  
But He freed me from them all.  
Days of darkness still come o'er me,  
Sorrow's paths I often tread,  
But the Saviour still is with me;  
By His hand I'm safely led.

3 He will keep me till the river  
Rolls its waters at my feet;  
Then He'll bear me safely over,  
Where the loved ones I shall meet.  
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story  
Of the Christ who died for me,  
Sing it with the saints in glory,  
Gathered by the crystal sea.

**Reflection** *On being one*

You know the story of Paul and Silas in prison, how they were singing at midnight and the whole place fell apart. What is remarkable about this is not the earthquake but the fact that they were singing. Why were they singing? *How* were they singing? They were in gaol: their future in doubt. Surely, they should have been worried if not terrified. But no. They had it together enough to sing. How? Why?

To look for an answer, let's turn to our second reading, Christ's so called High Priestly prayer in John 17. Jesus asks that his followers should be one as he and his Father are one. We usually take this to mean that they should be united, as a group, and then we apply this to our church fellowships but perhaps Jesus meant something else. Before we explore this possibility, we'll pause to read this meditation written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

**Meditation**

We turn to God when we are sorely pressed  
We pray for help and ask for peace and bread;  
We seek release from illness, guilt and death;  
All people do, in faith or disbelief.

We turn to God when he is sorely pressed  
 And find him poor, scorned, without roof and bread,  
 Bowed under weight of weakness, sin and death;  
 Faith stands by God in his dark hour of grief.

God turns to us when we are sorely pressed,  
 And feeds our souls and bodies with his bread;  
 For one and all Christ gives himself in death;  
 Through his forgiveness sin will find relief.

I'm taking a clue from the third reading set for today, Revelation 22, which we will come to in a moment. For now, let's note Jesus refers to himself as the *Root and Shoot of Jesse*; and as *the Beginning and the End* which make me wonder if, in John 17, Jesus meant 'one' in the sense of united or did he mean 'one' in the sense of being 'whole', 'complete' and 'all-together'?

I am writing this during Mental Health Awareness Week and I am struck by how fundamental mental health is to our well-being, both personal and as a society. Unity can only happen in a community if people are individually well-adjusted and at one with themselves.

I'm reminded of the story of Legion (Mark 5). Jesus asked him, "What is your name?" and he replied, "My name is Legion, for we are many." You will remember how Jesus healed him and then sat with him, now 'clothed and in his right mind.' We are Legion, all of us to some degree and we need to hear the voice of Jesus speaking healing into our fractured, fragmented lives. Then, and only then, can unity begin to happen. 'Then the world will know that you sent me and that you loved them as you have loved me.'

I know that Christianity is a communal project, a shared exercise, but it is not a system; it is people. It is us, when we, each one, respond to God's love and generosity, in our turn, with generosity and love. Then, tensions and disagreements fade and opportunities for loving care become apparent.

Personal healing leads to harmonious communities which will, in turn, lead to the salvation from itself of a desperate world. Let Jesus sort you out. Let God solve all your inner contradictions and divisions. Let the Spirit put you in your right mind, clothe you with grace and send you on your way. **Amen**

### **Hymn StF 248 - I heard the voice of Jesus say**

1 I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
 "Come unto me and rest;  
 lay down, O weary one,  
 lay down your head upon my breast."  
 I came to Jesus as I was,  
 so weary, worn, and sad;  
 I found in him a resting place,  
 and he has made me glad.

2 I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
 "Behold, I freely give  
 the living water, thirsty one;  
 stoop down and drink and live."  
 I came to Jesus, and I drank  
 of that life-giving stream;  
 my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,  
 and now I live in him.

3 I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
 "I am this dark world's light.  
 Look unto me; your morn shall rise  
 and all your day be bright."  
 I looked to Jesus, and I found  
 in him my star, my sun;  
 and in that light of life I'll walk  
 till trav'ling days are done.

## Reading

### Revelation 22: 12-14, 16-17, 20-21

<sup>12</sup> "Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done. <sup>13</sup> I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

<sup>14</sup> "Blessed are they who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city ...

<sup>16</sup> "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

<sup>17</sup> The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life ...

<sup>20</sup> He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

### Prayers of Confession and Supplication

Father, we confess that we are a divided people both within ourselves and between ourselves. Forgive us and heal us, we pray. Drive out our demons and set us on the road to life so that we can sing even in the darkest times.

Lord God, you are Creator & Sustainer of all things. Let the earth rejoice!

We confess that there are many wrongs in our world and so we pray:

For those in need

For those in our hearts our minds

For our neighbourhood and local community

For people in positions of power and responsibility

For the people who live out your grace in humble obedience

For ourselves, that we may take the next step along the way

### *Silence*

Help us to find our voices and speak your creative word into the darkness and into the chaos of our world; to speak healing and grace, to speak peace; to speak hope; to speak love; to speak joy. Help us to speak truth without fear or favour; to teach, to encourage and to comfort; to speak light.

Hear our prayers for the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

### Hymn StF 82

*O Lord my God*

1 O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all the works Thy hand have made,  
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,  
Thy pow'r throughout the universe displayed!

### *Refrain:*

Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee;  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to Thee;  
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!

2 When thru the woods and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees,  
When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur  
And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze, [*Refrain*]

3 And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in-  
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin! [*Refrain*]

4 When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation  
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!  
Then I shall bow in humble adoration  
And there proclaim, my God, how great Thou art! [*Refrain*]

### Closing prayers

Thank you, Father, for your love that, in Jesus, brings in your new way of doing things. Thank you for the grace which is sufficient and more than sufficient for each of us. May we catch and live your vision. **Amen.**

May we express your desires, pray your prayers & speak of your love, face to face, on the phone, in writing or via social media. In Jesus name. **Amen**

### Blessing

The blessing of God, who makes all things new and who gives grace upon grace and love beyond love, be upon you and remain with you, and with all whom you love and care for, this day and always. **Amen.**