

**Sunday October 23rd**  
**A service of worship for use at home**  
**Prepared by Rev David Speed**

Nottingham North East  
Methodist Circuit

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Charity number 1134226



**Hymn - StF 51** Great is thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

*Great is Thy faithfulness*  
*Great is Thy faithfulness*  
*Morning by morning new mercies I see*  
*All I have needed Thy hand hath provided*  
*Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me*

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest  
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above  
Join with all nature in manifold witness  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love  
*Great is Thy faithfulness*

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide  
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow  
Blessings all mine with 10,000 beside  
*Great is Thy faithfulness*

*Songwriters: Adam Anders, Thomas Chisholm, William Runyan*

**Prayer and Lord's Prayer**

Let us pray,

We praise you because you are greater than us. You are God and we are human. But there is more.

We praise you because you are humble, we praise you because you do not stand on you, we need you to go on.

We praise you because you are humble, and do not stand on your own dignity. We praise you because you are loving and show the signs of your love, particularly in Jesus.

Please forgive us for finding reasons not to show love. Forgive us those times when we have thought ourselves better than others. Please help us when we are tired and irritable, and to believe in you to make something of us.

**Hymn StF 489** All I once held dear – Our hymn shows our need of God.

All I once held dear,  
Built my life upon,  
All this world reveres  
And wars to own.  
All I once thought gain  
I have counted loss,  
Spent and worthless now  
Compared to this:

*Knowing You, Jesus,  
Knowing You,  
There is no greater thing.  
You're my all, You're the best,  
You're my joy,  
My righteousness,  
And I love You, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire  
Is to know You more.  
To be found in You,  
And known as Yours.  
To possess by faith  
What I could not earn,  
All-surpassing gift  
Of righteousness.

*Knowing You, Jesus ...*

Oh, to know the power  
Of Your risen life,  
And to know You in  
Your sufferings.  
To become like You  
In Your death, my Lord,  
So with You to live  
And never die.

*Knowing You Jesus...*

**Reading** - Genesis 2:4-7

The word Adam refers to that which comes from the ground. It is an encouragement to be humble.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth<sup>[a]</sup> and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, but streams<sup>[b]</sup> came up from the earth and watered the whole

surface of the ground. Then the LORD God formed a man<sup>[c]</sup> from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

**Hymn - 696** For the healing of the nations. The hymn leads into our prayers

For the healing of the nations,  
Lord, we pray with one accord.  
For a just and equal sharing  
Of the things that earth affords.  
To a life of love and action  
Help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us, Father, into freedom,  
From despair your world release;  
That redeemed from war and hatred,  
We may come and go in peace.  
Show us how, through care and goodness,  
Fear will die and hope increase.

All That Kills Abundant Living,  
Let It From The Earth Be Banned;  
Pride Of Status, Race Or Schooling,  
Dogmas That Obscure Your Plan.  
In Our Common Quest For Justice  
May We Hallow Life's Brief Span.

You, Creator God, have written  
Your great name on humankind;  
For our growing in your likeness  
Bring the life of Christ to mind:  
That, by our response and service,  
Earth its destiny may find.

## Prayers

Let us pray,

We thank you for giving people willingness and motivation to care. We pray for those who have taken on demanding work, children's workers, doctors, and nurses, social workers, community workers, and who so often face abuse for their trouble. May they know encouragement in these times.

We think of our own country and those who struggle between whether they can eat or heat. We thank you for the help that we all are given but pray for those for whom this is not enough.

We pray for our country in the turmoil that we are going through. We pray for our distressing world, remembering Climate Change and the conflicts that threaten our response to it. We pray for the nations of Ukraine and Russia, Palestine, and Israel, Syria, and Lebanon, Iran, and Iraq. We think of the Yemen, and the drought in the Horn of Africa. We pray for those we know, who are hurting and going through it, those facing operations, and those recovering. You know what they need. For it we pray.

We pray for ourselves, in faith that you know our need, and for you to meet it in your own way, we pray  
AMEN.

### Reading - Luke 18:9-14 The Pharisee and the Publican.

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.

**Activity** These scenes portray what the Pharisee and publican did. Why not meditate on these pictures and the story and see if either or both say anything to you?



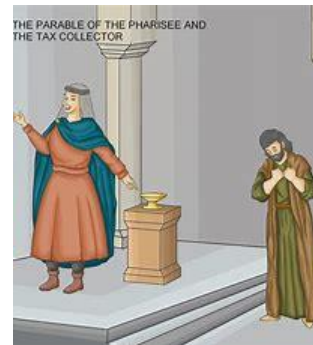
Walking up a Hill (to the Temple)



Pharisee standing up praying



Praying out loud



Tax collector  
Even here the  
Pharisee gets in the way

Beating the chest/breast



Being one (with God)

**Hymn, StF 523** It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer

*It's me, it's me, O Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer  
It's me, it's me, O Lord  
Standing in the need of prayer*

Not my mother or my father, but it's me, O Lord

Standing in the need of prayer

Not my mother or my father, but it's me, O Lord

Standing in the need of prayer

*It's me, it's me, O Lord...*

Not my brother or my sister, but it's me, O Lord

Standing in the need of prayer

Not my brother or my sister, but it's me, O Lord

Standing in the need of prayer

*It's me it's me, O Lord...*

Not the stranger or my neighbour, but it's me, O Lord

Standing in the need of prayer

Not the stranger or my neighbour, but it's me, O Lord

Standing in the need of prayer

*It's me it's me, O Lord...*

**Sermon - TOO MANY 'I's MAKE YOU BLIND**

Do you remember the song, "Smoke gets in your eyes?" When it happens you can't see. Other things can stop us seeing. Let's spell eye differently, with the word we use to describe ourselves, a capital 'I'.

I believe too many 'I's make you blind. We see it in the story of the Pharisee and the Publican. The Pharisee spoke with too many 'I's and so was blind to God and blind to himself.

First, He was blind to God.

I've preached on this story, before, but this is a different sermon. Oh, I'm sorry, this is too much about me, again. You don't need to know that. All this is not about me. It's about God.

And the Pharisee said, "I am not like other people. I fast twice a week. I give more than the legal ten per cent to the Temple. I thank you, Lord, that I am not like this other man here who not only does none of these things but exploits people"

His too many 'I's had been blind because his religion was all about himself and not about God. Someone once said, "You cannot talk about how great you are and how great God is at the same time".

It was normal to stand and pray. I think it is standard practice among German Methodists. It was normal to pray out loud. That didn't make him pompous. You could even start prayers by thanking God for giving you special privileges. Israel thanked God for choosing her among the nations. You could do that so long as the prayer was about God, not about you. The Pharisee's prayer was all about him, very little about God.

"Little Jack Horner sat in a corner eating his curds and whey. He stuck out his tongue and pulled out a plum and said what a good boy am I". It's so easy to get trapped like that. I have served the Church for so many years. I'm always there to help. But for me, the place would close. I fast twice a week, I pay my tithes, does it sound familiar? Do more than is required. Even the I thank you God that I am not like other people. We wouldn't say it out loud but has the thought ever flickered that if other people were like us the world would be a better place?

One group of Ministers, on their first day of theological college, were told, "It's not all about you".

He thought rather a lot of himself. What he couldn't see was that his religion was so much about himself that there was very little room for God. He was telling God how good he was. Some say that he was praying to himself rather than to God. Whether

he was or not, the effect was the same. He was talking to himself. His words were empty. When the Almighty hears such a prayer, what would He want to reply?

I came across a rhyme about a Biblical scholar. It goes a little like this, "There was once a scholar called Dodd, who thought it was terribly odd, for his name to succeed, would require the two 'D's when one was sufficient for God".

Too many I s, too much thinking of how important we are blinds us to realizing that faith is about God, not us. It's not all about us. That enters into it but it isn't all of it. It is about our relationship to God. That's the things with the publican. He was a tax collector who collect money for the Romans at the expense of his own people and get a bit for himself. He didn't observe the Jewish law very well. He didn't think of his achievements. He didn't think he had any. But He saw prayer as a relationship with God. Someone once said that study might make the scholar learn what the devout know by intuition. He could have stood up to pray that was perfectly OK. He could have looked the world in the face. No harm in that. But he kept apart from the good people, knelt and would not raise his eyes to heaven.

Jesus is telling a story and there's exaggeration to make a point. He isn't saying that we should all think of ourselves as the most miserable ever to crawled upon the face of the earth.

There was a ditty that went something like this, "Once in darkest anguish. I cried out in deepest grief. Woe is me, I am undone, of sinners I am chief. Then spoke my Guardian Angel and tapped me from behind.

Vanity, my little man, you're nothing of the kind". It's not a competition to show everyone how bad we are. "I am the worst of people". "No, I am the worst of people", so its hairshirts at dawn.

It's realizing that faith is a relationship with God, and that you and I need Him to live our best lives. You've heard the comment, "Well, Lord, I haven't been rude. I haven't been selfish, I haven't been irritable, but in ten minutes I'm going to have to get up and then I'm going to need all the help I can get". When we ask that prayer, God will come in. The publican's prayer was accepted because he had room for God. The Pharisee's prayer allowed no two-way conversation, and God had no room to answer.

There are so many I s to the Pharisee that he had no room for God.

He was also, TOO BLIND TO HIMSELF

Which of the two could have sung, "It's me, it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer"? The Pharisee or the Publican? He was so sure of himself that he couldn't see his own pride staring back at him in the mirror.

Someone was making a big deal of the things he had done and how great he was. He went on and on so a Minister went up to him and said, "You must be very proud of your humility". "Well, yes, actually, I am".

Now, Pharisees were often small landowners, people who had a bit of property, but who feared losing it. So, they had to brag about their status. They even had to look down on others they considered beneath them to give themselves as a sense of status. I am a person of status, says the Pharisees. I am someone.

An MP had been newly elected. He went into the members sitting room, and he started complaining before Winston Churchill that he couldn't get through the entry gate for a long time, because of the policeman guarding the entrance.

He said, "Well, maybe he didn't know who I was".

So, Churchill raised his head over the newspaper and asked, "And who are you?"

Whoever we are, whatever we do, we are no more or less important than anyone else. The more we think of ourselves as important the more we fail to see our pride in the mirror. Do we need to see ourselves as people with strengths as well as frailties, and frailties as well as strengths?

The poet, Benjamin Zephaniah, wrote, and the words are emblazoned in Chester's Storyhouse Theatre and Eating House, "Wanderers and Workers, Sinners and Saints, from here, they all look the same".

I know someone who used to say, "I don't make mistakes". I heard of someone else who said, "The greatest of mistakes is to be conscious of none".

The publican knew his frailties. He felt he wasn't fit to be in the company of the pious, so he kept apart. He wouldn't adopt the position of prayer, not even raising his eyes to heaven. He beat his breast. The breast and the heart were seen as the source of our failings, and so to beat the breast was a sign that you wanted to say sorry.

Another person said, "It's not the mistakes you make that count. It's what you do with them". The publican took them to God in prayer. He knew he needed God. It seems he was open to God, who could help him most. So, God could speak to him, accept him, forgive him, and treat him as if he were always in the right. That's what justified means. He recommends we do the same. God will help us when we let Him. Rather than conveying an image of what we would like to think, when we face up to who we are, we are released from the strain of living up to an image. We allow God to show us that He accepts us, almost makes us right again, and give us power to change. To be blind to God will be to be blind to ourselves. Too many 'I s' make us blind but God will help us to see.

The Pharisee and the Publican.  
AMEN.

**Hymn – StF 563 O Jesus I have promised**

O Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end;  
Be Thou forever near me, my Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle if Thou art by my side,  
Nor wander from the pathway if Thou wilt be my Guide.

Oh, let me feel Thee near me; The world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle, The tempting sounds I hear;  
My foes are ever near me, Around me and within;  
But, Jesus, draw Thou nearer, And shield my soul from sin.

Oh, let me hear Thee speaking in accents clear and still,  
I dare not trust my judgment: Thy way shall be my will;  
Oh, speak to reassure me, to hasten or control;  
Oh, speak, and help me listen, Thou Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised to all who follow Thee  
That where Thou art in glory there shall Thy servant be;  
And Jesus, I have promised to serve Thee to the end—  
Oh, give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.

**The Grace.**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
The Love of God  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
Be with us all, evermore  
Amen