



Written Service Sunday November 19th 2023
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Jane Lewis

Charity number 1134226

Call to worship

We are all children of the light and the day,
We are not of the night or of darkness.
Let us not fall asleep as others do,
Let us keep awake and give our praise.

Hymn STF 83 Praise my soul

1. Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven;
To His feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored,
forgiven,
Evermore His praises sing:
Praise Him, praise Him, alleluia!
Praise the everlasting King.
2. Praise Him for His grace and favour
To our fathers in distress;
Praise Him still the same as ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise Him, praise Him, alleluia!
Glorious in His faithfulness.
3. Fatherlike He tends and spares us,
Well our feeble frame He knows;
In His hands He gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise Him, praise Him, alleluia!
Widely yet His mercy flows.
4. Frail as summer's flow'r we flourish,
Blows the wind and it is gone;
But while mortals rise and perish,
Our God lives unchanging on.
Praise Him, praise Him, alleluia!
Praise the high Eternal One!
5. Angels, help us to adore Him,
Ye behold Him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before Him;
Dwellers all in time and space,
Praise Him, praise Him, alleluia!
Praise with us the God of grace.

Prayers

Adoration

God you are great and mighty, beyond our understanding. You reign in majesty as Creator, the One who made all things. We are in awe of your splendour and your might. We worship you.

Confession

We come O God, seeking your forgiveness. You gave us stewardship of your creation- yet, what have we done with it? Our environments are changing, weather patterns swinging between extremes. Creatures are becoming endangered as their habitats are altered by climate change, with some at risk as a result of being hunted to satisfy man's greed.

Forgive us O God, for not being good caretakers of your created world; help us to right our wrongs. Forgive us for not always being good caretakers of what you've given us personally. You have given each of us talents. Forgive us for not always using them wisely, for hiding away those we think too small to be of consequence. Forgive us for when we brag about what we have and

what we've achieved. Forgive our small mindedness, our selfishness, our greed, our desire for recognition. Forgive us and help us to grow and to use well all you give us to benefit others and further your kingdom. Amen

Assurance

God may the light of your love shine upon us. Because of Jesus we are children of light. Because of Jesus, we are loved and forgiven. Amen.

Hymn STF 608 All Praise to our redeeming Lord

1 All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace,
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.

2 He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling's glorious hope
we hand in hand go on.

3 The gift which he on one bestows,
we all delight to prove;
the grace through every vessel flows,
in purest streams of love.

4 Ev'n now we think and speak the same,
and cordially agree;
concentred all, through Jesus' name,
in perfect harmony.

5 We all partake the joy of one,
the common peace we feel,
a peace to sensual minds unknown,
a joy unspeakable.

6 And if our fellowship below
in Jesus be so sweet,
what heights of rapture shall we know
when round his throne we meet!

Readings:

Zephaniah 1 v7, 12-18

⁷Be silent before the Sovereign Lord,
for the day of the Lord is near.
The Lord has prepared a sacrifice;
he has consecrated those he has invited.

¹²At that time I will search Jerusalem with
lamps
and punish those who are complacent,
who are like wine left on its dregs,
who think, 'The Lord will do nothing,
either good or bad.'

¹³Their wealth will be plundered,
their houses demolished.
Though they build houses,
they will not live in them;
though they plant vineyards,
they will not drink the wine."

¹⁴The great day of the Lord is near—
near and coming quickly.
The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter;
the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.

¹⁵That day will be a day of wrath—

a day of distress and anguish,
a day of trouble and ruin,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness—

¹⁶a day of trumpet and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the corner towers.

¹⁷"I will bring such distress on all people
that they will grope about like those who
are blind,
because they have sinned against
the Lord.

Their blood will be poured out like dust
and their entrails like dung.

¹⁸Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the Lord's wrath."

In the fire of his jealousy
the whole earth will be consumed,
for he will make a sudden end
of all who live on the earth.

Matthew 25 v 14-30 The Parable of the Bags of Gold

¹⁴ “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag,^[a] each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.

¹⁹ “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’

²¹ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²² “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

²³ “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

²⁴ “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

²⁶ “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.’

²⁸ “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Hymn STF 611 Brother Sister let me serve you

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

3. I will hold the Christlight for you
in the nighttime of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will! weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Sermon

3 questions posed by our readings today that we are going to explore together.

1. *What gifts has God given you?*

One of the phrases that leaps off the page to me when I read this story is “to each according to his own ability.” This leads me to ask the simple question: what has God given you to do? What is your role in building the kingdom?

Eagerness is something many of us grow out of in our teens. There is that sullen ‘do I have to...’ That plagues many parent/teenager relationships – ‘Do I have to...clean my room’, ‘Do I have to...go to bed this early, none of my friends do!’ and other such sayings! Fortunately, many young people grow out of that phase. I know my daughters did and by the time they were in their late teens and moving away from home they were actually really pleasant people, often willing to do those things that a few years before they had resisted doing!

As members of the family of God are we still keen, or are we like spiritual teenagers, only doing just enough to get away with it? What do we learn about eagerness from the example of three servants in Jesus’ parable? And what about the trust placed in them by their master?

These 3 servants had been given enough. They had been given as much as the master thought they could handle. Remember, Jesus began the parable by saying the kingdom of heaven is like.... God has given us a responsibility, according to our ability too. Two of these servants thought about what they might do, and probably with some eagerness, went about doing it. So, they grew what they had been given. The third one, was not so eager! Maybe they were more like that sullen teenager, lacking enthusiasm. He decided to bury it, just leave it. He knew it would still be there when he came back to it, but he never bothered anymore and got on with his life.

They were given talents, the money of the day. They were given them to do something with. I wonder what gifts God has given us. Sometimes we think that gifts are only given to certain people – those who stand up and preach for example or play the organ or sing. But that most definitely is not the case. God has called us all for a purpose, and he has gifted us all for a purpose. Sometimes the seemingly most insignificant gifts turn out to be the most significant. Never underestimate your gift. The Abbess Hild – sometimes known as Hilda – lived in the Abbey in Whitby. She is remembered on November 17th each year. She was a great supporter of people’s gifts – she didn’t make a lot of noise about it, but she was. The most famous person to have benefitted from her support was Caedmon. Without her support and her gift of encouragement he might never have become England’s first poet. Never underestimate the gifts you have been given, and the power they have to change people’s lives.

2. *What are you doing with the gifts?*

Remember in the parable that one had 5 talents, one had 2 talents, and one had 1 talent. So not all are given the same. Wouldn’t it be boring in the church if we had all been given the same talents? How incomplete the Body of Christ would be if we were all preachers! There would be no one to listen to the preaching would there. God, in his wisdom, has wonderfully balanced out the distribution of talents because He knows and loves each one of us and knows the kind of person we are.

When we look at Paul’s writings he of course writes about the distribution of gifts within the church – In Romans 12 he lists prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, caring for the needs of others, leadership. There are other places in the New Testament where he lists other gifts. It’s interesting that he puts leadership at the end of his list here – leadership is not the most important, none of them are more important than another. Each one is a gift, given by the Master.

So, what are you doing with your gift? Are you burying it away like the slave with 1 talent? Or are you using it? Are you letting others use their gifts because you think their gift is more important than yours? That is certainly not how God sees it or wants it to be. Everyone has been given a gift to use for the benefit of others – what are you doing with yours?

3. Are you ready for the Master's return?

One of the top takeaways from this parable of the talents is the suddenness of the master's return. There is no warning that he is coming back. He just arrives and imagine the panic that may well have set in as the servants realise this is it! The time has come to show what they have been doing. This prepares us, as Christians today, for the beginning of Advent in a few weeks' time, when we will be focussing on the Second Coming of Jesus and our readiness for that. So here, Matthew is urging the followers of Jesus to be ready for the Lord's return.

How do you react when you have an unexpected visitor? Are you the sort of person who welcomes them, tells them it's good to see them and makes them a cup of tea? Or are you the sort of person who doesn't like unexpected callers? You are thinking that the sitting room isn't very tidy, you haven't got any milk in the fridge and all sorts of other possible things that might make you dread someone just calling by unannounced! It can be difficult sometimes when we have unexpected callers! I wonder what the 3 servants were thinking when news reached them of the master's return – 'where did I put that money? If only he hadn't come back today, just when I'm so busy...' but he had returned, and the servants needed to account for all they had done with his money.

Zephaniah tells the people of his time that they must be ready, for the Day of the Lord is coming! He warns the people of his time that their money and all the things they might have will not do them any good, because those things don't really count with God. Zephaniah is very much a prophet of doom, like Amos and Micah who could see that the people had got it all wrong, their priorities were all wrong, and that one day, God would deal with them. Zephaniah is full of doom and wastes no time telling people exactly how it is. I wonder, what are the things we do today that might get a modern Zephaniah cross? Maybe it is gathering money and possessions for ourselves, maybe it is not using the gifts God has given us to benefit others?

I wonder, what are the things we might do for others that Jesus would like to see? What would please God's heart as we and He look upon the world and its people at this time? Where we see conflict, greed, despair, war, famine, loneliness....we could go on.

For us, as Christians, it is clear that one day Jesus will return. He talked about it so much when he spoke to his disciples. We read it time and again when we look at the gospels and especially in so many of the parables. We have only to look at this parable to see what Jesus thought about those who kept what they had been given purely for themselves – when the third servant gives his excuses for not doing anything with the talent the master says 'You wicked and lazy servant' – that is what he thought about it and I think Jesus is making the point that is probably what God says about it too. And there is no way back for that servant – the punishment is very clear right at the end of the parable. Zephaniah makes it really clear in his time that God is not pleased with those who have misused what they have been given, they too will be punished.

When we read the whole parable, there are two different responses given to the servants. Two of them heard "well done" and one heard "you wicked, lazy servant." We need to focus on what we do with the gifts God has given us. The number of gifts or what the gifts are doesn't matter – it is what we have done or are doing with them that matters.

How does this challenge you and me today? We might think we have done our bit, that we have nothing else to give or do in the service of God. I think that makes us like the servant who made his excuses – 'I'm too old, I've done my bit' 'There isn't anything I can do now', 'why would God

want me to do this or that in the church or for my neighbour?'. If we can't do anything else we can pray, we can perhaps pick up the phone and call people, we can write letters to people, we can call on a neighbour to make sure they are ok. These, alongside the gifts that others might exercise within the church, are equally important.

The Bible reminds us that 'there are many gifts, but the same Lord, there are different ways of working, but the same God works all of them in all people'.

Prayer

Creator God who has given us all that we have
We give you praise and thanks.
Remind us of our gifts when we lose sight of them.
Show us where and how to share them.
Give us the courage to offer them freely, as you give to us.
What others may seek to destroy, help us to protect and care.
And give us the conviction to stand fast when we are called to do so.
This we ask of you, in Jesus' name.
Amen

Hymn STF 663 I the Lord of Sea and Sky

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them, They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them,
Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord ...

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord ...

Prayers of Intercession

Intercessions & petitions – our prayers for others, for the church, for ourselves

As we bring our prayers of intercession, we remember that the world is our neighbour, and we are called to love our neighbours, to share our gifts and talents with others.

God of wisdom,

We pray for leaders of the nations.

Recall situations you want to pray for at this time – the political turmoil in our own country, the war in the Middle East, the war in Ukraine. Pray for the innocent victims of war – parents, children, old people, those who were living a quiet life until a few weeks ago. Pray for peace and reconciliation in these places. Pray for Afghanistan, Yemen and other places that have fallen from the front pages recently.

Lord, send your spirit to open their eyes to love for neighbour.

God of wholeness,

We pray for a church struggling to offer a glimpse of Christ in a changing and materialistic world.

Pray for church leaders. Pray for our ministers, deacons & youth worker and all who serve in our local churches. Pray for churches in the Nottingham North East Circuit, as we live out our mission to our communities. Pray for all members of congregations across the circuit that each person will recognise and use the gifts God has given them, to build up and support others.

Lord, send your spirit to enrich our faith and empower us to love our neighbours.

God of creation,

We pray for the world you have created and placed us within. Renew us in our passion to care for the world to make it fit for future generations.

Pray for those working for justice for the climate and the natural resources of the world. Pray for governments and leaders as they seek to balance the needs of the climate alongside all the other financial demands. Pray that those of us in churches will set an example of care for the world and its resources.

Lord, send your spirit to challenge and encourage us so we can join with our neighbours in our concern and care for your world.

God of love,

We pray for all who feel that they have lost sight of Christ through sorrow, sickness, anxiety or doubt. We pray for our church family.

Pray for those who have lost or are struggling with their faith, especially since the pandemic. Pray for those known to you who are sick and struggling at this time.

Spend some time naming them before God.

Lord, send your spirit to breathe new life into those who despair and comfort them with the knowledge of your presence. May we know what it is to love one another within the fellowship of the church.

In the name of our risen and ascended Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

Hymn STF 566 Take my life and let it be

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
*Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in endless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.
Take my feet and let them be
Swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice and let me sing,
Always, only for my King.
Take my lips and let them be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.
Take my intellect and use
Every pow'r as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will and make it Thine,
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is Thine own,
It shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Blessing

God, you have called each one of us. We are chosen by you and precious to you. Fill our hearts with love for others within and outside of the church, so that we might bless them through our gifts.

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all now and evermore.

Amen.