

Sunday 13th March 2022.
A service of worship for use at home
Prepared by Rev David Speed

Nottingham North East
Methodist Circuit

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Shout with joy to God all the earth, glory to his name

Hymns and Psalms 66 Great is thy faithfulness

1 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

2 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

3 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: William M. Runyan / Thomas O Chisholm / Eric Allyn Schrotenboer

Prayers and Lord's Prayer,

Let us pray, Lord, we are so glad and grateful that you have shown us what it means to love. We see it in Jesus, who has shown us the kind of love we could never imagine on our own. We praise and thank you. Lord God, you continue to do something loving no matter how bad things get. We admit we often give up and use the sad things going on as an excuse. Forgive us and help us to wish to be forgiven. Infuse in us a new faith, hope, and confidence in you, and in ourselves to reflect Jesus. In His Name we pray.

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Reading - Philippians 3:17-21 -The reading shows us where we belong, though we still pray and work for earth to show something of heaven.

¹⁷ Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. ¹⁸ For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Hymns and Psalms 712 God of grace and God of glory

1 God of grace and God of glory,
on your people pour your pow'r;
crown your ancient Church's story,
bring its bud to glorious flow'r.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.

3 Cure your children's warring madness;
bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
lest we miss your kingdom's goal,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.

2 Lo, the hosts of evil round us
scorn the Christ, assail his ways.
From the fears that long have bound us
free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.

4 Save us from weak resignation
to the evils we deplore;
let the gift of your salvation
be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage
serving you whom we adore,
serving you whom we adore.

Sermon - OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN

Our much-loved Queen has spent so much of her reign supporting the Commonwealth. She has visited nations throughout the world and has been so successful in what she has done that even some nations outside the former British Empire have joined the Commonwealth. She has believed that our welfare comes from seeking the general good because this is what the word Commonwealth means. The verse from Philippians talks of our commonwealth being in heaven. It can be translated citizenship.

OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN.

OUR WELLBEING IS IN HEAVEN, OUR DESTINY IS IN HEAVEN.

OUR WELLBEING IS IN HEAVEN

Our ultimate welfare lies in heaven. These days we have wellbeing officers. There's one in the Circuit, the District, and the National Church. I once rang the National Officer up out of concern for my wellbeing. He was off ill.

We should look after ourselves, and where would we be without epidemiologists discovering vaccines? I wonder sometimes whether we have behaved as if everything would and should come right in this world when Paul is saying things will only finally come right in heaven.

Our world is like a car. When they're new you expect or at least hope they will go right but after a few years you know that things will go wrong. So, it is with life. After a time, things will go wrong. You expect it. But, perhaps some of us have lived as if we expected all to go well in life as we have it. That's not to say we shouldn't work to make earth seem more like heaven, simply that we cannot expect heaven to come on earth.

Have we ever asked ourselves if we have put too many of our hopes on things going well on this earth? Have not these last two years of pandemic, Climate Change, plus the appalling scenes in Ukraine made us wonder that? Yes, we must work to bring a little more of heaven on earth, but there will always be problems on earth, there will always be resistance to God's ways. Our ultimate wellbeing will be in Heaven.

How old is the oldest letter you've ever looked at? This letter comes from the second century. We don't know who wrote it, except that he followed Jesus. He simply calls himself a disciple maybe out of humility, maybe because he didn't want to leave himself open to persecution. but we do know he sent it to someone called Diognetus. He's explaining who Christians are to him. He writes of his fellow Christians, "They live in their own native land but as aliens... Every foreign country is to them as their native country, and every native land as a foreign country... They pass their days on earth but are citizens of heaven.... They love everyone but are persecuted by all. They are poor and yet make many rich. They are short of everything and yet have plenty of all things. They are dishonoured and yet gain glory through dishonour...The soul is in the body but not of the body. Christians are in the world but not of the world".

Paul is saying that we live according to Christ's standards now. It sometimes seems that the methods of violence, hate, and malice are the ones that hold sway. It's easy to believe that they are more powerful than those of love. Violence and hate will burn themselves out for they have nothing to feed on. Someone once said, "Without followers, evil cannot win". We do not see that as our salvation. We have a Saviour from Heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we trust. He is our Guide. His ways will triumph.

My wife and I went to South Harrow, Middlesex, fairly recently, not without some nervousness, to attend the funeral of my old Youth Club Leader. Yes, he was that old. It was the most inspiring funeral I have ever been to. Everything about it was about love. Greg Wise the actor referred to Mervyn him as the most holy man he had ever met. The love that he showed having time for everyone came out, and the love for him as organist, youth club leader, fundraiser for the British Heart Foundation, and the rest, and the love everyone had for his wife, Daisy, simply shone. When we sang the last hymn, Love Divine, 'Changed from glory into glory', I felt that this way of showing Jesus's love would triumph, not the bombs in Ukraine, the cruelties against minority races. We were singing above the hate. Those who send blankets and money to Ukraine and other places are saying, "Love will win". We go further. Jesus' love will win for it is the life of Heaven, and our wellbeing lies in living the life of Heaven.

OUR DESTINY IS IN HEAVEN

Living seems so uncertain and fragile.

"Mr. Emerson", someone asked her preacher, "They tell me the world's going to end".
"Never mind", he said, "We can get along without it".

I've reached the age when many of my friends are suffering many health concerns. Sometimes, they say, "Don't be eighty", but add that, graciously including me in, "we know where we're going". " Our destiny is in heaven.

Many of us know people who are British but who live in another country. Just because they live in another country does not make them any less British. Whichever country we live in, whichever country we support in the cricket or football, our homeland is still heaven.

Paul is writing to the Philippians, who were a colony of Rome. They were Philippians but Rome held their citizenship. They belonged to a capital city that kept their names on its registers. That's what the Greek word for citizenship means. Our capital city is heaven. It keeps our names on its registers.

Did not Jesus say to his friends, "I go to prepare a place for you" and "Where I am you may be also?" It's a picture of a servant preparing the room for those who are to follow.

I go to prepare a place for you. Servant preparing the room for master and servants.

When I was growing up in the 1960s, what with social pressure groups, medical and technological discoveries, and general prosperity, we tended to believe that things would get better and better until God's wonder would come on earth. It was as if our destiny was to bring God's full splendour to earth. How to set yourself up for disappointment! As we have said, some will always oppose this. We, ourselves, are sometimes hesitant for this to happen. If I had continued to believe God's splendour would come fully on earth, life would have been an incredible let down. Now, I know that this is unlikely to happen, so much has gone wrong, but we need not have the feeling of too much let down. Even if more things go wrong on earth than we feel we can cope with, it is a sign that this world is imperfect, and that our destiny is not here but heaven.

The minister, Rev. W. E. Sangster got to know someone who had a severe drink problem. He had given his life to Jesus but had hoped that his wish for drink would disappear. He had a long struggle and Sangster suggested that when the man was having a hard time he should come and see him and they would pray together. He dropped in often. One day he cried out, "I know I'm in the gutter. I know it but I don't belong there, do I? Tell me I don't belong there".

"No! You belong to God. Heaven is your home", said Sangster.

Then, he said, "He had lost his name but not his address".

Heaven is our address, even more than earth.

Our destiny is in heaven. The trick is to remember that not just on Sunday, but Monday, and Tuesday to Saturday. The trick is to ask Jesus to remind us. Then we can live more confidently on earth. Then we can show more of God's love on earth without being crushed by crises.

Philippi's life, as a Roman colony, was a smaller mirror image of what life in Rome was like. If we are a colony of heaven, the Church, this Church, our Church, us as believers, together so work for the Church to become like heaven, that people say, "Now we know what heaven is like because this is what the Church is like". Similarly, we work for earth to become more like heaven, so that people can say, "We know what heaven must be like because we see what our community is like". Yet we do not stand or fall by whether we feel this happens. We pray "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven", but as those who know their destiny lies not on earth but heaven. Here we have no abiding city.

I vow to thee my country all earthly things above but there's another country, I've heard of long ago, the country of heaven. OUR WELLBEING, OUR DESTINY, OUR CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN.
AMEN.

Hymns and Psalms 455 Christ is the world's light, he and none other

Christ is the world's Light, Christ and none other;
born in our darkness, he became our Brother.
If we have seen him, we have seen the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's peace, Christ and none other;
no one can serve him and despise another.
Who else unites us, one in God the Father?
Glory to God on high.

Christ is the world's life, Christ and none other;
sold once for silver, murdered here, our brother-
he, who redeems us, reigns with God the Father:
Glory to God on high.

Give God the glory, God and none other;
give God the glory, Spirit, Son and Father;
give God the glory, God with us, my brother:
Glory to God on high.

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Prayers of Intercession,

Let us pray,

Ignored, spurned, and rejected, we thank you, Lord, for never losing patience with your world. Aware of this, we pray for the situations that we hear in the news. There is a yellow and blue building near where I live that reminds us of the colours of Ukraine.

We pray for the people there, scared but resilient, fleeing yet together.

We pray for those who bring them aid. We think of the armies of Russia, and Ukraine in all their fear.

We pray for the leaders of Russia and Ukraine.

We pray for the leaders of the World.

We pray that all may see that their best interests are in peace.

We pray for all countries experiencing conflict, remembering Yemen, and the Middle East.

We picture those that we think about during the day – our families. We know that you are with them in their achievements and disappointments, in their sickness and in their health. If some have COVID, we pray that they will sense you seeing them through. As we pray for them, we pray for others, whom we don't know, in similar situations.

We picture those feeling low because of all these bad times. We know a little of what it's like. You are with them on their journey. May they pick up the phone to talk to the right person, and may the right person talk to or text them.

We pray that all of us may know that we were made for something wonderful. Help us never to lose sight of the wonder that is inside us.

AMEN

Hymns and Psalms 465 We have a gospel to proclaim.

We have a gospel to proclaim
Good news for men in all the earth;
The gospel of a Saviour's name:
We sing His glory, tell His worth.

Tell of His birth at Bethlehem,
Not in a royal house or hall
But in a stable dark and dim:
The Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of His death at Calvary,
Hated by those He came to save;
In lonely suffering on the cross
For all He loved, His life He gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
Empty the tomb, for He was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
That we might share His victory.

Tell of His reign at God's right hand,
By all creation glorified;
He sends His Spirit on His Church
To live for Him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name Him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel message we proclaim:
We sing His glory, tell His worth.

Blessing

May peace be woven as clothing over those whom we love,
Those whom we do not like but ought to love,
Our families,
Our friends,
Our communities,
Our disfigured but beautiful world
And ourselves

And may the Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all now and always.

AMEN.