

Christchurch, Hitchin. 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021 @10:45am

**Call to worship based on Psalm 98.**

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvellous things.  
His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.  
The LORD has made known his victory,  
All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.  
Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth,  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

**Hymn (S.t. F) 24**

Come, now is the time to worship  
Come, now is the time to give your heart  
Come, just as you are to worship  
Come, just as you are before your God  
Come  
One day every tongue will confess You are God  
One day every knee will bow  
Still, the greatest treasure remains for those  
Who gladly **choose you** now.  
Come, now is the time to worship  
Come, now is the time to give your heart  
Come, just as you are to worship  
Come, just as you are before your God  
Come  
One day every tongue will confess You are God  
One day every knee will bow  
Still, the greatest treasure remains for those  
Who gladly choose you now. By Brian Doerksen (b.1965)

**Prayers of Adoration**

God of relationships,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, together and as one  
You draw us into friendship with you that we may draw others to you.  
You command us to love as you have loved us that we might inspire others.  
You fill our hearts with the passion of your heart that we might serve others.  
You are the most authentic and faithful friend,  
the most enduring; we praise and thank you,  
for the giving and the receiving, for the opportunities and challenges,  
for the laughter and the tears, for the conversation and silence,

for the moments and memories, draw us deeper into your love,  
and bless us with the confidence, to proclaim Jesus as our dearest friend, teacher and  
Saviour. **Amen** (Roots, 113 Issue)

### **A prayer of confession**

Dear Lord, your love is so precious; but we have turned away,  
from you when our lives have been easy-  
forgive us and help us to turn back to you.  
You commanded us to love others, but we have turned away from them when their lives  
have been difficult; forgive us and help us to be there for them.  
You have shared with us your ministry of words and actions.  
But in many ways, we have not matched our words to our actions-  
forgive us and always help us be the hearers and the doers of your words.  
Help us to live a joyful, loving, and friendly life as we partner with the Holy Spirit as  
ambassadors, advertisers and marketers of your Kingdom around the world.  
For the sake of Jesus, whose life and death, deeds and words have saved us.  
Amen! (Roots, issue 113)

### **Hymn 548 (S. t. F)**

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

*Refrain:*

*This is my story; this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.  
This is my story; this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

2. Perfect communion, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my sight.  
Angels descending bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love. [*Refrain*]

3. Perfect submission, all is at rest.  
I in my Saviour am happy and blessed,  
Watching and waiting, looking above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his love(*Refrain*) by Fanny Crosby (1820-1915)

## Bible reading. John 15:11-17, Acts 10:44-48

### Reflection: The way of life of God's chosen people

**John 15:11-17:** *"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."<sup>1</sup>*

From time to time, depending on the occasion, I go to the shops to choose a dress to wear. Before buying a dress, I ask myself a question: "why am I buying this dress? What is it for? How much does it cost? Etc..."

From our Gospel reading today, we have these words: **"I have chosen you; you have not chosen me."** These are the central words Jesus said to His disciples. It is not us who have chosen God, but God, in His grace, has reached out to us through Jesus Christ with a call and an offer made out of His unconditional Love. Today, we reflect on why Jesus has chosen us and what kind of way of life should we live as God's chosen people. **John 15:11-17** tells that we have been chosen for joy; to be God's friends and partners in his great commission, his ambassadors and marketers. It is our choice to accept or refuse God's way of life as His chosen people who genuinely serve him (MDO's servanthood ministry).

We have been chosen for joy. No matter how hard the Christian way of life might be, both in the travelling and in the goal, by sending His son Jesus Christ, God's intention was for our joy! There is always Joy in doing what is right, although 'what is right' might be subjective! When we have achieved some duty or some tasks, there is a sense of joy motivating and inspiring us. The word of God says in Nehemiah 8: 10 that the joy of the Lord is a believer's strength, even in hardship, or when grieving, Christians find some joy in the Lord, who has redeemed us all. Indeed, there is Joy in the way of life with Jesus. The joy comes from the sacrificial relationship with Jesus and with others. Jesus' sacrificed his life for our joy. The question is: what are we prepared to sacrifice for the joy of others? Yes, we cannot die for others, but the sacrifice of love comes in many ways. Are we bearing fruits? Are we genuinely loving each other, as Jesus Loved us?<sup>2</sup> Yes, we love one another in different ways, but are we doing it to attract others to ourselves or to Jesus? I pray that we will continue to reflect on how we can

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<sup>1</sup> NRSV Bible

<sup>2</sup> Borton J and Muddiman Ed. The Exford Bible Commentary (Oxford University Press, 2001) pg989

practice this sacrificial love that brings joy to all around us because it is in their joy in the Lord that our joy will be complete.

Jesus has called us to be His friends. Jesus tells his disciples that he does not call them slaves anymore; He calls them friends! For those who have experienced slavery of any kind, this statement means more than words. For us today, the term friends might sound familiar, but for those who heard it for the first time, it meant more than what it means to us today. For instance, when we look in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 34:5, and Joshua 24:29, and in Psalm 89:20, Moses, Joshua and David were called slaves and servants of God. In the New Testament, Paul and James saw it as an honour to be a servant of God. However, when Jesus told his disciples that they were His friends, it meant something that they never knew about before they met Him. It is an offer of an intimate friendship with God, which was impossible before Jesus, who enabled them to have a personal relationship with God. It is our choice to accept or reject this privilege of having this personal relationship with God through Jesus, our Lord.

Jesus has called us to be His partners in his great mission. The slaves or servants couldn't partner with their masters. Commentaries indicate that according to Greek Law, slaves were considered a living tool. No relationship with their masters. The slaves had to do what they were told without reasoning or asking any question or without explanation.<sup>3</sup> I have watched 12 years of slavery and the hidden figures movies. From these two movies, I appreciate more the work of Jesus, who turned things around for the best of all. He said: "*you are not my slaves; you are my partners,*" I have shared with you everything God has told me; I have shared what I am trying to do and why I am doing it. Friends, what a privilege!!! No wonder why Deaconal ministry puts emphasis on partnership, networking and relationship building. As His followers, Jesus has given us the honour of becoming his partners in His great mission. As He shared with his disciples his mind, aims, goals, plans, and ambitions to save the world, he shares this with each one of us by the power of the Holy Spirit and through each one of us! Jesus opens His heart to us all. It is up to us to accept or refuse to open our hearts and partner with the Holy Spirit in His mission.

Jesus has called us to be His ambassadors and marketers by sending us out, as he did it with his first disciples. He chose us to be his representative here on earth by living out our faith in words and genuine in actions. Jesus never sends us to start an argument with those who are not Christians or to start competitions between ourselves, but he has sent us out to live a life that bears fruits that

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<sup>3</sup> Borton J and Muddiman Ed. The Exford Bible Commentary (Oxford University Press, 2001) pg989

other people might desire for themselves. How do we bear fruits around those who are different from us?

The truth is the way we market and advertise the work of God in our churches and in our daily life really matters. Every business person has to market what they sell. Business people must show how excellent their products are to attract consumers. So often, I am consistently asking myself, how shall I market the good news of the Gospel to the world? As far as marketing is concerned, Matthew 6:1-4 tell us that we must take extra care to not be like hypocrites who show their good deeds to please people instead of seeking to please God, who sees our motives and deep down in our hearts as we serve him.

Today we are reminded that we have been chosen and called for joy, love, friendship, and partnership with Jesus in His great commission to be His unique ambassadors and marketers. Most importantly, by the power of the Holy Spirit and for his name's glory, we are to bear fruits that others might desire and loving one another because that how the world will know that we have been chosen by the one who gave up his life for our sake. Therefore, we have the free will to accept or to fully embrace the way of life for Jesus' chosen people.

#### **Prayers of intercession**

Heavenly Father and Mother, we give thanks for mountains, lakes, rivers and plains in the Cumbria District and for all its dwelling places.

We pray for the farming community, in Cumbria and around the country, with its present uncertainties and often impossible margins, and for agricultural chaplains, for the Ecumenical Western Dales Pioneer Minister, and for other new ecumenical Pioneer practitioners and fresh expressions within the district.

**May the Power of the Holy Spirit fell upon them once again to guide, reveal, strengthen as they reach out in their new contexts.**

We also pray the service and witness of traditional chapels in rural communities, market towns and urban and post-industrial contexts.

We pray:

for many who visit the district to enjoy the beauty of God's earth,  
for the thousands of people who work in the tourist industry,  
for the ministry of the chaplain to tourism workers,  
for the moves towards a new ecumenical mission community in Windermere,  
for other mission communities emerging across this district...

**May the Power of the Holy Spirit fell upon your servants once again to guide, reveal, strengthen as they reach out in their new contexts.**

We remember.....

Loving God, thank you that in your love, forgiveness and compassion, you did not abandon all that you have made but came amongst us in your Son Jesus Christ to heal, guide and transform. May your life and love honestly and truly inform and shape all our hearts and minds for the challenges and the opportunities that lie before us. For those who struggle, may there be comfort and release, for those who would bring relief, may there be wisdom and strength, and for those who lead, and for us all, may eyes and minds, hearts and hands be open to see, love and respond, as you see, love and respond, for the sake and love of all. In the name of God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit! Amen (prayer by Reverend James Tebbutt, Cumbria District Chair)

### **Our Lord's Prayer.**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your Kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the Kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever.  
Amen.

### **Hymn (S. t. F) 531**

What a friend we have in Jesus,  
all our sins and griefs to bear!  
What a privilege to carry  
everything to God in prayer!  
O what peace we often forfeit,  
O what needless pain we bear,  
all because we do not carry,  
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?  
Is there trouble anywhere?  
We should never be discouraged,  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Can we find a friend so faithful?  
Who will all our sorrows share?  
Jesus knows our every weakness,  
take it to the Lord in prayer!

Are we weak and heavy laden?  
Cumbered with a load of care?  
Precious Saviour, still our refuge--  
take it to the Lord in prayer!  
Do your friends despise, forsake you?  
Take it to the Lord in prayer!  
In his arms, he will take and shield you,  
you will find a solace there. By Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886)

**Blessing.**

May, the gracious God, fill you with the Power of His Holy Spirit,  
May the Lord bless and keep you; make his face shine upon you.  
May the Lord look on you with kindness and give you peace.  
Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen (MWB)**