

16th August 2026 – Morning Service

Martyn Filsak

Call to Worship – Psalm 96:1

Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth.

Sing to the Lord, praise his name; proclaim his salvation day by day.

StF 88 – Praise to the Lord the Almighty

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| 1) Praise to the Lord, the Almighty,
the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy
health and salvation!
All ye who hear,
Brothers and sisters, draw near,
Praise him in glad adoration. | 4) Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness
of sin is abounding,
Who, when the godless do triumph,
all virtue confounding,
Sheddeth his light,
Chaseth the horrors of night,
Saints with his mercy surrounding. |
| 2) Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper
thy work and defend thee;
Surely his goodness and mercy here
daily attend thee:
Ponder anew
What the Almighty can do,
Who with his love doth befriend thee. | 5) Praise to the Lord! O let all that
is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now
with praises before him!
Let the amen
Sound from his people again:
Gladly for aye we adore him. |
| 3) Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
Fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
Then to thy need
He like a mother doth speed,
Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee. | |

Joachim Neander translated by Cathering Winkworth & Rupert E Davies

Opening Prayers

Lord our God, we bless your name for you are worthy of all praise. Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. You are holy and there is no other God, nor anyone like you. In your love you rescued us through your Son, taking away our sin and giving us his righteousness through our trust in him. You have sent your Holy Spirit to dwell in us so that we are never alone. We see your glory reflected in the world around us, in the sun, moon and stars, in eclipses, in the oceans and mountains. We see your provision in the growth of trees and plants and the harvest of the fruits of the earth. We acknowledge your tender care towards us. Accept our praise and worship today, for we love you. **Amen.**

You bless us with your bounty and grace, yet still we are imperfect in our devotion, and we fail you in word and deed. We battle with our old human nature and yet long to be perfected. As we confess our sins and shortcomings we are assured afresh of your forgiveness. You affirm your irrevocable calling on our lives and give us firm standing in the knowledge that we are yours forever. Our sins are forgiven! We are grateful. Thank you. **Amen.**

Reading: Genesis 45: 1-15 (NIV)

Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, 'Make everyone leave my presence!' So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph! Is my father still living?' But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Come close to me.' When they had done so, he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will be no ploughing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

'So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, "This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don't delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me – you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute."

'You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. Tell my father about all the honour accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.'

Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterwards his brothers talked with him.

Reflection

The story of Joseph is a compelling one. Here is a man who provoked the jealousy of his brothers, who then sold him into slavery. He is falsely imprisoned for something that he didn't do, then released and becomes the second-ranking person in the whole of Egypt. He feeds an entire region of the earth in time of famine through skilful administration and supernatural wisdom, then is reconciled to his brothers.

As with many Biblical stories, there are parallels with the life of Jesus.

Joseph was rejected by his brothers, so was Christ rejected by his spiritual brothers, the Jews.

Because Joseph was sold into Egypt, he was given the opportunity to provide food for the whole region and bless many nations. In the same way, because Jesus was rejected by his brothers, the Jewish people, the apostles took the gospel to the Gentiles and the whole world was blessed.

In Egypt, Joseph revealed his identity to his brothers (he would have taken on the clothing and make-up of the Egyptians as well as having looked different through the effects of time) and they then were able to recognise him. When Jesus comes a second time, as the Scriptures attest that he will, the Jews will recognise him as Messiah and look upon the one that they pierced (Zechariah 12:10). Then Jews and Gentiles will be united as one new community in Christ.

There is therefore a sequence to God's plan. The gospel was to be given first to the Jewish people, then to the Gentiles.

Jesus came primarily to give the message to the Jews during his earthly life. He lived in Israel and ministered largely within its boundaries. Although many Jewish people received him, many of the leaders rejected him. The Apostles continued for a while to preach only to Jews, but the time came when they recognised that the Gospel message would be more readily received by the Gentiles, and it spread throughout the world.

Reading: Romans 11: 1-2a, 29-32 (NIV)

I ask then: did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. 2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.

For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, so they too have now become disobedient in order that

they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.

Reflection

Prophetic scriptures tell us that eventually the Jews will recognise their Messiah and all Israel will be saved (Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11). In these chapters Paul deals with the question of the Jewish people. If the Jews, Israel, God's covenant people, seem to have rejected their Messiah, has God's plan failed? Paul concludes that God's plan certainly has not failed. God has never rejected his Jewish people. Instead, God's plan was that they should ultimately accept Jesus as Messiah. For a while they are hardened to the gospel, so that Gentiles can come in and be included in God's people, but eventually the Jews will accept Messiah as well.

Paul makes it quite clear that the Gentile church has not replaced Israel and the Jewish people. Instead, Gentiles are "grafted in" to Israel, just as wild olive branches can be grafted in to a cultivated olive. What should the Gentile Church's attitude towards the Jews therefore be? It should be one of humility, because we recognise that we are the wild olives grafted in to the cultivated tree. There is a movement in the Church today, as there has been for centuries, to separate the Church from her Jewish roots. Paul makes it quite clear that this is wrong. We should cherish our Jewish roots and recognise God's plan in the gospel going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles.

This sequence will help us to understand the gospel reading, which we will hear after our next song.

StF 58 - Lord, I come before your throne of grace

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| 1) Lord, I come before Your throne of grace;
I find rest in Your presence
And fullness of joy.
In worship and wonder
I behold Your face,
Singing what a faithful God have I. | 2) Lord of mercy, you have heard my cry;
Through the storm You're the beacon,
My song in the night.
In the shelter of Your wings,
Hear my heart's reply,
Singing what a faithful God have I. |
| Ch) <i>What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God.
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.</i> | 3) Lord all sovereign, granting peace from heaven,
Let me comfort those who suffer
With the comfort You have given.
I will tell of Your great love for as long as I live,
Singing what a faithful God have I. |

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Reading: Matthew 15: 21-28 (NIV)

Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, 'Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.'

Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, 'Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.'

He answered, 'I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.'

The woman came and knelt before him. 'Lord, help me!' she said.

He replied, 'It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.'

'Yes it is, Lord,' she said. 'Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.'

Then Jesus said to her, 'Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.' And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Address

This passage at first sight may seem difficult to make sense of. Was Jesus really ignoring the need of this woman? Why did he seem to make it so difficult for her to receive from him?

Firstly we need to remember that Jesus was kind and generous and wanted people to both receive him and receive from him.

Secondly, recalling our first reading and the earlier part of the reflection, we remind ourselves that God's revelation of himself to the world through Messiah Jesus had a sequence: firstly to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. Jesus had a clear understanding of his mission, which was to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. However, he also responded to the faith which he saw in people's hearts, whoever they were, and was willing to grant this woman her request to see her daughter healed on the basis of the woman's faith in him. There is support in other parts of scripture for healings to Gentiles, for example the healing of the Roman Centurion's servant (Matthew 8: 5-13 and Luke 7: 1-10) and, centuries earlier, the restoration (under the guidance of a young Israelite girl and the prophet Elisha) of the health of Naaman the Syrian (2 Kings 5).

What is Jesus trying to do here? Some have suggested that he was testing the disciples to see whether they would have compassion on this woman. This is possible but there are other explanations.

I also suggest that Jesus, by his delay, was deliberately drawing out of this woman the reality of what was in her heart. She initially approached Jesus by trying to get his attention with the words "Son of David." She was a Gentile and yet was sounding Jewish. Was she trying to put on a front of Jewishness in order to impress Jesus? Did Jesus need to break through this veneer of Jewishness in order to uncover the reality of who she was? Jesus loved who she really was, not the person that she may have wanted him to think that she was.

Pastor Joseph Prince of New Creation Church Singapore has an interesting take on the story. He says that the Gentile woman, by using Jewish-sounding language to call to Jesus, was approaching Jesus on the basis of the Jewish Law, or at least giving the appearance of doing so. Because she was not part of God's covenant people Israel, the only possible response that Jesus could have spoken to her would be one of rebuke and condemnation. Therefore he was merciful in being silent! Had he spoken to her at that stage his response would have seemed even more harsh than his silence. You may or may not accept that explanation but it may explain why Jesus initially chose not to reply.

Jesus eventually explains his mission, which was to his own people, Israel, the Jews. The woman then kneels down and simply says, "Lord, help me". Now she is making progress. The religious language has gone and she simply asks for help. She is not leaning on any pretence of being part of God's covenant people but simply coming just as she is.

There is then a conversation about throwing the children's bread to the dogs. However, the Greek word for dogs here is not the one that refers to wild dogs, so despised by the Jewish people, but the pet dogs, literally "little dogs" that could be part of a household. I like to think that Jesus has a twinkle in his eye as he uses this image to draw further wisdom out of this lady.

Jesus is impressed by this woman's great faith. We don't even know her name, but she is one of only two people described in the gospels as impressing Jesus by having great faith, and she was not even part of God's covenant people. The other one was the Centurion (note: another Gentile, a Roman, someone not part of Israel... interesting!!) whose servant Jesus healed.

I wonder if the Lord sometimes appears to be silent or delays answering our prayers in order to uncover our real faith, and to grow that faith in the process. Do you sometimes find that if you are praying into a situation over a long period of time without seeing any apparent change in circumstances, you notice that you yourself are changing? Your faith matures, and your prayers themselves change and become more

God-centred and less self-absorbed as time goes on. Sometimes the silence of God for a season is part of his mercy towards us and causes us to grow, leading to greater blessing in the end.

Do we sometimes approach God by trying to make ourselves sound worthy of his blessing? People sometimes use religious language thinking that the Lord will respond to that more readily than if they just speak what is in their hearts. They try to sound entitled and believe that in some way they are more likely to have their prayers answered because of their self-perceived virtue, religious pedigree or family background. Jesus, of course, takes no notice of any of self-appropriated sense of entitlement. He is looking for empty hands and an expectant heart, then he acts!

In the Gospels, when people came to Jesus relying in some way on their own goodness, Jesus responded by telling them how hard it was to enter the kingdom of God. However, to those who came simply with their need and their faith, and without any pretension to goodness, he provided welcome with joy and met their needs. That's why the tax collectors and prostitutes and general "sinners" received from him so easily, and some of the more religious types went away disgruntled.

When we come to the Lord with needs, it's important to come without any pretension of entitlement, recognising that we have no righteousness of our own. As Paul says in Romans 11:32, all humankind has disobeyed. None of us deserve God's favour, only judgement, yet God has chosen to show us mercy! When we come with empty hands and an expectant heart, with faith and humility, that is what really gets Jesus' attention!

StF 565 – Only by grace can we enter

Only by grace can we enter,
Only by grace can we stand;
Not by our human endeavour,
But by the blood of the Lamb.
Into Your presence You call us, You call us to come.
Into Your presence You draw us,
And now by Your grace we come,
Now by Your grace we come.

Lord if You mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.
Lord if You mark our transgressions,
Who would stand?
Thanks to Your grace we are cleansed
By the blood of the Lamb.

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Prayers of Intercession

Father God, we give you thanks and praise because you have opened up to us the Kingdom of God. Although we were far away from you, we are now brought near through the Lord Jesus Christ. We belong through faith to your holy nation, and nothing can remove us from your strong hand. We thank you that you love us as we are, and care enough to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

We pray for the nations of our world. Your love beckons all to follow you, and yet many choose a different way. Nation has gone to war with nation and there is unrest in many places. We pray for Jesus the Prince of Peace to reign and bring forgiveness and reconciliation where there has been conflict.

We pray for the earth's resources to be shared equitably with all. Where there are famines caused by flood or drought or human failure we pray for those who seek to help. May this help be provided in a way that does not disenfranchise those receiving it, but may it promote dignity and self-determination. As much of the UK is affected by drought we pray for abundant rain in the areas that need it most, and for a blessing on our farming and growing community upon which we depend.

We pray for our own government and all those in positions of influence in our society, that they may act with love, courage and integrity, standing up for all of the nation's citizens without favour to any particular group. Guard our national institutions for health, justice, education, social care and emergency responses and bless those who work in them.

We pray for your guidance and blessing upon our own circuit and churches as we pursue the way of spiritual growth and outreach. We ask the blessing of your Holy Spirit on Rev Rachel as she begins work in the Circuit from September.

We remember those within our congregations and others known to us who need particular provision right now, whether it be healing, comfort, encouragement, wisdom or peace. We know that you provide out of the riches of your glory.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

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 for ever. **Amen.**

StF 556 – Just as I am

1) Just as I am, without one plea
But that you died and set me free,
And at your bidding, 'Come to me!'
O Lamb of God, I come!

2) Just as I am, though tossed about
With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings within and fear without,
O Lamb of God, I come!

3) Just as I am, you will receive,
Will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come!

4) Just as I am - your love unknown
Has broken every barrier down -
Now to be yours, yes, yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come!

5) Just as I am, of that free love
The breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,
Here for a season, then above,
O Lamb of God, I come!

Charlotte Elliott

Blessing

Lord, place upon us the blessing of Father Abraham, as we have been made members of your Covenant people. The blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us now and evermore. **Amen.**