



Written service for Sunday 13th February 2022

Draw near to God, our source of life
who is ready and waiting to bless you
in this time of worship.

Hymn 25 StF, 653 H&P, 1193 MP God is here! As we his people

Prayers

Lord, I have come to worship you,
Knowing that you are always ready to bless me with your love,
You who created all the world and all the living creatures
find me worthy to be showered with your peace
and given a purpose in your kingdom.
You continue to nourish me with your provision and care day after day
And I rejoice and marvel at your works
But at the same time find myself full of awe
for who you are and what you do.

But Lord, even with all your love surrounding me,
sometimes I still get things wrong.
When my faith is tested to the limit and I stumble, forgive me.
When my feet stray from the path and I wander away from you, forgive me.
When my neighbour is in need and I pass by, forgive me.
When the voices of this world drown out your whisper, forgive me.

Jesus was sent to the world, to live our life and share our humanity, but died
on the cross so that we can all be forgiven. Amen.

Say the Lord's prayer...

Bible Readings

Jeremiah 17:5-10

Luke 6:17-26

Hymn 164 StF, H&P 482 Your words to me are life and health

This week for the first time during the Covid pandemic, I'm hiding away in one room, not because I'm positive...at the time of writing... but because I've been a close contact to someone who tested positive. I'm trying not to pass on any possible infection to the rest of the family. No doubt over the last 2 years some of you, or maybe all of you have been in a similar situation, especially if you live on your own. But I feel lost, the usual household activities that normally happen without us even noticing have mostly stopped for me, even

little things like when the TV gets switched on or the washing machine beeping to say it's finished. The interaction between family has changed...I'm thankful for WhatsApp and all the other internet based contact systems, but it's not the same. I feel a little bit uprooted and put in to a different place, in to a desert away from family life.

Jeremiah uses the image of shrubs in the desert to tell the Judeans what it will be like if they trust in humans and turn away from God. If they trusted in the political or military alliances they were trying to build with other Egypt against the Babylonians, it might have the appearance of health and strength, but it would be rootless and lacking in depth and would be readily destroyed. But we know that they didn't follow Jeremiah's advice and the Babylonians tighten their grip and eventually destroyed the city of Jerusalem, taking the people in to exile. When that happened, I'm sure at first they felt like they were living in a desert, uprooted and away from home, their whole life turned upside down.

It's hard living in a desert, whether that is a real desert, one we have created for ourselves or a metaphorical one. The Judeans learnt it in exile and Moses and the Israelites learn it wandering around in the wilderness on their way to the promised land. There is not the sustenance of fresh water, nutrients, or in my case this week, of family life to keep us going when times are tough.

Jeremiah's plea was for the people to put their trust in God instead and then they would be blessed, as if they were trees planted near a stream, with fresh water flowing near their roots and no doubt a lot more vegetation which would offer more nutrition. When drought, hot weather or hard times come there will still be a source to keep life going.

I'm sure if Jeremiah was here today, he would still be pleading for us to put our trust in God, as churches and as individuals. As he points out our human hearts are devious and can make us think that following our political, military or cultural leaders will bring us to a place of safety and security. But the only way to be truly satisfied is by staying close to God and putting deep roots into the source of life and nurturing our relationship with God, which he freely offers to us. We know though that it can be a challenge, it is not easy to work out the difference between trusting in God and that which cannot truly satisfy.

We might want to look more deeply at what stops us trusting in God, well if we turn to Luke, there are 4 blessing and 4 woes, and it is the woes that are the warnings for us. Being rich, well fed, being in a place of merriment and laughing, and being well thought of, are some of the things can stop us connecting with God. These are the things that can trap us in to only thinking about ourselves, not that God wants us to be poor or sad, but Jesus is

pointing out that in God's Kingdom things are reversed and it is those who are weaker who will be blessed.

The blessings are promises to those who are suffering in this world that God still sees them, loves them, and is intent on their thriving. The poorest and hungriest are recognised by God and given fresh hope. Jesus's words should make those of us who are already blessed in so many ways, feel a calling to pay attention to our neighbour and be generous with what we have, just as God is attentive and generous with us.

Unlike in Matthew where we find the Beatitudes in the sermon on the mount, Luke portrays Jesus teaching on a level place, on the plain, somewhere flat. Maybe part of what Luke is saying is that we should be trying to help create a world where there is equality. We know that energy bills are going up, and if we haven't been hit by them yet, we will be soon, food prices are rising along with NI and interest rates. We also know that during the pandemic the 10 richest men have seen their wealth double during the covid pandemic, and to be honest, most of us are rich compared to many. How can we alter the balance of wealth so that everyone has a share on a level playing field? Now that is a question many have tried to answer, and maybe in this human world it's not one we can accomplish, but God will in his time and his Kingdom, in his Kingdom those who are 'high and mighty' now, will be brought low.

Both of our bible readings should give us hope and at the same time challenge us, God knows us and cares for each one of us, whatever our circumstances, but he will also examine our hearts and know what our motivations are. He will deal justly with each one of us. If we stay rooted in Gods ways, trust him for what is to come and not get side-tracked, then we can be part of God's Kingdom, which is different to our earthly kingdoms world because it leads to peace and wholeness for all people.

Hymn 504 StF, 739 H&P, 463 MP May the mind of Christ my Saviour

Prayers of Intercession

Lets pray for the world and for the things that concern us, using the following prompts:

We are members of the family of God. But many of our sisters and brothers live lives that are different to ours.

We have food to eat and fresh water to drink, yet for many in the world these are not freely available.

We have shelter and clothing, yet for many in the world these are in short supply.

We have access to medical care, yet for many in the world, clinics and hospitals are overcrowded and understaffed, or are far away.

We are able to meet freely to worship God, yet many Christians suffer persecution for their beliefs.

We are members together of the family of God.

Loving God, help us to be generous and selfless with all that you have given to us. Teach us to share so that others may benefit. Help us to be thankful and not to take your gifts for granted. Grant us the grace to offer ourselves in service to others, for the sake of your Son who offered his life for us. **Amen.**

From Rootsontheweb

Hymn 681 StF Community of Christ

Say The Grace, remembering that even if you are on your own, there are other's saying this today in churches, or on their own, all around the world....