

Sunday 5th July 2020

Call to worship - An opening prayer

Romans 7:18: "for I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out."

God of Grace

We come before you today with good intentions, longing to please you.

We come before you today leaving the messiness of our week behind, setting aside the things we often prioritise over you.

We come before you today with thankful hearts; grateful for your grace that is poured out not just for the best bits of ourselves, but also for the bits we feel ashamed of.

We come before you today knowing that you change us,

Even if it is scary and unknown and beyond our comprehension, we open ourselves up for transformation.

As we come before you today:

take our good intentions,
take the messiness of our lives,
take our best bits and our worst bits,
take our willingness to be changed,
take us as individuals
take us as a community
and weave it all into the fabric of your kingdom.

May your words of grace, that our sins are forgiven speak to us this day. Take us, use us, change us, Lord.

Open our hearts now in worship, so that we might see more of You. Amen.

To God be the glory

1 To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.

2 O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God;
for every offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!
Let the people rejoice!
Oh, come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory!
Great things he has done!*

3 Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son:
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
our joy and our wonder, when Jesus we see.

Frances (Fanny) Jane Crosby (1820–1915)

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Readings: Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

¹⁶ "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷ "We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn."

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

²⁵ At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. ²⁶ Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do.

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²⁷ “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.
²⁸ “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Reflection

In the first half of chapter 11 of Matthew’s Gospel we read Jesus’s tribute to John the Baptist. By this time John is in prison, and he’s longing to know if he has stepped aside for nothing, whether all his efforts and the suffering he’s now enduring are worth it. He’s aching to be reassured that he has truly heard what God was saying to him and what God had been telling him to do. He gets the reassurance he needs because Jesus sends his disciples back to report to John the things that they have seen Jesus doing. Jesus then turns to the crowd and says his public ‘Thank yous’ to John, the man who was prepared to be nothing himself but to point to Jesus so that he could eventually step into his rightful place.

But the crowd Jesus is talking to aren’t really very interested. After all, John is yesterday’s news. Things have moved on. They are ready for the next sensation. The tabloids are now full of Jesus, for the moment at least, until he puts a foot wrong, or something more interesting and less demanding turns up. The crowd are getting restless with all this talk about John. They have come to hear about themselves, their needs, their hopes and fears. Who cares about that old has-been, John?

Jesus knows his audience well, as his ironic little parable shows. Let’s try and unwrap it a little bit. They are like selfish children, who will only play their own game, and even then, only if they can take the main part. When their fellow playmates, John and Jesus, try to initiate a game, the bored children won’t play. ‘I don’t like that game,’ they shout, ‘I didn’t make it up, and I don’t like it. It’s a silly game.’ ‘Your game is too sad,’ they tell John, ‘why can’t we play a happy game? Someone’s always dying in your game.’ ‘And your game is too noisy,’ they tell Jesus, ‘and I don’t like that kind of cake, and you’ve got more squash than I have.’ We all know what children can be like when they are playing together!

But of course, the end result for these poor, cross, dissatisfied children is that they end up with no one to play with at all, and no idea of how or what to play on their own. They are alone, crying and grumpy, not knowing what they really want, only that they haven’t got it.

But if the spoiled, tantrum-throwing child is one half of today’s picture the other half is the excited, curious, wondering child of verses 25 to 27. This is the child who does not always need to be in charge, but is the one happy to play the game by someone else’s rules. This is the child who has not been left alone with only other children to try and sort things out by themselves, but rather the one whose Father is there to play too. His Father will not take control of the game; he will allow the child to take it in his own direction, but he will be there, sharing, enjoying, rejoicing in the imagination and creativity of his child and gently leading them in the right direction

The intimacy of these verses is very moving, with their repeated use of the child’s voice calling on the ‘Father’. When we move into the final few verses of this chapter of Matthew 11, what we hear is this voice again, but now grown up. It is the voice of the child who has been well fathered, who has known the love and support and delight of his father, and can now in turn care for others. Jesus, the child of the Father, turns to those spoiled lonely children from the earlier verses, and offers them rest. The burden of their discontent and frustration is too much. Can they learn to turn to the Son of the Father?

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Prayers for Others

Living God, we come before you in this time of prayer.

We do not always understand the power of prayer, and feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the task – the desire to speak to you openly and honestly about ourselves, our world, our faith.

As we pray Lord, we ask you to move us beyond our doubts and our uncertainties.

Move us by your Spirit.

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief.

In this time of prayer, O God, we bring you a world in need, a world in pain, a world seeking hope, joy and peace.

We hold up all those affected by the Coronavirus:

all working on the front-line to support those most in need;

all those enabling our lives to continue to function;

all those working in hospitals and health centres around the world;

all those seeking a vaccine and at the fore-front of research.

We bring to you all those whose lives have been made worse by this virus:

those who have lost loved ones;

those who are living with symptoms;

those living in fear;

those in situations, countries or environments that make it impossible to self-isolate or feel safe.

We bring you all the concerns and fears in our world that have been ignored, overlooked or moved lower-down the priority list because of global attention on the pandemic:

those without a home;

those living in poverty;

those living with other diseases or health conditions.

We pray for all those seeking a better world.

May we work together, in Jesus' name, to bring about a better world.

May I find my place, my calling, and know the Spirit moving through me.

By the power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer

O Jesus I have promised

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end ;
be now and always near me,
my master and my friend :
I shall not fear the battle
if you are by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if you will be my guide.

Oh, let me feel you near me :
the world is ever near ;
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear ;
my foes are ever near me,
around me, and within ;
but, Jesus, draw still nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

Oh, let me hear you speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will ;
Oh, speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control ;
O speak, and make me listen,
true guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, you have promised
to all who follow you,
that where you are in glory
your servant shall be too ;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end :
now give me grace to follow,
my master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816–1874) (*alt.*)

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Blessing

Present and holy God, come and meet with us today.
Transform us into tools for your grace, your peace, your love.

Build your kingdom here, we pray. Amen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pCb7seykw>