

A month of Sundays November 2023



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

Sunday 5th November 2023

Call to worship

Jesus is the one we follow.

He came to serve,
he humbled himself on a cross,
and he was and is exalted.

Jesus is our pattern and example,
He is our teacher and we are all students.
Let us worship him.

Bible readings: Matthew 23:1-12

A Warning Against Hypocrisy

23 Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: ²“The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. ³ So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. ⁴ They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.

⁵“Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; ⁶ they love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.

⁸“But you are not to be called ‘Rabbi,’ for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. ⁹ And do not call anyone on earth ‘father,’ for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant. ¹² For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Hymn Stf 563 O Jesus, I have promised

- 1 O Jesus, I have promised
to serve you to the end ;
Lord, be for ever 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.

- 2 O 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, now draw nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

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

- 4 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 ;
O give me grace to follow
my master and my friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816–1874)

Prayer of intercession

Today, we pray for all who feel isolated.

In their uniqueness, they may also feel alone.

This is most of us, some of the time,

but it is some of us most of the time.

God of encounter, may we all turn with love and interest towards those who have been isolated.

God of encounter:

hear our prayer.

Amen.

Reflection

Reflect for a few moments on a Scottish missionary. No, not Columba, Ninian, or any of the famous Celtic saints. This story is about a girl who lived within recent memory. During a missionary talk in Glasgow, she felt God's call, a life-changing moment, and it led to what she described as 'her life work' – and ultimately to the sacrifice of her life in Auschwitz. This missionary is Jane Haining. She was born in 1897, into a strong Christian family in a peaceful rural idyll in Dumfriesshire. Outstanding achievements at school led to a successful working life in Glasgow – which is how she came to be there, in 1927, to hear God calling her. She retrained and devoted the rest of her life to caring for young girls in The Scottish Missionary School in Budapest.

During a visit home in 1939, with war imminent, Jane was not persuaded to remain safe in Scotland. Her memorial in her birthplace records her response: 'If these children need me in the days of sunshine, how much more will they need me in days of darkness.' She returned to her duties but was soon arrested by the Gestapo and accompanied some of her children to Auschwitz where she perished. Some school pupils survived the death camp, and remembered her commitment, dedication and care for the rest of their lives.

Eventually, in 1997, on the 52nd anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, Jane Haining was recognised on the wall of honour in the Garden of Remembrance in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, as one of the 'Righteous Among the Nations' – an award given to non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. What began as an 'ordinary' Scottish life will now forever be remembered for her faithfulness to Jesus' own ministry and sacrifice as a servant of humankind.

Of course, Jane Haining is not the only one. There are many whose lives are an example and an inspiration to others, to us. Some may be well known even famous, either during or after their lifetime. But many, if not most, will be ordinary people called by God not to seek honour or glory but to serve in the place they were called to be. Ordinary people like us.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

May our heartfelt praises ring out and make your light, O God, shine brighter amid the hypocrisy and negativity in this world. You are like an eternal firework lighting up the inky sky. Unlike an earthly firework, you never fizzle out. Your love makes life sparkle with joy. Thank you for the myriad blessings that explode and colour our lives as we follow you. Thank you for working in us, highlighting our blind spots and growing us in faith.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

Blessing

Go into the world with Jesus as your inspiration, guide and friend. Be generous, without always counting the cost. Give of your time, without always seeking a reward. Share your love with a needy world. Make peace and strive for justice. And do it all in Jesus' name.
Amen.

Sunday 12th November 2023

A prayer of approach

Come, time may be short.

Let us fill our lamps with the oil of joy
as we sing praises and exalt the Lord our God.

Bible reading: Matthew 25:1-13

The Parable of the Ten Virgins

¹ “At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

⁷ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

⁹ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

¹⁰ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹ “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

¹² “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

¹³ “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Reflection

In many places, no woman, young or old, would venture out into the darkness without a lamp. Without a light their actions might be considered suspect, questionable. The lamp was not used only, or even primarily, to show the way; it was held to illuminate the face, to show their identity. In their village or town their identity would be known and welcomed.

In this week’s Gospel reading, the bridesmaids are waiting for the arrival of the bridegroom (and the bride). Traditionally, the bridegroom would journey to the bride’s house and then together they would make their way to the wedding banquet. On the way, the bridegroom would show off his bride to as many people as possible; their arrival was assured, but exactly when was an open question. So that is the context in which the women in Jesus’ story – some wise, some foolish – make their preparations. The wise expect a long wait and bring spare oil. The foolish have only what is in their lamps. Time passes, but eventually the bridegroom’s procession is spotted. They all spring into action. But now the dilemma of the foolish bridesmaids is laid bare, their identity is in darkness. They are forced to go find more oil. But when they return it is too late. They have missed out. They plead for entry into the feast but are told, ‘No, I do not recognise you’. This is not the only parable where people bring judgement on themselves by what they do – or don’t do.

That is why the urgency. That is why the time is now. We have been warned. We do not know when Jesus will come again. But we do know that, when he comes, he will be disappointed if we do not meet him radiant in the light of full and lit lamps with oil to spare.

Hymn StF 76 Give me joy in my heart

- 1 Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning,
Give me oil in my lamp, I pray ;
Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning,
Keep me burning till the break of day :
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King
- 2 Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
give me joy in my heart, I pray ;
give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
keep me praising till the break of day :
- 3 Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving,
give me peace in my heart, I pray ;
give me peace in my heart, keep me loving,
keep me loving till the break of day :
- 4 Give me love in my heart, keep me serving,
give me love in my heart, I pray ;
give me love in my heart, keep me serving,
keep me serving till the break of day :

Anonymous
adapted by A. Servison
and others

A prayer of confession

Forgive us, Lord, for our complacency:
for putting off until tomorrow what needs to be done today;
for failing to prepare, relying instead on the generosity of
others; or not turning to you, but seeking a quick fix, only to be
let down; for neglecting the needs of others or lacking
commitment; and for all the times we've let you down.

Lord God, forgive us.

**Help us to live a better life of faith, and to be more
disciplined, to discern and respond to opportunities made
available to us, to give hope, encouragement and comfort**

to those in need.

May our lives reflect you and bring others to you before time runs out and we miss out on heaven's banquet.

Amen.

Prayer of intercession

Today, God, we pray for those in grief. Someone was living who is now not living, and our hearts mourn in the wake of their lives and their presence in our lives. May we have hope. Not saccharine, not silly, not soppy. We pray for hope. Hope that we may live in the light of their great lives, and in the hope of seeing them again, in the kindness of heaven.

God of encounter:

hear our prayer.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Go now from this place.

Be alert to needs – your own, and those around you.

Be agents of the change you pray for.

Always be ready to meet Jesus.

Amen.

Sunday 19th November 2023

A gathering prayer

Creator God, who has furnished us with all that we have,
we give you praise and thanks.

Remind us of our gifts when we lose sight of them.

Show us where and how to share them.

Give us the courage to offer them freely, as you give to us.

What others may seek to destroy, help us to protect and care,
and give us the conviction to stand fast when we are called to
do so.

This we ask of you, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Hymn Stf 706 Longing for light, we wait in darkness

1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

3 Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.

4 Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.

5 Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957)

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A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We praise you, majestic God of light.
We thank you for your light in our lives;
for the love light in your created people,
shining in the faces of those we know and love;
for the light shining in the words and actions of all who know
you,
and use their time and talents to serve well;
for the joy that pours in, lights up and empowers us
when we let go and trust you with all we have.
We praise and thank you, loving majestic God of light.
Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

Bible readings: Zephaniah 1:7, 12-18

⁷ Be silent before the Sovereign LORD,
for the day of the LORD is near.

The LORD has prepared a sacrifice;
he has consecrated those he has invited.

¹² At that time I will search Jerusalem with lamps
and punish those who are complacent,
who are like wine left on its dregs,

who think, 'The LORD will do nothing,
either good or bad.'

¹³ Their wealth will be plundered,
their houses demolished.

Though they build houses,
they will not live in them;
though they plant vineyards,
they will not drink the wine."

¹⁴ The great day of the LORD is near—
near and coming quickly.

The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter;
the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry.

¹⁵ That day will be a day of wrath—
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of trouble and ruin,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness—

¹⁶ a day of trumpet and battle cry
against the fortified cities
and against the corner towers.

¹⁷ "I will bring such distress on all people
that they will grope about like those who are blind,
because they have sinned against the LORD.

Their blood will be poured out like dust
and their entrails like dung.

¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold
will be able to save them
on the day of the LORD's wrath."

In the fire of his jealousy
the whole earth will be consumed,
for he will make a sudden end
of all who live on the earth.

Matthew 25: 14-30

The Parable of the Bags of Gold

¹⁴ "Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. ¹⁵ To one he gave

five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. ¹⁶ The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. ¹⁷ So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. ¹⁸ But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money.

¹⁹ "After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. ²⁰ The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.'

²¹ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²² "The man with two bags of gold also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.'

²³ "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

²⁴ "Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. ²⁵ So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.'

²⁶ "His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? ²⁷ Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.'

²⁸ “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. ²⁹ For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. ³⁰ And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Reflection

It can be very easy to be disheartened by the darkness of Zephaniah. He doesn't offer much hope. At this time of year, it is also dark and we are fast approaching the shortest day. In ancient times people did not know if the daylight would ever return again to its former glory; they just had to hope that it would. It might seem strange to us now, but in modern times we also have to hope – hope that humanity will address the human-made difficulties our gifted planet faces (floods, droughts, fires and more). Sometimes it is difficult to have much hope that they will. Yet Jesus shows us that by using well what God has given us, there is much in which to invest our gifts, talents and hope. And that includes money.

Christians sometimes have an uneasy relationship with money, feeling that it is somehow wrong to be anything other than poor. Yet here are two passages – in Zephaniah and Matthew – that tell us pretty clearly that it's not the possession of money that is wrong, but what we do (or don't do) with it. Neither silver nor gold will buy us into God's good books, and keeping money for ourselves (if you interpret the story of the talents literally) is just not on. The money we have, or something else that we could regard as 'in kind', is a gift from God; think of it as a loan if you like – which means it must be paid back. How might we do that? Can we use it to help the legacy of God's Garden survive into the future? If action inconveniences us, as it did the man who buried his talent, is that a reason for doing nothing? Does doing nothing make us complicit? Can we find a way of addressing Zephaniah's doom and bring back the peace, joy

and beauty of the Garden of Eden to our tired and unhappy earth?

Prayers of intercession

We pray to God, who is always ready –
for those overtaken with demands.

Give rest, O Lord.

For those overburdened with anxieties.

Give rest, O Lord.

For those overcome with debt.

Give relief, O Lord.

For those oppressed by powers that despise them.

Give salvation, O Lord.

For those in situations they cannot see a way out of.

Give freedom, O Lord.

For those in need of hope.

Give hope, O Lord.

Amen.

A sending out prayer

This earth, this good earth,

The sunlight, the moonlight,

The sky that reaches over us,

The soil beneath our feet.

We will hold all this in our hands with gentleness and love.

Amen.

Sunday 26th October 2023

Call to worship

Let us sing to the Lord.

Let us make a joyful noise.

Let us come into his presence
with thanksgiving and songs of praise.

The Lord is our God, our shepherd;
let us listen to God's voice.

Bible reading: Matthew 25: 31-46

The Sheep and the Goats

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

⁴¹ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.’

⁴⁴ “They also will answer, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?’

⁴⁵ “He will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.’

⁴⁶ “Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.”

Reflection

How easy it is to welcome someone similar to ourself?. How easy it is to exclude someone who is not? Who decides who is deserving and who is not? What is it that makes someone deserving of care and hospitality, and what is it that suggests someone else is not? And when we offer the hand of care, for whose benefit is it – the person receiving it, or ours, because we hope it will buy our way into heaven, or because we are told to, but would rather not?

People often feel uncomfortable about the notion of judgement, but perhaps only if it is ourselves being judged. We are often quite comfortable with judging others. We are quick to deride people who come to the UK as economic migrants while

supporting people leaving the UK to live elsewhere, when it's the same thing. We decide people's stories for them: the mother who must surely be on benefits, on the bus with several children. But the thought that God might be judging us in just the same way makes us squirm. Am I a fat sheep or a lean sheep? I am a lean sheep, surely? I can't possibly be a fat one. Might the knowledge that God is watching help us to be compassionate, and to be so for the right reasons?

Prayer of intercession

For the times when we are sick:

may we have healing.

For the times when we are isolated:

may we have company.

For the times when we are oppressed:

may we have justice.

For the times when we are exposed:

may we have dignity.

For the times when we are mistreated:

may we have humanity.

For the times when we are ignored:

may we be heard.

For the times when we ignore, or isolate, or oppress, or expose or mistreat:

may we change.

Amen.

Hymn StF 489 All I once held dear

1 All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.
*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*

2 Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.

3 Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

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A prayer of confession

Lord, forgive us for the times when we've neglected your Word and our relationship with you. You lovingly reach out to meet the needs of the lost, the hungry, the sick; when hard times strike, we can selfishly hold on to what we have, putting our own needs first. Forgive us for turning a blind eye when we've seen someone we could have helped. Forgive us when our own personal worries cause us to become self-focused.

Forgive us when we've shrugged off helping hands reaching out to us; give us grace to recognise you at work in others.

Lord God, hear our prayer.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

Sprung from the dark depths by the mighty power of God, Jesus sits at God's right hand, having conquered death.

Because of his victory and the power of his love, we who believe in him are also victorious. We are cleansed. We are free. We are forgiven. Praise be to our king, our saviour and our God.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Loving God,

help us to be 'doing' people and not always 'thinking about it';

help us to be 'sharing' people and not hoarders or hidiers;

help us to be people who know we are blessed in abundance by you and, through the power of the Spirit, are eager to pass those blessings on.

We ask in the name of Jesus.

Amen.