

A Month of Sundays September 2024



Preston Ribble Circuit
Ministry Team

Sunday 1st September 2024

Call to worship

Let us give thanks for God's Holy Word.

For the Word of God in Scripture:

Thanks be to God.

For the Word of God within us:

Thanks be to God.

For the Word of God among us:

Thanks be to God.

Bible reading: James 1:17-27

¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. ¹⁸ He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

Listening and Doing

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Hymn Stf 566: Take my life, and let it be

- 1 Take my life, and let it be
 consecrated, Lord, to thee;
 take my moments and my days,
 let them flow in ceaseless praise.

- 2 Take my hands, and let them move
 at the impulse of thy love;
 take my feet, and let them be
 swift and beautiful for thee.

- 3 Take my voice, and let me sing
 always, only, for my King;
 take my lips, and let them be
 filled with messages from thee.

- 4 Take my silver and my gold,
 not a mite would I withhold;
 take my intellect, and use
 every power as thou shalt choose.

- 5 Take my will, and make it thine;
 it shall be no longer mine;
 take my heart — it is thine own;
 it shall be thy royal throne.

- 6 Take my love; my Lord, I pour
 at thy feet its treasure-store;
 take myself, and I will be
 ever, only, all for thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836–1879)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 566 .

Prayers of intercession

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

Lord, teach us truly to seek you and to ask with wisdom as you open your door to us.

Lord, you know each of us inside and out. You know our deepest failings, yet still you love us. We are sorry for the times when what you see on the inside just doesn't match up to what we show to the outside world. You also know our deepest needs and our deepest hurts. We ask you to give us the courage to face these places of pain and difficulty, give us the wisdom to ask for help from others and the grace to accept it. And we ask you to give us the insight to see where others need our support and to be prepared to go that extra mile for them. We lift to you now any amongst our family, friends and church whose needs we know, especially [pray for those you know].

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

Lord, teach us truly to seek you and to ask with wisdom as you open your door to us.

Heavenly Father, we pray for our world. We know that there are many places where your values of justice and mercy are not upheld: we lift before you Fairtrade organisations, those fighting for climate justice, those seeking to rid the world of racism and inequality. Help us to think of small or larger actions that we can do this week, as individuals, families or a church, that will enhance the extension of your values in the world.

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you.

Lord, teach us truly to seek you and to ask with wisdom as you open your door to us.

Lord, as we go forward into this new week teach us truly to seek you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to serve you with integrity and love.

Reflection

Do we know why we do certain things? Some traditions in family or community life carry on without knowing why or how they came into being, the original reason lost. For example, a woman cuts the legs off the chicken before cooking. Why? Because her mother and grandmother did so before her. But then the great grandmother explains that she did so because she only had a small cooking pot!

New church ministers are often challenged because they do things differently from those who have gone before them. But James and Jesus

both challenged traditions. Do we need new and different ways of doing things?

What response does God want from our reading of Scripture today? James is clear, 'Be doers of the word and not just hearers'. The response required is not to leave the word of God on the page, but to re-read it and reflect upon it until it is written on our hearts and then to seek grace and guidance on putting it into action (Think: page, heart, action). This involves both opening our doors and praying for people to come in but also going out and meeting the needs of a hurting world.

- Could you make a 'Prayer walk' in your local area, offering to pray for those you meet?
- Could you visit shops and places of work and find out about their concerns, offering to leave a prayer card on their noticeboards?
- Look for places in the community that can become 'prayer stations'.
 - a crossroads – for people travelling;
 - cul-de-sacs – a quiet place to pause off the busy road or place we may pray for people finding no purpose in their lives;
 - playgrounds – giving thanks for times of recreation.
 - Can you think of others in your community?
 -

Let us live and pray in a purposeful way, always having the example of Jesus and his teaching before us, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Act in us, O God.

Care through us, O God.

Teach us to be gentle with the whole of creation.

Inspire us to live as Jesus taught us.

Open our hearts to your ways.

Nurture us in your compassion.

Amen.

Sunday 8th September 2024

Call to worship

Coming together,
let us open our eyes to see Jesus
in the faces of our sisters and brothers.
Open your hearts and minds
that we may respect and value one another.
All of us are God's beloved children.
Amen.

Prayer of adoration

Holy God, you show no favouritism but welcome all
into your kingdom – all have a place with you.
Your heart is for the poor and those on the margins –
you embrace the weak and needy.
Your compassion is everlasting and your mercy never fails.
We adore you, O God, with all our heart, soul,
mind and strength.
Amen.

Bible reading: James 2:1-17

Favouritism Forbidden

2 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. ² Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. ³ If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," ⁴ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?

⁸ If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbour as yourself,” you are doing right. ⁹ But if you show favouritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “You shall not commit adultery,” also said, “You shall not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker.

¹² Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, ¹³ because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

Faith and Deeds

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Reflection

Here is a story from a church that met every Sunday in the local primary school. For several years, the church had been set out in traditional rows of seating with the altar up on the stage. One Holy Week, to enable foot washing to take place on Maundy Thursday, this layout was changed so that the chairs were in a circle and the people, including the priest, sat in the round. The altar was brought down to the level of the people. After a little discussion it was decided to leave the church in this layout for the Easter celebrations. Then a vote was held on whether to keep it permanently. It was overwhelmingly carried.

A little while later, an eight-year-old member of the congregation came to speak to the minister at the end of the service. Mark was crying, so the minister asked what was wrong. Mark said, ‘My mum said that I had to come and tell you that I put two votes in for the “cuddly” shape.’ ‘Oh, Mark,’ the minister replied, ‘I am so pleased you like the new layout in church. So did everyone else! Perhaps they put extra votes in too!’ So often children can put into words what others are feeling too. Well done to that congregation for trying a new shape of church that made people feel ‘cuddled and held in God’s love’.

Does the layout of our church enable newcomers to feel welcomed and seen? What are we doing well in terms of welcome and where is there room for improvement? What would a 'mystery worshipper' report about us? (This might be a useful exercise to carry out – invite someone from outside the church to attend a service and to share their thoughts. This could then form the basis for an action plan.)

Hymn StF 78: Give thanks with a grateful heart

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.

Give thanks with a grateful heart,
give thanks to the Holy One;
give thanks because he's given
Jesus Christ, his Son.

And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'
because of what the Lord has done for us;
And now let the weak say, 'I am strong,'
let the poor say, 'I am rich,'
because of what the Lord has done for us;
Give thanks.

Henry Smith (b. 1952)

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Prayers of intercession

God whose compassion knows no borders,
with the new school term just getting going for some and looming for others we pray for everyone moving on this September. Whether changing year groups, schools or heading off to university for the first time help our young people as things change this autumn. We are

particularly mindful of those for whom last year was very difficult – with covid, disruption to routines, difficult times with home learning and personal loss. May all of the children who have had a hard time know compassion and care and may this year be calm and ordered, filled with fun and purpose.

Lord bring compassion,
and may your love be known by all.

God of joy,
we thank you for the joy the Olympics has brought to us in the last couple of weeks. Watching fellow human beings overcoming adversity and triumphing in their sports is exhilarating and heartening. Thank you for all of the athletes who have competed. As they head home may they feel they have worked to the best of their ability and know how inspirational they are.

Lord bring more joy to this world,
and may your love be known by all.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Let us go and share God's love
in the care of our neighbours,
building up community (*place one fist on top of the other*)
in the words we speak,
building up new friendships (*swap fists*)
by showing care,
building up God's kingdom here on earth. (*move your arms round in a circle*)
Amen.

Sunday 15th September 2024

Call to worship

In this time of worship,
may we learn to imitate Jesus' compassion and care.
In our speaking, actions and thinking,
may Jesus be our guide.
In exploring God's Word together,
may we give Jesus' praise.
Amen.

Hymn Stf 24: Come, now is the time to worship

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.

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)
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Say the Lord's Prayer

Bible reading: James 3:1-12

Taming the Tongue

3 Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. ² We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check.

³ When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. ⁴ Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. ⁵ Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶ The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

⁷ All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸ but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.

⁹ With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. ¹⁰ Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. ¹¹ Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? ¹² My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

Prayer of confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have misused our tongues, which you have given us as a gift.

We have spoken words that hurt, deceive or destroy others.

We have remained silent when we should have spoken up for justice or peace.

We have violated your law of love.

Forgive us, O God.

Help us to tame our tongues and to speak with wisdom and grace.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, who died for us and rose again.

Amen.

Reflection

What do you need to run a marathon? If you've ever done so, you no doubt had an intensive training schedule and plan to enable you to make it to the end of the race. Similarly, life can be a marathon. How can we prepare spiritually for its challenges? James calls for discipline and formation, mindfully bringing God's grace into every aspect of life. Let's look at a few starting points.

A daily running schedule

Do we have a daily plan of Bible reading and reflection to guide our living? There are helpful guides and Bible reading notes available. Perhaps some of you were given a Gideon's New Testament and Psalms when you were at school? It has a helpful two-year reading schedule of the Psalms and New Testament.

A running partner

We all need support when facing a challenge. Have you thought about joining a prayer or Bible study group? These all bring support and a deeper understanding of Scripture. It can also be helpful to find someone who can offer one-to-one support, such as a spiritual guide or friend.

Be prepared for 'hitting the wall'

When an athlete 'hits the wall', they physically run out of energy. It often happens around the 18-mile mark in a marathon but can be avoided by eating the right foods before and during a race. How do we prepare for those stress points in life, when we feel like giving up? Remember, Jesus often went apart to pray and be with God at the difficult times, to ask for wisdom and grace in his teaching or to face the many challenges in his ministry. How can we 'fuel up' in prayer and being close to God?

Mindfulness moments

What comes out when you are squeezed? Blessings or curses? It again depends on pondering these things long before and having the experience of living through the 'smaller' challenges with God along the way.

Be aware of the pressure points in the diary and pray through the day and ask others to pray for you. Pray through possible responses and build yourself new ways of preparing and responding to challenges, failures, etc. Remember there are water stations along the marathon

route. Take that refreshment and take a slower pace to drink before returning to speed.

Take a break

The final advice in preparing for a marathon is to take a two-day break from training each week and do something restful. Just before the event, runners are advised to stop training and to rest for a week. Regular retreats are essentially 'a Holy sabbath,' a chance to withdraw from the pressures of the world and to draw closer to God's presence. Taking such moments of holy rest can prepare us for the challenges ahead when we return to the world.

Prayers of intercession

So many people in our world today are taking huge risks with their lives for causes they believe in. For those showing huge courage, we ask that their voices are heard, and that we in the west keep listening, thinking and praying for them. We pray that leaders with influence use the power they have to guide those who desperately need it to safety.

Loving God draw close,

may we see and be inspired by those who take risks for justice.

We are aware of many different people and groups fighting hard for climate justice; trying to bring to our attention the peril the world is in and effect change. Thank you for people who care deeply about the environment and are not afraid to use their voice to speak about it. We particularly pray for the young people who are mobilising their friends and classmates. Thank you for their thoughtful concern and the energy they devote to thinking about such huge global issues. May they be determined rather than daunted by the scale of the challenge and be encouraged in their pursuit of change.

Loving God, draw close to the people around us who fight continually for climate justice,

may we see and be inspired by those who speak up and make us listen.

Many of us will have examples of Christian around this world facing persecution and danger. Brothers and sisters who live in countries hostile to their beliefs and for whom expressing their faith is a highly provocative act. Please draw near to everyone who is in danger today because they follow Christ. Help persecuted Christians around this world find safe spaces to express their faith and, for those for whom there is no safe space, may they know your deep love for them. May they powerfully

feel the presence of your Holy Spirit and hold onto the promise of the Gospel.

Loving God draw close to all for whom discipleship is costly, may we see and be inspired by those who choose to worship you whatever the circumstances.

Finally, we pray for ourselves. Whatever circumstances face us in the week to come may we face them in the knowledge that you are always with us. May we learn how to let go of the things of this world that weigh us down or distract us from serving you.

Loving God draw close to all of us this week as we work out what discipleship means, may we see and be inspired by those who model lives of faith and service.

A sending out prayer

Come, Holy Spirit,
dwell in us and help us to praise you.
Give us words of encouragement
to support those who struggle.
Train our hearts to be generous and kind.
In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Sunday 22nd September 2024

A gathering prayer

When you think about things that give you pleasure,
be thankful to God.
He gives us a harvest each year of all that we need;
be thankful to God.
Bring before him the fruits of your own life;
be thankful to God.

Bible reading: James 3:13-4:3,7-8

Two Kinds of Wisdom

¹³ Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. ¹⁴ But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. ¹⁵ Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. ¹⁶ For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. ¹⁷ But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. ¹⁸ Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Submit Yourselves to God

⁴ What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Reflection

Choosing wisdom will never be easy: in our media-connected world there are more pressures than ever for all ages to conform, to follow a trend, to adopt a cause.

What is the source of our wisdom? To submit to God and to draw near to him, by following the example of Jesus and the teaching of the Bible, is quite different from submitting to human wisdom. Whether the oppression of a government or the persuasive words of a media influencer, that 'wisdom' is unlikely to lead to actions that bear fruit of benefit to others.

How can we possibly be wise all the time? Sometimes there are no right decisions. In the novel *The Shack* by William P Young, while Mack saves his son from drowning in the lake his daughter is abducted from the shoreline: should he have acted differently? There are more everyday dilemmas, such as when the latest 'wisdom' on how to care for a newborn baby is contrary to the advice of a grandparent.

The mark of God's wisdom is the focus on others, which requires us to resist the selfishness of the world. In the words of *The Message* version of James 4:2-3, 'You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. You're spoiled children, each wanting your own way.' Our focus is to be on what God wants, for all his children, to be our own best self for the good of others.

There are plenty of motivational speeches online. There is even one entitled, 'Focus on yourself, not others'. There are pressures from every side. On social media or in the real world, how much influence can we have on those around us, particularly our young people who are overwhelmed by so many products, fake news items and bewildering life choices?

Blogs gather a following of like-minded readers. Do we follow Jesus with such avid devotion?

If you can't beat them, join them! There are Christian websites and blogs, although discretion needs to be exercised in using some of them. This could be a project to follow with a young person.

Submitting to God's love, not to other pressures, gets easier as we draw nearer to him. Can we, by trusting in God and living contrary to the world's expectation, be made great though humility?

Prayer of praise

Based on Psalm 116

God of blessing and joy, thank you for your gifts,
which are more than we can ask or imagine.

Thank you for the gift of life, which is precious and sacred.

Thank you for the gift of faith, which is a light in the darkness. Thank you for the gift of hope, which is an anchor for the soul. Thank you for the gift of love, which is the greatest of all.

Thank you for the gift of Jesus Christ,
who is our Lord and our friend.

Amen.

Hymn StF 455: All my hope on God is founded

- 1 All my hope on God is founded;
 he doth still my trust renew.
 Me through change and chance he guideth,
 only good and only true.
 God unknown,
 he alone
 calls my heart to be his own.

- 2 Human pride and earthly glory,
 sword and crown betray our trust;
 what with care and toil we fashion,
 tower and temple, fall to dust.
 But God's power,
 hour by hour,
 is my temple and my tower.

- 3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
 deep his wisdom passing thought;
 splendour, light, and life attend him,
 beauty springeth out of naught.
 Evermore
 from his store
 new-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4 Daily doth the almighty giver
 bounteous gifts on us bestow;
 his desire our soul delighteth,
 pleasure leads us where we go.
 Love doth stand
 at his hand;
 joy doth wait on his command.
- 5 Still from earth to God eternal
 sacrifice of praise be done,
 high above all praises praising
 for the gift of Christ his Son.
 Christ doth call
 one and all
 ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844–1930) *(alt.)*
based on Joachim Neander (1650–1680)
Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 455 .

Prayers of intercession

Loving Father, sometimes the world is hard to understand. There is so much happening around our globe. Many complex and difficult situations. As we survey the world this week we ask that you give us hope. We are reminded in the Gospel reading today of your death and resurrection. Thank you that we know the transforming power your Spirit can bring. Help us to live in the reality of that hope while we pray for the very real situations around the world.

Lord, thank you that you are in control.

Help us to put our trust in you.

Gracious God, help us to learn to see the world as you do. The first will be last and the last first. Thank you for today's reminder to pay attention to the weak and not just the strong. We pray for those in our communities who are struggling at the moment. We pray for those who

are on the margins or feel disenfranchised. Help us, as your church, to notice and respond to the needs we see. We also pray for the powerful, for those who lead and govern. May they see the world as you do, may they work to bring equality and restore dignity.

Lord, thank you that you see the people our society often disregards as unimportant.

Help us to put our trust in you.

God of all, teach us how to welcome others. We are all welcome in your kingdom. Thank you that you see us and know us and that your welcome is deep and personal. During this week help us to be particularly aware of the welcome we offer others. May this church be a place of real welcome, a place where people feel they are seen and known and feel loved and secure. Thank you for the challenge in today's reading to welcome the very least in society, help us to work out what this looks like for us.

Lord, thank you that you are a God of welcome to all.

Help us to put our trust in you.

Heavenly Father, help us to keep learning about your kingdom. Thank you that you took time to teach your disciples. Thank you that you showed them a new way to live. Thank you that you turned the wisdom of their world upside down and showed the disciples a new way to think and behave. Help us to allow your words to transform us and to change the way we think and behave.

Lord, thank you for the wisdom we find in the Bible.

Help us to put our trust in you.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

God, may we be great in your eyes
by being humble. (bow heads)

Help us to be wise

by following your Word. (open hands like a book)

May we be blessed

by being a blessing (open arms to include others)
and by choosing you.

Amen.

Sunday 29th September 2024

A gathering prayer

Lift up your heads
to the king of glory.
You who have pure hearts
will receive blessings from the Lord.
Lift up your heads
to the king of glory;
seek the face of God
and put aside all obstacles to his love.

Bible reading: Esther 7:1-6, 9-10, 9:20-21

Haman Impaled

7 So the king and Haman went to Queen Esther's banquet, ² and as they were drinking wine on the second day, the king again asked, "Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted."

³ Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favour with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. ⁴ For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

⁵ King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

⁶ Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!"
Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen.

⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs attending the king, said, "A pole reaching to a height of fifty cubits^[a] stands by Haman's house. He had it set up for Mordecai, who spoke up to help the king."

The king said, "Impale him on it!" ¹⁰ So they impaled Haman on the pole he had set up for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

Purim Established

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these events, and he sent letters to all the Jews throughout the provinces of King Xerxes, near and far, ²¹ to have them celebrate annually the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar ²² as the time when the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration. He wrote them to observe the days as days of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor.

Reflection

In the Second World War, Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist and member of the Nazi party, was used by God to save the lives of many Jews. While benefitting from his official position, his conscience moved him to use his business as a means of rescue for Jewish workers otherwise destined for concentration camps. His story was featured in the film Schindler's List. God can choose anyone to be his right person, at any time, in the place where they find themselves.

The story of Esther is set in Susa, on an important trade route. The Jews of Esther's community are those who did not return from Babylon to Judah but stayed and created their own fairly secure enclave. The lectionary verses miss out so many of the 'good bits' of this action-packed account! Read the whole book of Esther (or her story even further expanded in Additions to Esther in the Apocrypha) to find out why the King of Persia included in his royal palace a young Jewish girl, who became his queen, and her cousin who had saved his life. Then add in 'the baddie', Haman, who plotted against the king and against all the Jewish people and the scene is set for God (the un-named pivotal character in the story) to act on behalf of his people. Knowing of Haman's plot, Esther risked her life by appearing before the king without invitation. She did so with the support of those praying and fasting for her. She also knew that she was the only one who had a chance to make an appeal to the king, and her courage changed the course of history.

Like Joseph, many centuries earlier, Esther was there for 'such a time as this'. It could be that your church is so placed for God to use at this time: could a day be set aside for prayer and fasting, to review where the church is going and if you are living as God's 'right people'?

Hymn StF 696: For the healing of the nations

- 1 For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.
- 2 Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.
- 3 All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.
- 4 You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

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Prayers of intercession

Gracious God, the energy crisis will be worrying many people. As the weather gets colder, some will be wondering how they will afford to heat their homes and keep warm. We want to pray for everyone who is anxious about their future. We pray for people who are struggling financially and concerned for their family. We also pray for those working hard to bring relief to people in need. Give them the energy and

resilience they need to keep being supportive and bearers of hope. We pray for our foodbanks, debt advisors and mental health services, help us to give generously where we can.

May we see the imprint of the Holy Spirit in everyone we encounter.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, help us to learn how to live our lives in your service. Help us to live our best life for you. Help us to learn more about your values and see them in our own lives. Help us not to be stumbling blocks for others but signposts towards you. Help us to bring peace and light into others' lives. As we go through this week help us see God at work in the people we meet.

May we see the pattern of your love in all we do.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

May we listen for God's call,
know his strength,
see where he is leading us,
be faithful in doing his work
and make way for his kingdom.

Amen.