

LONDON ROAD PARTRIDGE GREEN & ST ANDREW'S METHODIST CHURCHES
WORSHIP AT HOME MATERIALS FOR SUNDAY 29TH AUGUST 2021

CALL TO WORSHIP

This day, we step into the river of prayer and worship,
A river that is always flowing,
Around the world and throughout the cosmos.
For these next few minutes, we close our minds to the
distractions of life,
And worship you, O God of all things.

Amen.¹

COME, LET US SING OF A WONDERFUL LOVE

Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
Tender and true;
Out of the heart of the Father above,
Streaming to me and to you:
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
Joyfully came;
Came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
Sharing their sorrow and shame;
Seeking the lost,
Saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
Why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
Home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
Dwells in the heart of the Father above.

Come to my heart, O Thou wonderful love,
Come and abide,
Lifting my life, till it rises above
Envy and falsehood and pride,
Seeking to be
Lowly and humble, a learner of Thee.

Robert Walmsley.

OPENING PRAYERS

Gracious God, you have called us to be your people, and
we come to worship you this day, stepping aside from the
distractions of the outside world, to tune our hearts to
love again.

You, O Lord, have blessed us richly, with your unchanging
faithfulness to us and your love for all people.

Today, we give you our thanks, our praise, and our
worship.

Today, we come to you to seek to connect with the great
spirit-of-life that is flowing through all creation, to be

inspired, uplifted, reinvigorated, and reminded of your
love for us.

May we be a people who take that love with us in all that
we do, this day, this week, and forevermore.

Amen.²

WE SAY TOGETHER THE LORD'S PRAYER

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.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.

Amen.

SING WE THE KING WHO IS COMING TO REIGN

Sing we the King who is coming to reign,
Glory to Jesus, the Lamb that was slain,
Life and salvation his empire shall bring
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King.

*Come let us sing: Praise to our King,
Jesus our King, Jesus our King;
This is our song, who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King.*

All men shall dwell in his marvellous light,
Races long severed his love shall unite,
Justice and truth from his sceptre shall spring,
Wrong shall be ended when Jesus is King.

Come let us sing:...

All shall be well in his Kingdom of peace,
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase,
Foe shall be friend when his triumph we sing,
Sword shall be sickle when Jesus is King.

Come let us sing:...

Souls shall be saved from the burden of sin,
Doubt shall not darken his witness within,
Hell hath no terrors, and death hath no sting;
Love is victorious when Jesus is King.

Come let us sing:...

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Tim Baker

Kingdom of Christ, for thy coming we pray,
Hasten, O Father, the dawn of the day
When this new song thy creation shall sing,
Satan is vanquished and Jesus is King.

Come let us sing:...

Charles Sylvester Horne (1865-1914)

READINGS:

Song of Solomon 2:8-13;

James 1:17-27;

Mark 7:1-8, 14-15, 21-23

REFLECTIONS ON THE READING

Have you ever saved up enough money to buy something that you've been really longing for? Maybe a pair of shoes or an item of clothing? Or maybe something even more costly, like a piece of furniture, a car or a house! Remember how cautiously you guarded its condition to begin with - hoping the dog wouldn't eat it, or the cat wouldn't scratch it, or the toddler wouldn't be sick on it. Maybe, for the first days or weeks or even months, you kept it in perfect condition. But then, one way or another, in more or less extreme ways, it ended up damaged or broken or just not quite as shiny as it once was. Perhaps there is a huge coffee stain on a once cream-coloured sofa. Or perhaps there is a dent in the car door. Our carefully guarded, once perfect belonging is defiled.

I wonder if we can think of our hearts in the same way. Once whole, perfect, intact – but through the process of living our human lives, inevitably, over time, no matter how well guarded, they can become defiled: broken by grief or rejection, stained by suffering or selfishness, dented by bitterness or anger.

In our gospel today, we heard that the Pharisees and some of the scribes ask Jesus why it is that they eat with defiled hands, without washing them. And Jesus calls them hypocrites, and quotes from Isaiah, saying: "These people honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." He goes on to tell the crowd that what matters is not what goes into a person, but what comes from a person's heart. This is where defilement takes place and propagates.

Jesus speaks of defilement and lists adultery, theft, avarice, envy, pride. Ironically, he is challenging the purity laws around consumption, but each of these sins is in its own way about consumption - born out of a desire to have, to own, to take. And so, Jesus shows us, how we hopelessly attempt to self-satisfy the hunger of our broken hearts.

Facing up to the state of our own hearts is not a comfortable thing to do. Looking honestly at what we find there takes vulnerability. Just as it was for the Pharisees

and the scribes, it is an easier task to worry about things on the surface. Exploring the matters of your own heart is a more costly task.

Our epistle today is on the same theme and calls us to reflect on the condition of our heart, to rid ourselves "of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness". James writes: "If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless." If our living – our words and actions - don't match up with the deeper truth of our hearts, we are as hypocritical as the Pharisees and the scribes to whom Jesus spoke. If we pay lip service to God's story, but our heart beats to the rhythm of our own story, our religion is worthless.

How might we, with self-care, investigate the condition of our own hearts, where rests a deeper truth than our words and actions. What brokenness, what defilement might we find there? What need, what desire, what love?

We might think the truths of our hearts are well hidden, but the matters of our hearts have a way of spilling out into our lives. James warns against this, writing that an angry heart, "does not produce God's righteousness." Our Psalmist today opens their song with the words "my heart overflows with a goodly theme." The joy in their heart bubbles up into their living and speaking. Eventually, ultimately, the matters of our hearts are revealed in what we do and say, in what we prioritise, in the way we spend our time and resources, in what we celebrate and mourn. All these things are windows into our hearts and souls – into our true selves.

What is the story of your heart that overflows into your life? Is it one of peace, joy and love, or one of fear, anger, or desire? Are our lives defined by our defilement?

And this isn't just a question for each of us as individuals, but as communities too.

What is our shared heart, what is the true identity of us as a group of Christians?

Our mission and our evangelism - both as individuals and as church congregations - deeply depend on our ability to do this work: with kindness and vulnerability to examine our hearts, and with repentance and humility to set our hearts right before God.

When we set our hearts right before God, our lives will follow suit. But sadly, it is not always so easily done. Because, like cream-coloured sofas, human hearts are so easily ruined and not so easily restored.

The good news is that we have a God who pitches their tent in the ruins of human hearts. The good news is that we have a God who is in the business of heart-restoration.

God sees our defiled hearts, broken by grief or rejection, stained by suffering or selfishness, dented by bitterness or anger, and God's heart breaks for us.

Remember that thing you saved up for and took care of that eventually got ruined? How much more does God regard us, God's precious children, with grief and heartache as God sees our brokenness.

We can try to self-satisfy the hunger of our broken hearts - through our insatiable consumption of things, of people, of our own energy - but in this way our lives will continue to be defined by our defilement. Instead, let us welcome Jesus as guest into our hearts to pitch his tent of love there. Love which comes into the brokenness just as it is, with forgiveness and healing, and through which the loving is redeeming. Love which is powerful enough to restore each one of our spoiled hearts. Love which spills over in fullness into our lives and into the lives of the people around us.

If we want to know what living with a heart overflowing with love looks like, then we can look to the reading today in Song of Solomon. These verses are a testimony to the transformational power of love:

"...for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance."

These verses speak boldly of true love - in words of fruitfulness, abundance, beauty, creativity, flourishing. They testify to the out-workings of a heart defined by love and not by its own defilement. They testify to the possibility of transformation for the whole world - a mission which God invites us into.

As people of Christ, we have invited his healing, redeeming love into our broken hearts. We are called to let that love overflow into the lives and communities around us. We are also called to boldly testify, through what we say and what we do, to the goodness of God we have experienced. And as we do so, if we keep our eyes open, we might just notice the in-breaking of God's kingdom of justice and joy as transformation happens around us.

BE THOU MY VISION, O LORD OF MY HEART

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
Be all else but naught to me, save that Thou art;
Be Thou my best thought in the day and the night,
Both waking and sleeping, Thy presence my light.

Be Thou my wisdom, be Thou my true word,

Be Thou ever with me, and I with Thee, Lord;
Be Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son;
Be Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.

Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
Be Thou my whole armour, be Thou my true might;
Be Thou my soul's shelter, be Thou my strong tower:
O raise Thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I need not, nor man's empty praise:
Be Thou mine inheritance now and always;
Be Thou and Thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be Thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Tr. Mary E. Byrne & Eleanor H. Hull.

WHAT ARE YOU BEING CALLED TO?

Two questions for you to consider today, as you reflect on Holly's words and the readings we've heard.

How might you and your church community, through prayer, worship and fellowship – investigate the condition of your hearts and invite God's love to transform them?

How might you and your church community, through service and evangelism, intentionally testify to God's transforming love in words and actions?

Let us reflect on those questions together and share with one another this week what some of our answers might be.

Let us close with reminding ourselves of these words from Holly's reflection: "we have a God who pitches their tent in the ruins of human hearts."³

Amen to that.

LONGING FOR LIGHT, WE WAIT IN DARKNESS

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.

Longing for peace, our world is troubled.
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.

³ Reflection written by Holly Adams of the Growth & Evangelism Team

Make us Your living voice.

Christ, be our light!

Longing for food, many are hungry.
Longing for water, many still thirst.
Make us Your bread, broken for others,
Shared until all are fed.

Christ, be our light!

Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us Your building, sheltering others,
Walls made of living stone.

Christ, be our light!

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

Christ, be our light!

Bernadette Farrell
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PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

God of renewal, we pray for the Church, thank you that you call us to participate in your mission.

Help us to speak more boldly of your presence in our hearts and lives.

Equip and send out your Church to love our neighbours more faithfully and courageously, make us builders and proclaimers of your Kingdom of justice and joy.

God, may your transforming love renew our Church,
In the name of Christ, hear us.

God of restoration, we pray for your creation, we know that this world testifies to your goodness and creativity. Forgive us, we pray, for all that we have done to destroy and defile your Earth.

Help us to repent and to devote ourselves through prayer and action to protect and sustain the delicate systems of life on this planet.

Thank you that your good news story is big enough for each of us, and for all creation.

God, may your transforming love restore our world,
In the name of Christ, hear us.

God of redemption, we pray for humanity, thank you that you look on us with love and forgiveness and compassion. Thank you that you offer abundance, not abandonment. Forgive us, we pray, for all we do to perpetuate systems of injustice and oppression.

Show us the way to build your Kingdom through our living and our praying.

We lift up the lost and the lonely – may they know your closeness today.

We remember our leaders – may they be guided by your wisdom and mercy.

We offer ourselves – you know the deepest truths of our hearts. Heal us, help us, send us.

We pray for all those people on our hearts in the silence now.

God, may your transforming love redeem our lives,
In the name of Christ, hear us.

Amen.⁴

GOD OF ALL POWER, AND TRUTH, AND GRACE

God of all power, and truth, and grace,
Which shall from age to age endure,
Whose word, when heaven and earth shall pass,
Remains and stands for ever sure;

That I thy mercy may proclaim,
That all the world thy truth may see,
Hallow thy great and glorious name,
And perfect holiness in me.

Thy sanctifying Spirit pour,
To quench my thirst, and make me clean;
Now, Father, let the gracious shower
Descend, and make me pure from sin.

Give me a new, a perfect heart,
From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free;
The mind which was in Christ impart,
And let my spirit cleave to thee.

O that I now, from sin released,
Thy word may to the utmost prove,
Enter into the promised rest,
The Canaan of thy perfect love!

Now let me gain perfection's height,
Now let me into nothing fall,
Be less than nothing in thy sight,
And feel that Christ is all in all.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

BLESSING

Go and enter into the flow of love that is at work in the universe.

Go and discover that God is out there, moving, transforming, touching lives and all creation.

Go and encounter the Spirit of God.

Amen.⁵

⁴ Prayers of intercession written by Holly Adams

⁵ Additional prayers by Tim Baker