

At Home Service Jan 2nd 2022

May I wish a Happy New Year to all who receive this service!

As we often hold our covenant services on this Sunday I have included some of the prayers and hymns that come from the Covenant Service in The Methodist Worship Book.

Hymn:

1. Come, let us use the grace divine, and all with one accord,
in a perpetual covenant join ourselves to Christ the Lord;
Give up ourselves, thru Jesus' power, his name to glorify;
and promise, in this sacred hour, for God to live and die.

2. The covenant we this moment make be ever kept in mind,
we will no more our God forsake, or cast these words behind.
We never will throw off the fear of God who hears our vow;
and if thou art well pleased to hear, come down and meet us now.

3. Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, let all our hearts receive,
present with thy celestial host the peaceful answer give;
to each covenant the blood apply which takes our sins away,
and register our names on high and keep us to that day!

Charles Wesley

Let us pray:

Glory to the Father, the God of love, who created us;
who continually preserves us and sustains us;
who has loved us with an everlasting love,
and given us the light of the knowledge of his glory
in the face of Jesus Christ.

Blessed be God forever.

Glory to Jesus Christ our saviour, who though he was rich,
yet for our sake became poor,
and was tested in every way as we are, yet without sin;
who proclaimed the good news of the kingdom,
and was obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross;
who was raised from the dead and is alive for everlasting
and has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in him;
who is seated at God's right hand in glory,
and will come to be our judge.

Blessed be God forever.

Glory to the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
by whom we are born into the family of God,
and made members of the body of Christ;
whose witness confirms us; whose wisdom teaches us;

whose power enables us;
who will do for us more than we can ask or think.

Blessed be God forever.

To the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be praise and glory for ever. Amen

Now read from your Bible: Jeremiah 31:7 – 14

Hymn:

The world we thought we knew is changing fast, and longingly we cling to what is past –
that settled life which made no great demand Our foretaste of the hoped for promised land.

But as for you, dynamic, Pilgrim God, you do not linger on the path well trod,
but ever lead your pilgrim people on to risk an unknown future with your Son.

The challenge of diversity and change will take us well beyond our former range.
Exposing us to things we do not know, demanding all the love that we can show.

You take the stuff of chaos, fear and dread, and make a path where we can safely tread;
and if we fear the wildness of the wave, we know your outstretched hand is there to save.

Words © Rosemary Wakelin

Reflection

At the time of preparing this service, we are facing a second diminished Christmas due to Covid, and an uncertain New Year. Just when we were beginning to feel a little free from restrictions, a little less afraid, another spectre in the form of Omicron has hit us and plunged us once again into fear and uncertainty, captives once again, oppressed by a ruthless enemy. Many of us are struggling to make sense of it all.

There is a parallel with the people of Israel at the time that Jeremiah uttered the words of our reading today. They came at a time of fearful siege when all the kingdoms and peoples of the earth were fighting against Jerusalem. The people were in exile, facing the judgement of God for their idolatry and disobedience. But Jeremiah says, that although they face suffering, death and loss this is not the final word, grace will abound. Though they are terrified now, there is a limitation to their suffering and here they are given a glimpse of a bright future. “The days are coming...” When the time was right God would bless and restore them because that is His nature. The pain and loss through which people have struggled will be brought to an end.

He speaks of “streams of water” signifying restoration, and “level paths” for the vulnerable, He is “Israel’s father”, He cares for all. “They will come and shout for joy.....they will be like a well watered garden, and they will sorrow no more.....I will turn their mourning into gladness: I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow....” What a picture of hope and joy given at a time of terrible suffering.

We can take great heart from this. Our “suffering” is of a different kind and times are very different. At this point in time we don’t know what the extent of this new variant will be or how great the losses will be. Hopefully, the number of cases will quickly diminish, let’s pray that the reality is much less than what is being predicted. But we do know that the heart of God hasn’t changed. Prophetic words can be applied to both the short term and the very long term, they transcend time and place. He is a loving caring parent and this scripture is applicable to all who feel hopeless about the challenges confronting them in their daily lives. Restoration can be an emotionally complex process, healing from trauma takes time. We will need patience and humility. Like the Israelites, we will rejoice again, but not before tears have been shed and sorrow diminishes.

These words must surely also evoke in us compassion for those who seek refuge in our country. As God, our Father has compassion for us, so we, if we are to be true witnesses for Christ, must have compassion for others. Whether people have been hounded from their homes through war or conflict or through economic necessity, through the collapse of law and order through failing national government or through persecution by those in power – whatever the reason - it is a terrible risk to leave your home and all you know and love and throw yourself into the unknown. It is an act of desperation not choice, as the Israelites were all too aware. Let us not only share this message of empowerment with the exiled, the forgotten, the rejected but also be the source of their restoration and hope. May we, by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit, provide streams of living water and level paths for those being overwhelmed by despair.

I give thanks to our heavenly Father who gives us solidity in our quaking world, who can contain and still the fears of all people and for His words of hope given so long ago but which are just as relevant today as they were then. So let us approach the New Year with courage and strength in the knowledge that He "will turn our mourning into gladness" and "will build us up again".

Now let us say the covenant prayer remembering that we can only say and do these things with the help and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Methodist Covenant Prayer

I am no longer my own but yours.
Put me to what you will, rank me with whom you will;
put me to doing, put me to suffering;
let me be employed for you, or laid aside for you,
exalted for you, or brought low for you;
let me be full, let me be empty,
let me have all things, let me have nothing:
I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal.
And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
you are mine and I am yours. So be it.
And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven.'

Prayers of Intercession

We know that the NHS is under great pressure with Covid patients, with the pressures of pent-up demand for appointments, the COVID backlog of delayed treatments and staff shortages, so we lift to you all who work in the NHS who are overburdened. Strengthen and empower them to face each day with courage.

Natural disasters in various parts of the world have left many dead and others homeless. We pray for their families and that they will receive the help they need to rebuild.

Thank you for those who are helping those fleeing for their lives as indeed you once fled for yours. Help us as a nation to open our arms in welcome and reach out our hands in support, so that the desperate may find new hope and that families and lives torn apart may be restored. May our government find ways of safe passage and ways of processing assylum seekers quickly and efficiently.

God of compassion we hold before you those who are homeless and cold especially at this time of year. Draw near and comfort them in spirit, help them to find shelter and those with afflictions to receive help. Bless those who provide them with shelter, food and friendship.

And now, we hold before you members of our own families and friends and members of our church family suffering because they are unwell, physically, mentally and/or emotionally, those undergoing treatment for cancer, those who are fearful of gathering together because of COVID, those who are housebound. Each one is precious in your sight. We pray for healing, wholeness, peace and

comfort, and the knowledge that they are not alone but united in Spirit with the whole family of God.

We pray for peace among nations, peace in our homes, peace in our hearts.

Amen

We sing/say our final Hymn:

1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven, to his feet your tribute bring;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like you his praise should sing?
Alleluia, alleluia! praise the everlasting King.

2 Praise him for his grace and favour to our fathers in distress;
praise him, still the same as ever, slow to blame and swift to bless;
Alleluia, alleluia! glorious in his faithfulness.

3 Father-like, he tends and spares us, All our hopes and fears he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us, rescues us from all our foes:
Alleluia, alleluia! widely as his mercy flows.

4 Angels, help us to adore him; you behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him, praise him all in time and space.
Alleluia, alleluia! praise with us the God of grace.

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

Blessing

The blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you for ever. Amen