

SERVICE AT HOME FOR SUNDAY 22nd AUGUST 2021

Prepared by Richard Pearce

Opening Prayer

We come to you this morning both as individuals and corporately as part of the Methodist Connexion, to worship you Lord and praise your holy name. Help each of us to come with open hearts and minds so that we may hear you speak to us, and in faith respond, Amen.

StF 94 To God be the glory

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:

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

*O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
and give Him the glory - great things He hath done!*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
to every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:

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 wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see:

Frances Jane van Alstyne (1820-1915)

PRAYERS

Dear Father,

To you be the glory, for great things you have done.

All our worship and praise belongs to you, our God and maker. Where there was nothing, you created all things, the universe and all its stars, moons and planets and the life we see around us. But this is not all, as we gather here this morning, new stars and planets are still forming, and this will continue until time is no more.

Thank you for your love that gave us your Son.

Through that perfect sacrifice of your Son on the cross, 2,000 years ago, we have been offered a pardon for our sins, allowing us to make that decision to accept your Son as our saviour, and so bringing us closer to you. We thank you that you are always willing to forgive us and accept us as we are. We confess our sins to you this morning .. (pause)

...we thank you for your forgiveness Lord.

We now look forward in the sure knowledge that we have been forgiven and are closer to you in spirit. Help us to listen to your words this morning with open hearts and enable us to use our gifts given by your Holy Spirit to further your kingdom here on earth throughout the coming week. **Amen.**

READING: Acts 9: 36-43 (NIV)

Dorcas is restored to life by Peter

³⁶ In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. ³⁷ About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. ³⁸ Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

³⁹ Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

⁴⁰ Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. ⁴² This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. ⁴³ Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

StF 664 Lord, you call us to your service (Tune Angel Voices)

Lord, you call us to your service

Lord, you call us to your service, each in our own way.

Some to caring, loving, healing;

some to preach, or pray;

some to work with quiet learning,

truth discerning,

day by day.

Life for us is always changing

in the work we share.

Christian love adds new dimensions

to the way we care.

For we know that you could lead us,

as you need us,

anywhere.

Seeing life from your perspective

makes your challenge plain,

as your heart is grieving over

those who live in pain.

Teach us how, by our compassion,

you may fashion,

hope again.

Lord, we set our human limits

on the work we do.

Send us your directing Spirit,

pour your power through,

that we may be free in living

and in giving

all for you.

Marjorie Dobson (b. 1940)

SERMON

I use to live in Plymouth and sometimes I would walk down to Plymouth Hoe for some food and to look out over the Sound. The Hoe was of course the place where a very significant message was once received. In July 1588, the commander of the English fleet, Sir Francis Drake, was apparently playing bowls when he received an urgent message that the vast Spanish Armada, sent by King Phillip of

Spain to invade England, had been spotted. The story goes, that notwithstanding the imminent invasion of England, Sir Francis calmly finished his game of bowls.

The story in Acts 9 concerns another urgent message, this time sent by some disciples in Joppa who knew Tabitha, and also knew that the Apostle Peter was in the local area. News of Peter and his reputation had obviously spread throughout the countryside, and we can surmise that the disciples were confident Peter could help her.

What we can piece together of the message to Peter was that it concerned a greatly loved woman, Tabitha, who had become sick and died. Tabitha helped the poor and needy, perhaps even the widows mentioned in our reading. Joppa was a port and fishing would undoubtedly be a part of the local economy, and then as now, and quite like Plymouth, fishing would have been a high risk occupation, with fatalities and significant injuries, leaving widows and families without incomes. Tabitha used her very ordinary gifts to help out people, making clothes, acting out her Christianity in a very practical way and making a huge difference in the local community. Luke, the author of Acts, refers to Tabitha as a disciple, i.e. a follower of Jesus, and someone who has learned from his teaching and responded to God's call upon their life.

So Peter receives the message and he would have known that she had died. However, there is no indication of any second thoughts on his part even though it would have been immediately clear to him, that they were asking that he come and raise her back to life. We may well wonder what went through his mind at that point, was he quite confident of what he had to do? Was he full of trepidation, had he perhaps had similar requests previously, and responded, only to learn that it was not God's will for such an act? Whatever has passed before, Peter responds, making himself available immediately. Are we prepared to offer ourselves without delay, like Peter?

Significantly there is no reference to Tabitha's age, she could be young or old. Perhaps we can infer from that, that whatever our age, this means that making ourselves and our own gifts available for God's purposes, whatever they might be and however ordinary they may seem, is relevant to each and every one of us. It may be that we are able to bake cakes, telephone, read, and enjoy talking to and welcoming people as they come into church, lead prayers and worship, preach or serve tea and coffee. They are all gifts that can be used for God's purposes and none should be treated as of lesser importance than any others.

It must have been difficult for Peter to respond urgently to that message, after all Joppa is some 10-12 miles from Lydda. The two men would have travelled to find him first, about a four hour walk there and the same back again. So, it can only have been late the same day, at the earliest that he would have arrived at Tabitha's side. It was important for Peter to be alone in that upper room with Tabitha, to allow him to focus and concentrate on God. We also read he got down on his knees and prayed, but for how long we do not know.

Peter was confident and at ease with his faith, he left Lydda in response to the urgent request for his presence, most likely knowing full well what he would be up against. Yet he was firm in his understanding that God was calling him to do that. God rewards faithfulness and obedience and if we step out in faith to make ourselves available and commit our gifts to God's purposes he will honour that commitment from us, now and in the future.

PRAYER OF RESPONSE

Lord, help us to listen to you, help us to be open and receptive to the presence of your Holy Spirit within and moving around us, as we lead our lives, working for the glory of your kingdom. **Amen.**

StF 383 Holy Spirit, gift bestower (Tune Scarlet Ribbons)

Holy Spirit, gift bestower,
breathe into our hearts today.
Flowing water, dove that hovers,
Holy Spirit, guide our way.
Love inspirer, joy releaser,
Spirit, take our fears away.
Reconciler, peace restorer,
move among us while we pray.

Holy Spirit, Christ proclaimer,
wisdom bringer, light our way.
Fire that dances, wind that whispers,
Holy Spirit, come today.
Ease disturber, comfort bearer,
move among us while we pray.
Truth revealer, faith confirmer,
rest within our hearts today.

From Church Hymnary, 4th Edition 2005

PRAYERS FOR OUR WORLD

Dear Lord and Father, we bring to you some of the problems of this troubled world. Lord we pray together as one voice for the people of Afghanistan and for the rights of the different individuals within that country. We also think of the people of Haiti as they grapple with the effects of the earthquake and a tropical storm. We ask in faith and obedience that you act through your Holy Spirit in these countries, bringing hope for the future.

We pray for our politicians, for wisdom and humility in their decisions in this coming week. In our circuit we pray for Revd's Arthur and Janice Cowburn and for the new superintendent, Revd. John Hughes and his wife Christine. We ask for your blessing on them all.

We pray for those in our fellowships who are unwell, and pray that they will experience and know your healing touch. We also pause for a few moments as we bring to you those known to us (PAUSE).

We thank you Lord that you are with us now by our sides, here listening to our prayers, and we are grateful for the intercessions of your Son on our behalf.

Amen.

We now join together in 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.
Save us from the time of trial.
And deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever, Amen.**

StF 449 Lord of creation

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!
Most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
And yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

Lord of all power, I give you my will,
In joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom; your service is song;
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is strong.

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,
Rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to find;
What eye has not seen and what ear has not heard
Is taught by your Spirit and shines from your word.

Lord of the bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart,
Your love to inspire me, your counsel to guide,
Your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

Lord of all being, I give you my all;
If I should disown you, I stumble and fall;
But, led in your service your word to obey.
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the way.

Jack Copley Winslow (1882-1974)

We finish with the blessing

BLESSING

May Christ dwell in your hearts through faith;
And may you be rooted and grounded in love
And comprehend, with saints, what is the breadth and length
And height and depth of the love of Christ,
So that you may be filled with all the fullness of God, **Amen**.