

SERVICE AT HOME FOR SUNDAY 15TH AUGUST 2021
(prepared by Steve Irish)

Call to Worship (Psalm 111:1 - 5)

- ¹ Praise the Lord.
I will extol the Lord with all my heart
in the council of the upright and in the assembly.
- ² Great are the works of the Lord;
they are pondered by all who delight in them.
- ³ Glorious and majestic are His deeds,
and His righteousness endures forever.
- ⁴ He has caused His wonders to be remembered;
the Lord is gracious and compassionate.
- ⁵ He provides food for those who fear Him;
He remembers His covenant forever.

Prayer of approach

For the glory of Your Name which transforms our lives
and the wonder of Your love gives value to our days;
for the joy with which You fill our hearts and our minds
and the song of thanksgiving that springs from our lips;
we praise You Lord. Amen

StF 55 Immortal, invisible, God only wise

- ¹ Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.
- ² Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might,
thy justice like mountains high soaring above
thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.
- ³ To all, life thou givest, to both great and small.
In all life thou livest, the true life of all.
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
and wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

⁴ Great God of all glory, great God of all light,
thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight.
All praise we would render; O help us to see
'tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

⁵ Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824 – 1908)

Prayer of Adoration

For the wonder of Your Creation which moves us to praise and the
love that brought all things into being; for the views from the
mountain tops that take our breath away and the beauty of the quiet
valleys that fill us with joy and peace; we praise You Lord.

For the gift of our lives' journeys that begins each new day and for
those who travel with us every step of the way; for those we have
loved who made life so precious and for those who love us when we
are weak and when we are wrong; we praise You Lord.

For the thrill of reading the Scriptures and Your message of hope
and the grace that flows from Your Word and changes our lives; for
the life, death and resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, that is the
Good News for all Your children; for the fruits and the gifts of Your
Holy Spirit to bring renewal for all; we praise You Lord

Prayer of Confession

As we praise You, Loving God, we acknowledge that our tongues have often wandered from the words You give us; our hands have not always offered love and friendship; our thoughts often stray away from You as we are tempted by the ways and facilities of the society we live in. We ask that You will forgive all that is lacking in our love, our speaking, our work and our thinking.

We pray that we can reject all that is false, all that which is not in accordance with Your will. Let us stand out from the crowd and be the Holy people You made us and call us to be.

Merciful God, we seek Your forgiveness, Your renewal and Your blessing. We long to hear the words of grace, “Your sins are forgiven” and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Saviour.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Father, we have so much to say thank You for. There are so many things that we accept as being normal, that are just there for us. We look around us at the continuing creation and thank You for the beauty of this world, the beauty You created. We thank You for the gifts of friends and families, for parents, for brothers and sisters, for the extended family. We give thanks for our homes and shelter, for our daily food and drink, for gifts You have given us to share with all Your people. We thank you for the Church of Christ here on Earth, for the Church family into which we are adopted. For the ministers and leaders, the musicians and choirs who lead and encourage our worship.

Above all things we thank You, Father, for our Saviour, Your Son, Who was obedient to You, even though it meant the cross. We thank You that the grave could not hold Him and that He rose to life on the third day and intercedes for us with You.

Loving God, accept these our prayers, our worship and our work in the Name of Your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ in whose Name we pray. Amen

Reading: 1 Kings 2: 10 – 12, 3: 3 – 14

¹⁰ Then David rested with his ancestors and was buried in the City of David. ¹¹ He had reigned forty years over Israel—seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. ¹² So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

³ Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.

⁴ The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. ⁵ At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, “Ask for whatever you want me to give you.”

⁶ Solomon answered, “You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

⁷ “Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. ⁸ Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. ⁹ So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”

¹⁰ The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. ¹¹ So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, ¹² I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. ¹³ Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honour—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. ¹⁴ And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life.”

Reading: Ephesians 5: 15 - 20

¹⁵ Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, ²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reading: John 6: 51 - 58

⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³ Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For My flesh is real food and My blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent Me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on Me will live because of Me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”

Sermon

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise.”
Ephesians 5: 15

We would all like to think that every decision, every action we made was made with wisdom. I know that there have been decisions made by me that have turned out to be anything other than wise. Perhaps you are able to empathise with that.

Where does wisdom come from? Are we born with wisdom as a gift of God to us? Is wisdom something we learn with experience? Is wisdom gained through education?

The vast majority of people in the western world receive a good education. If wisdom comes through the learning of the three R’s and associated subjects then surely we would all be wise. Yet wisdom is not gained by learning.

There are many learned people in my sphere of acquaintances who are highly intelligent yet lack what we could call to be common sense. Some of them even reject Christ as Saviour and view the Holy Bible as a collection of stories and myths.

In his first letter to the Church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul writes quoting the words of Isaiah:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” (Isaiah 29: 14, 1 Corinthians 1: 19)

This Paul includes after he has written, “for the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing but for those who are being saved it is the power of God”.

We may gather from these words that not all the intelligent are wise and that not all the unintelligent are fools. By this we mean that if we truly believe and commune with God the Father through His Son, Jesus Christ, with God’s Holy Spirit dwelling in our very being we will not be frustrated by the message of Christ Jesus – that He came into this world so that we may have life in all its fullness and the hope of life eternal when we pass through the veil.

Solomon was the son of David. David had been king for forty years. David had not always acted wisely - we can think of some of the unwise actions he did. Yet David was always mindful of what God had given him.

When Solomon succeeded David it was not surprising that he, too, was devout and relied upon God to lead him. Solomon worshipped God in many places and in many ways. We do not have burnt offerings and ritual slaughter today – well, not in my church! – but it was the done thing for the Jews all those years before the coming of Jesus.

Yet, with all his power and authority as king, Solomon knew where his limitations lay. When, in a dream, God asked Solomon what he wanted Solomon did not reply with what we may think to be the obvious answer.

Solomon had riches – he needed no more. He had a good life – maybe he could live and rule for many more years than did his father, David. But that was not what Solomon knew he needed to be a good king, a good ruler.

He knew that if he was to be a good king, a leader of the people, he would need to have wisdom. He would need the ability to make wise judgements.

Solomon asked not for riches and health and long life, he asked for wisdom and discernment. Such a request pleased God and God gave Solomon the ability to act wisely and to be a fair judge.

The author of the Letter to the church at Ephesus will have known that there had been unwise actions and words at that church. Hence the call to ‘act wisely’.

From the letter we may glean that not all at that church were living Christian lives. They were allowing the lives of non-Christian neighbours to taint their lives. That church had made decisions that were pleasing only to the evil of the days that was prevalent outside the church in society. Decisions that the writer describes as unwise.

There is a church that wished to evangelise the community in which the church was set and many of the congregation lived. They discussed evangelism at the church council, in meetings of smaller groups and even in their homes over a coffee.

They came up with a solution on how to evangelise the community. They would remove the stout oak doors at the front of the church building and replace them with glass doors so that people passing by could see into the church.

In all their deliberations they had forgotten two things. Firstly, they had not sought the will of God. In all their discussions and deliberations their thoughts had been more about how they could say they were evangelising without actually getting involved in person.

Like many churches the congregation was elderly and had been attending church since they had been very young children. They had become stale in worship, study and prayer. Worship on a Sunday was more akin to a club than a church. They had simply forgotten to listen to what God was saying to them although they had plenty to say to God!

Secondly, they had ignored the fact that the church is on a quiet residential road and hardly anyone passed by on a Sunday morning. We could not claim it as an act of God but fortunately the whole idea of glass doors has been dropped. We would like to think that wisdom allied to common sense prevailed.

Wisdom is not the prerogative of the leaders in the Church of Christ. We may consider our ministers to have wisdom, our lay leaders to have wisdom and the hierarchy of the Church to also be wise. They may be good administrators and excellent orators but that does not necessarily give them the mark of wisdom.

John records the words of Jesus in his rendition of the Good News. In chapter 6, verse 47 Jesus tells the people, “Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life”.

When we believe we have faith. When we have faith and claim Jesus as Lord and Saviour we gain wisdom. Not the wisdom of this world which blows in the wind and is here today and gone tomorrow.

When we come to faith we gain wisdom from God. The wisdom to love our brothers and sisters regardless of ethnicity, wealth or poverty. For those who are in Christ are rich with the Love of Christ shining in our lives, in our words, in our work and in our actions.

Faith brings wisdom to all who truly believe. Wisdom that can only come from God.

Solomon asked for nothing more than wisdom, to act and live wisely. May we who have Christ Jesus at the centre of our lives also ask for that same wisdom; not to rule but to act justly and live wisely. AMEN

StF 661: Give me the faith which can remove

1 Give me the faith which can remove
and sink the mountain to a plain;
give me the childlike praying love,
which longs to build Thy house again;
Thy love, let it my heart o'er-power,
and all my simple soul devour.

2 I would the precious time redeem,
and longer live for this alone,
to spend and to be spent for them
who have not yet my Saviour known;
fully on these my mission prove,
and only breathe, to breathe Thy love.

3 My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
into thy blessed hands receive;
and let me live to preach Thy Word,
and let me to Thy glory live;
my every sacred moment spend
in publishing the sinner's Friend.

4 Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
with boundless charity divine,
so shall I all my strength exert,
and love them with a zeal like Thine,
and lead them to Thy open side,
the sheep for whom the Shepherd died.

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Prayers of Intercession

Lord, we pray for those who look at life differently and for those who help us to see things in a whole new way; for those who look up and remind us to give praise to You and for those whose whole being acknowledges Your Glory; and for those whose words, deeds and actions are focused on worship and for those whose purpose each day is to live for Your praise.

Lord of change and renewal, **come, make us anew.**

Lord, we pray for those who look at life differently and for those who help us to see things in a whole new way; for those who look back and who teach us to be thankful and for those who ooze with gratitude for all they have received; for those who with joy have counted their blessings and for those whose whole lives are a song of Thanksgiving.

Lord of change and renewal, **come, make us anew.**

Lord, we pray for those who look at life differently and for those who help us to see things in a whole new way; for those whose vision helps them to see the whole world of all those who challenge us to hear the cry of the poor; for those who work to bring hope to the hungry and starving and for those who open our eyes to the homeless on the streets of our cities.

Lord of change and renewal, **come, make us anew.**

Lord, we pray for those who look at life differently and for those who help us to see things in a whole new way; for those who look ahead and help us to see where we are heading and for those who challenge our misuse and abuse of God's world; for those who speak out for those who cannot speak for themselves and for those who expose the loss of our rainforests and animals facing extinction.

Lord of change and renewal, **come, make us anew.**

Lord, we pray for those who look at life differently and for those who help us to see things in a whole new way; for those who look with compassion into the faces of the lonely and by grace see something of the hidden pain in people's lives; for those who seek to embrace the broken, the depressed and the abused and for those who shed real tears with those who are frightened and hurting.

Lord of change and renewal, **come, make us anew.**

Lord, we pray for those who look at life differently and for those who help us to see things in a whole new way; for ourselves, that we may open the eyes of our neighbour to Your love and for real opportunities to become a channel of Your peace, joy and hope; for a new willingness to care for those who are careless and love the unloveable and we ready to offer forgiveness to those who do not really deserve it.

Lord of change and renewal, **come, make us anew.**

Father we bring these our prayers, all our work and our witness in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ Who taught us when we pray to say:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name,
Your Kingdom come,
Your will be done,
 on earth as it is in Heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from the evil one
For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are Yours
 now and forever. Amen

StF 545: Be Thou my vision

1 Be Thou my vision, oh Lord of my heart
 Nought be all else to me, save that Thou art
 Thou my best thought in the day and the night
 Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light

2 Be Thou my wisdom, be Thou my true word
 I ever with Thee and Thou with me Lord
 Thou my great Father and I Thy true son
 Thou in me dwelling and I with Thee one

3 Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight
 Be Thou my armour and be Thou my might
 Thou my soul shelter, and Thee my high tower
 Raise Thou me heavenwards, oh power of my power

3 Riches I need not, nor man's empty praise
 Thou mine inheritance through all of my days
 Thou and Thou only the first in my heart
 High King of heaven my treasure Thou art

4 Oh High King of heaven, when battle is done
 Grant heaven's joy to me, bright heaven sun
 Christ of my own heart, whatever befall
 Still be my vision, Thou ruler of all

Irish, 8th century
Translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880 – 1931)

Let us pray:

Holy Wisdom,
You granted Solomon's request
for an understanding mind
and the knowledge to discern good from evil.
Fill us with such understanding and knowledge
that we may act as instruments
of Your loving desire for creation,
working with You to transform
our conceit into concern for others,
our fear into love,
our violence into peace,
and our brokenness into wholeness. Amen

Blessing:

May the blessing of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us, with those we love and pray for and those we should love and pray for, this day and forever.

Amen

Let us go in peace to love and serve our Lord.

In the Name of Christ Amen