

Sunday service
For the Beauty of the Earth - Week 6
24th May 2020

We come to the final verse in our hymn book of the poem/hymn that F. S. Pierpoint wrote. He did actually have at least another two verses but no hymn book prints them anymore. He was inspired by a view of his home town Bath and also by a deep religious faith. God was seen in many ways and especially for him in the worship of the church and particularly in the service of Holy Communion. All were to him gifts from God and for him, as for us, the response could only be to worship.

Here is the final verse;

For thy people, evermore
lifting holy hands above,
offering up on every shore
their pure sacrifice of love.
*Gracious God, to thee we raise
this our sacrifice of praise.*



Let us then respond now with a call to worship. A call taken from the songbook of the children of Israel, the songbook of Jesus and his disciples, the Psalms.

*COME,
Bless the Lord, all you his servants
who minister day and night in the house of the Lord.
Lift your hands towards the sanctuary and Bless the Lord.
May the Lord, master of heaven and earth,
Bless you from Zion.*

We sing the Hymn 10, 000 reasons -

Bless the Lord O my soul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSxocnIaNOA&feature=youtu.be>

Let us pray.

Generous God,
we come to worship you today because you have blessed us in so
many ways:

The gift of creation in all its wonders.

The gift of each new day with all its possibilities.

The gift of our bodies uniquely and intricately made.

The gift of loving relationships enriching our very existence.

The gift of our potential to be what you long us to be, truly
amazing.

The gift of the church, the very bride of Christ.

For all these gifts and more we thank you and praise you.

Yet we know how much we abuse these gifts as we put what we
want above everything else.

Loving God, we ask you to forgive us for we are so sorry for making
such a mess of the world and our own lives.

Help us to know that forgiveness that can only come from you as
we pray;

Our Father, who art in Heaven

hallowed be thy Name,

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those

who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. **Amen.**

As we have worshipped apart but together throughout these past weeks one thing we have not been able to do is dedicate any collection. Yet it is a natural response to any gift we receive to want to say thank you.

Some give money by standing order, others through envelopes filled every week and waiting for the day when we all gather together in one place.

Others respond with acts of kindness; phoning others, waving to them from a social distance and the conversations that flow from that.

So let us pray **a prayer of dedication.**



Father God, you have made us and our world and both are
beautiful.

Saviour Christ, you have loved us and died for us so we can never
be the same again.

Comforting Spirit, you have come amongst us to help us be the
people you want us to be.

So, in thankfulness and praise we dedicate ourselves to your
service. Please accept everything we give in response to your love

for us. Bless everything we bring that it might be a sign of your
love in your world.
Amen.

We sing the Hymn

Come on and celebrate
the gift of love we will celebrate

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3EeMhqRWBo&feature=youtu.be>

Reflection.

In his book 'Simply Christian, why Christianity makes sense' Tom Wright, the New Testament scholar, suggests the church exists for 2 closely related purposes: To worship God and to work for his kingdom in the world. We can all say that's right but he goes on to propose a third purpose which serves the other two. This is the area of encouragement, being built up in the faith, prayer, learning, challenging, being an example and doing. All of this, he suggests, we could say is part of fellowship. It gives us another image of 3.



Rather like a 3 legged stool can stand
but not one with two legs.

So our church exists to worship, advance the kingdom of Jesus
Christ and to build fellowship. Now in our current circumstances

the last leg is a bit loose and wobbly but it is still there. By various means we have maintained a sense of being together. We can continue to pray together and for one another. We sometimes see one another, whether by social distancing or some technological development. Every time we are thrilled. Yes, it reminds us of things we cannot do but also points us to those many things we are appreciating thanks to our building being unavailable.

During this time we have all , as the first and other verses of the hymn would have us note, appreciated the wonder of creation. An ever present blessing flowing from our loving creator God.

Following this hymn through the weeks has enabled us to think and reflect on the many reminders of God's loving gift for us all. Always there for us but so often forgotten or simply taken for granted.

Surely we can now respond with the hymn writer;

Gracious God to thee we raise, this our sacrifice of praise.



As we acknowledge the blessings God gives us so our response is to worship, to give thanks, to praise God. All of this then becomes a virtuous upwards spiral of blessing overflowing into worship which reminds us of more blessings and so to worship over again. We find ourselves being drawn to that place where God is eternally worshipped and adored by countless numbers of the saints and we begin to sense the words Jesus taught his disciples; 'Your kingdom come, your will be done; on earth as in heaven. Every verse of our hymn adds to that ever increasing outpouring of praise and of worship. All these wonderful gifts; creation, our time on earth, our amazing selves, the love of others until we are overwhelmed by the love God has for us make us mindful of God's generosity. Finally coming as a child, growing to a man, dying to save us, rising from the dead to show the power of God and ascending into heaven to intercede for us. Grace, as we discovered last week for each one of us. As the hymn puts it; Lost in wonder, love and praise.

John Goldingay, an Old Testament scholar writes that 'the supreme expression of God's faithfulness is his sending Jesus to redeem us. The only contribution we make to our salvation is our sin and our willingness to trust Jesus.' It is this that brings us our final blessing as revealed in our last verse. The church at worship is another blessing from God and it makes us want to praise God all the more.

Were you not raised to life with Christ?

*Then aspire to the realm above , where Christ is seated at God's
right hand,*

And fix your thoughts on that higher realm, not on this earthly life.

*You died; and now your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you too will be
revealed with him in glory.*

Colossians 3. 1-4.



When we give our lives to Jesus, when we accept his grace , regardless of all our sins and waywardness, it is if we have, as Paul puts it, died and been born again. Paul is trying to help this little band of Christians in this big Roman town to realise how amazing is this God revealed in Jesus. So amazing it is as if we can start all over again. To have the confidence in this wondrous God who saves us and then blesses us, over and over again. So that, when we worship, lifting holy hands above as the adopted sisters and brothers of Jesus we do so with all the other believers throughout the world. Offering our very selves in an act of love to serve God. Praise builds on praise and overflows in acts of love for others. We cannot do anything else. C. S. Lewis wrote in 'Mere Christianity'; 'Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither'.

This hymn reminds us, yet again, what a wonderful Saviour is Jesus. I read recently, whatever this coronavirus may bring, we can be assured God is not self isolating, Jesus is not doing social distancing for through the Holy Spirit he is with us every step we take. Let our response be;

Gracious God to thee we raise,
this our sacrifice of praise.



The hymn Angel voices ever singing
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EM9PzHYoWFO&feature=youtu.be>

Prayers of intercession.

Gracious God, you have blessed us in so many ways, ways that we cannot begin to thank you for. Yet we respond with a sacrifice of love for you and for our neighbours in our prayers.

Loving God, when you created - everything was good; so we pray for those places in the world where things are not good; For those places **where hatred and fear have driven out love and compassion**
People are hungry for food shelter and warmth.
And we ask you to bless and prosper the work of those who bring light and love to those dark places, offering hope and joy.

Loving God, when you created - everything was good, so we pray for those parts of our land where things are not good;

For those places **where hatred and fear have driven out love and compassion**

People are hungry for food and companionship.

And we ask you to bless and prosper the work of those who bring light and love to those dark places offering hope and joy.

Saving Christ, you came that we might have joy in all its fulness, so we pray for your church where the sense of your grace is lacking;

For those places **where the actions of the church have caused hurt**

People worship alone for fear of the authorities

And we ask you to bless and prosper the work of all those who seek to reveal the kingdom of God on earth as in heaven.

Companion Spirit, you came to show us how to serve, so we pray

For all those **who are fearful of taking the first step of faith are alone and frightened at this time known to us who need placing in your love and care**

And we ask you to bless and prosper us in our work as disciples of Jesus.

Amen.

Throughout this series on 'For the beauty of the earth' I have been struck by how often the people producing these services have used the Psalms. So it seems appropriate to end with the final Psalm in the Psalter, Psalm 150.

Praise the Lord

*Praise God in his holy place,
Praise him in the mighty vault of heaven.
Praise him for his acts of power,
Praise him for his immeasurable greatness.
Praise him with fanfares on the trumpet,
Praise him on the harp and lyre;
Praise him with tambourines and dancing,
Praise him with flute and strings;
Praise him with the clash of cymbals,*

with triumphant cymbals praise him.

Let everything that has breath Praise the Lord!

Praise the Lord.

So let us play our part as we sing

Let all the world in every corner sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADxIVMS6xAc&feature=youtu.be>

May God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
continue to bless us, as we know he will.
And may our lives sing and dance to his praise and glory.



AMEN