

HYMN: CH4: 544

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

And the creed and the colour and the name

Won't matter, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?

I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?

I was cold, I was naked, were you there?

When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?

When I needed a shelter, were you there?

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there

Wherever you travel, I'll be there...

Sydney Bertram Carter (1915-2004)

Sunday 5th July 2020

“The greatest among you must bear himself like the youngest, the one who rules like one who serves. I am among you like a servant.”

Luke 22, 26, 27

PRAYER

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ has taught us that what we do for the least of your children we do also for him. Give us the will to serve others as he was the servant of all, who gave up his life and died for us, but lives with you and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

HYMN: CH4: 544: When I needed a neighbour

SCRIPTURE 24: 42-49

When I came to the spring today, I said, ‘O Lord, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. See, I am standing beside this spring, if a maiden comes out to draw water and I say to her, ‘Please let me drink a little water from your jar.’ and if she says to me, ‘Drink, and I’ll draw water for your camels too,’ let her be the one the Lord has chosen for my master’s son. Before I had finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She quickly lowered her jar and said, ‘Drink, and I’ll water your camels too.’”

REFLECTION

When you have put a lot of effort into a particular task, you hope it bears good fruit.

During this coronavirus pandemic, life has changed quite significantly. People are willing to stand in a queue to get their shopping. Many people are going the extra mile to look out for their neighbour and do what they can to help. Communities have come together in creative ways to show appreciation to those who care for others in a variety of settings.

What will happen, long term?

Will this patience, neighbourliness and corporate compassion continue? Will the journey we have been on together bear good fruit and result in a better world? Will this prayer be answered in the way we hope?

- ◆ Thank God for the “community spirit” that is sweeping across the nations
- ◆ Thank God for those who are making sacrifices in order to safeguard others
- ◆ Pray that good will come out of this situation
- ◆ Pray that greater equality will emerge as a result of the way in which we have all been humbled

PRAYER

Were we becoming too big for our boots, Lord?

Were we in danger of forgetting the values that matter most in life?

Has a pandemic been the means by which we have learned to value others and care for the weak and vulnerable?

In our fast moving world of high tech and climbing the social ladder, had we forgotten who our neighbour is?

Forgive us, Lord, if we did not consider the needs of others in our haste to be sure we were ok.

Forgive us, Lord. Forgive us, forgive us, forgive us.

Gracious God, as we work together, to move beyond this crisis, help those who have long felt marginalised or undervalued know that our desire to change things for the better is sincere and not a one day wonder.

Be near, O God to those who are hungry or thirsty, cold or in need of shelter, through the supportive actions of those who see them as a neighbour and respond to their needs.

Bring us, Lord, to the new land of your making; the land of healing and helping, the land of caring and sharing, the land of faith and fellowship, where young and old, rich and poor, able and less able are respected equally. This prayer we bring to you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SONG

When you're weary, feeling small
When tears are in your eyes. I will dry them all,
I'm on your side, oh, when times get tough
And friends just can't be found
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down

When you're down and out
When you're on the street
When evening falls so hard
I will comfort you
I'll take your part, oh, when darkness comes
And pain is all around
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down,
Like a bridge over troubled water.
I will lay me down.

(Composed by Paul Simon, performed by Art Garfunkel)

Sunday 12th July 2020

“The grass may wither, the flower fade, but the word of our
God will endure for ever.”

Isaiah 40: 8

PRAYER

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you. Give us peace in your service, and in the world to come, the joy of seeing you face to face, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

SOMG: Bridge over troubles water

SCRIPTURE Psalm 55

Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me. My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught. My heart is in anguish within me; fear and trembling have beset me.

I said, 'Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

But I call to God, and the Lord saves me. I cry out in distress and he hears my voice.

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you, he will never let the righteous fall.

I could have chosen “Do not be afraid” CH4: 191

But I chose one of the world’s best loved songs that is about providing comfort to someone in need. Even today, the words of “Bridge over troubled water” composed by Paul Simon and performed by Art Garfunkel speak to millions.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a huge impact on the lives of everyone. Our thoughts and prayers—as we look towards releasing lockdown—must surely be with those most devastated by the crisis

- ◆ Those who grieve the death of a loved one to coronavirus
- ◆ Those whose business and finances have been totally ruined by the pandemic
- ◆ Charities who equally will struggle to recover and mourn the fact that they have been unable to be there for people in the way they normally would
- ◆ Families who are struggling well below the bread line and worry sick about how they will manage
- ◆ Those whose mental health has plummeted to the lowest of levels and long for comfort and support
- ◆ The hidden “many” whose needs we might never really know or fully comprehend, but God knows.

PRAYER

Where do we start, dear Lord, when it comes to praying for those most affected by coronavirus? Perhaps we start by recognising that real needs exist and these needs relate to people—all of whom are precious in your sight and in ours.

Lord, when questions remain unanswered (as they will) when the true cost of the pandemic comes to light (if it ever does) when politicians, agencies, communities and people themselves begin to “move into whatever the new is” help us not to forget the vulnerable and those who will struggle most to cope with the reality of their situation.

God of all compassion, help us to carry, the oil of kindness and to speak words—not of reprisal but - of hope and comfort.

We know, Lord, that many things will never be the same (and in some ways this is good for there is much that needs to change) but change can bring increased worry before any benefits are seen.

Through the power of your Holy Spirit, melt us and mould us, as society is reshaped. Grant to all of us, patience, tolerance, understanding and rekindled faith, so that we do indeed remember those in need and provide the ongoing comfort and care they need for anxieties to be eased, worries addressed, and broken lives restored. Amen

HYMN: CH4: 519

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven, to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art
Visit us with thy salvation
Enter every trembling heart

Finish then thy new creation
Pure and spotless let us be
Let us see thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee
Changed from glory into glory
Till in heaven we take our place
Till we cast our crowns before thee
Lost in wonder, love, and praise

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Sunday 19th July 2020

“Out of the treasure of his glory God grant you inward strength and power through his Spirit, that through faith Christ may dwell in your hearts in love.” Ephesians 3:16-17

PRAYER

Almighty God, your Son has opened for us a new and living way into your presence. Give us pure hearts and constant wills to worship you in spirit and in truth, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

HYMN: CH4: 519: Love divine, all loves excelling

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 86: 11-17

Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. I will praise you, O Lord my God, with all my heart; I will glorify your name for ever. For great is your love towards me... You, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Turn to me and have mercy on me; grant your strength to your servant. Give me a sign of your goodness, that others may see it, for you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

REFLECTION

If you have a jewellery box or treasure box, take a few moments to think about the treasures within. How often do you look at them, wear them, use them or even remember they are there?

I love to come across a piece of jewellery I have not seen or worn for a while. I love the memories finding such a piece evokes and the joy it brings to my heart.

“Out of the treasure of his glory God grant you inward strength and power through his Spirit.”

Beautiful words, little treasures in themselves. From God’s box of treasures God bestows upon us the things we need to be wearing in our lives.

Take a moment or two and think about what “little treasures” you need from God. It might be inward strength and power. It might be peace of heart and mind. It might be that you need to find some joy and hope, laughter or love, in your life. Could it be that the “treasure” you long for God to bestow upon you is forgiveness, understanding or tolerance. You already have God’s compassion and grace, so come to God in faith, open your heart and out of the treasure of his glory God will grant you what you ask. Then wear it in such a way that others see it.

PRAYER

Gracious God, red and yellow, black and white, all are precious in your sight, for each person is like a jewel in your treasure box.

We do not always act like “little gems.” Often the “shine” is taken from us. Our lives get damaged and your glory is marred, dirtied, distorted, by life’s demands and pressure. Yet, gracious God, your love and compassion is unending.

Help us Lord God, to polish and restore that which is in need of attention in our lives, so that your glory may be seen in all we say, think and do. Help us to wear the very best of our Christian qualities in a way that draws us closer to others and indeed to you, the Creator of all that is honourable, noble and true.

These things we pray, very much mindful of the times we are facing and the challenges before us. Help us, Lord God, to stand firm and true to the teaching of scripture, for within the pages of the Bible, we find the greatest treasure of all. Words that inspire us, comfort us, guide us, strengthen us. Help us to search deep within our hearts and so find that which will open a new and living way into your presence. Amen.

HYMN: CH4: 517

Fight the good fight with all your might,
Christ is your strength, and Christ your right
Lay hold on life, and it shall be,
Your joy and crown eternally

Run the straight race through God's good grace,
Lift up your eyes, and seek his face;
Life with its path before us lies,
Christ is the way, and Christ the prize

Cast care aside, lean on your Guide
His boundless mercy will provide
Trust, and your trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love

Faint not, nor fear; his arm is near;
He does not change, and you are dear;
Only believe, and Christ shall be
Your all in all eternally

John Samuel Bewley Monsell (1811-1875)

Sunday 26th July 2020

"I am able to face anything through Christ who gives me strength." Philippians 4:13

PRAYER

O God, the protector of all who trust in you, without you nothing is strong, nothing is holy. Increase and multiply upon us your mercy, that with you as our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal, that we lose not the things eternal; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

HYMN: CH4: 517 Fight the good fight

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 13: 31-31

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.

The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough. Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables.

REFLECTION

I have a plant that has been in the same small pot for years and years. In the winter it dies back to just about nothing, so much so, I have often been tempted to throw it out. But something makes me leave it on the windowsill. In the Spring, a tiny shoot appears, it grows (slowly) tries to bud (on the odd occasion does) then withers away again in the winter.

A few years back, I gave it greater care and attention. It is still in the same pot, but I feed and water it regularly. I even remember to turn the plant pot so that the shoots get the sun. What fruits I have gained from my labour. The plant has blossomed beautifully and I have in fact been able to take a few cuttings from it. These are also growing well.

God gives us everything we need to grow and flourish. When we are weak and unsuccessful, the problem often lies deep within ourselves. It's not God's fault that things don't work out as we expect. We need to want it to happen. We need to put everything we have into it to make it happen. We need to give it time to happen. We need to believe it can happen. God has given us everything we need to make God's kingdom grow and flourish in our hearts and homes. Strong or weak, let's tend to it.

PRAYER

Dear Lord, how often I cry inwardly:

"I can't do it"

"You're asking too much of me."

"I'm not strong enough"

Time and time again, I feel like the weeds in the garden, crushed under foot or like the runt of the litter, with little hope of success.

Life can be overwhelming. Our Christian faith can be just as demanding—sometimes more so because of the expectations others set upon us.

Yet, Lord God, scripture reminds us that you often take the weakest to fulfil your will. You draw alongside the outcast and give them work to do. You turn the world's ways upside down and make the impossible, possible. You tell us, "You can do it"

And it doesn't take a lot—just a tiny bit of faith that spreads out; grows and flourishes!

Lord God, help us to trust you completely and to really believe that what we do in your name and through your power, not only enriches our lives but the lives of others too.

Lord, let your kingdom come. Amen.