

WRITTEN WORSHIP

Sunday 13 July 2025

Geoff Cawthorn

KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

CALL TO WORSHIP

From Psalm 91: 14-16,

The Lord says, "Whoever loves me I will save,
I will protect those who know me.
They will call to me and I will answer them.
I will be with them in trouble;
I will rescue them and honour them.
I will give them a long full life,
and they will see how I can save."

STF 134 - Christ, whose glory fills the skies,

Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true and only Light,
Sun of righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shade of night;
Day-spring from on high, be near;
Day-star, in my heart appear.

Dark and cheerless is the morn
unaccompanied by Thee;
joyless is the day's return,
till Thy mercy's beams I see,
till they inward light impart,
glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine,
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, radiance divine,
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more Thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

Charles Wesley



PRAYER FOR PEACE BY POPE FRANCIS:

Lord God of peace, hear our prayer!

We have tried so many times and over so many years to resolve our conflicts by our own powers and by the force of our arms. How many moments of hostility and darkness have we experienced; how much blood has been shed; how many lives have been shattered; how many hopes have been buried... But our efforts have been in vain.

Now, Lord, come to our aid! Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: "Never again war!"; "With war everything is lost". Instill in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace.

Lord, God of Abraham, God of the Prophets, God of Love, you created us and you call us to live as brothers and sisters. Give us the strength daily to be instruments of peace; enable us to see everyone who crosses our path as our brother or sister. Make us sensitive to the plea of our citizens who entreat us to turn our weapons of war into implements of peace, our trepidation into confident trust, and our quarrelling into forgiveness.

Keep alive within us the flame of hope, so that with patience and perseverance we may opt for dialogue and reconciliation. In this way may peace triumph at last, and may the words “division”, “hatred” and “war” be banished from the heart of every man and woman. Lord, defuse the violence of our tongues and our hands. Renew our hearts and minds, so that the word which always brings us together will be “brother”, and our way of life will always be that of: Shalom, Peace, Salaam! Amen.

LORD’S PRAYER - Our Father, in heaven.....

STF 508 -

Purify my heart, let me be as gold and silver.
Purify my heart, let me be as gold and silver.
Refiner’s fire, my heart’s one desire is to be holy,
set apart from You, Lord I choose to be holy,
set apart from You my Master, ready to do Your will.
Purify my heart, cleanse me from within and make me holy.
Purify my heart, cleanse me from my sin, deep within. Brian Doerksen

SHORT REFLECTION

So, how many of us woke up this morning with a spring in our step and couldn’t wait to start our daily round of physical exercises? How many of us were pounding away with sweat pouring down our foreheads shouting the maxim, ‘No pain, no gain’?

It all seems a bit ‘yesterday’ really doesn’t it?

Nevertheless, there does seem some truth in the idea that smooth times don’t stretch us but tough, painful times bring us insight and spiritual maturity if we let them. Facing the challenges and troubles of life can bring us closer to God. And a regular fitness regime of prayer, study, worship and shared faith can help develop our spiritual muscles and make us fit to face the stress and anxiety of life – they prepare us for when life’s speed bumps shake us up and slow us down.

How do we feed our spirit every day? Are we ready for God’s work, tough or smooth?

When in WWII, with bombs raining down, many were evacuated from our cities, most found it a daunting experience. Their parents waved them off in tears. Now they were being helped by strangers and, with all its odd smells and different ways, the countryside seemed an alien place. So much to take in; it was all rather mind blowing.

To start with there was little to do, everything was unfamiliar and when they found out where eggs emerged from, many were disgusted. By the end of the war 3.5 million mainly children had experienced this isolation. Most had adapted and in the end found it to be good, even life enhancing.

God has many unusual experiences waiting for us and we need to be in the best possible shape to face whatever He may throw at us, wherever we are in life. We must, buckle down and take regular spiritual exercise to be in the best shape for whatever may be ahead.

The Psalmist puts it slightly different in Psalm 25, so let’s hear what he has to say. The passage is headed ‘A Prayer for God to Guide’.

OLD TESTAMENT READING - Psalm 25:1-10

New Century Version

A Prayer for God to Guide

**LORD, I give myself to you;
my God, I trust you.
Do not let me be disgraced;
do not let my enemies laugh at me.
No one who trusts you will be disgraced,
but those who sin without excuse will be disgraced.**
**LORD, tell me your ways.
Show me how to live.
Guide me in your truth,
and teach me, my God, my Saviour.
I trust you all day long.**
**LORD, remember your mercy and love
that you have shown since long ago.**

Do not remember the sins
and wrong things I did when I was young.
But remember to love me always
because you are good, LORD.
The LORD is good and right;
he points sinners to the right way.
He shows those who are humble how to do right,
and he teaches them his ways.
All the LORD's ways are loving and true
for those who follow the demands of his agreement.

STF 615 -

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go:
*As God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,
give me your love in spite of all you know:
*As God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments,
give me your trust when all my failings show.
*As God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Michael Forster

GOSPEL READING - Luke 10:25-37

New Testament for Everyone

The parable of the good Samaritan

A lawyer got up and put Jesus on the spot.

"Teacher," he said, "what should I do to inherit the life of the coming age?"

"Well," replied Jesus, "what is written in the law? What's your interpretation of it?"

"You shall love the Lord your God," he replied, "with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your understanding; and your neighbour as yourself."

"Well said!" replied Jesus. "Do that and you will live."

"Ah," said the lawyer, wanting to win the point, "but who is my neighbour?"

Jesus rose to the challenge. "Once upon a time," he said, "a man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and was set upon by brigands. They stripped him and beat him and ran off leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, and when he saw him he went past on the opposite side. 32 So too a Levite came by the place; he saw him too, and went past on the opposite side.

"But a travelling Samaritan came to where he was. When he saw him he was filled with pity. He came over to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. Then he put him on his own beast, took

him to an inn, and looked after him. The next morning, as he was going on his way, he gave the innkeeper two dinars. 'Take care of him,' he said, 'and on my way back I'll pay you whatever else you need to spend on him.'

"Which of these three do you think turned out to be the neighbour of the man who was set upon by the brigands?"

"The one who showed mercy on him," came the reply.

"Well," Jesus said to him, "you go and do the same."

REFLECTION - KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Just as there is more to life than we can see, so there is more to the Samaritan story than a kind foreigner giving support to a mugged traveller.

Let me explain.

Life was a struggle for 20 year-olds Tom and Peter. They had both lost their jobs and their money had to stretch a long way. To help their finances they moved into a flat together and just managed to keep their heads above water.

The apartment was small but had everything they needed and their one luxury was a ten year old TV which helped them pass the time.

Imagine then, their absolute horror when returning home one day they found they had been burgled and the only thing missing was the television. Such a blow and they had no way of replacing it.

The problem only got worse when a few weeks later there was a knock on the door and there stood an official looking gentleman, with a folder and clipboard who asked Tom, 'Can I see your TV Licence please?' Tom explained that they didn't have a TV but the official simply didn't want to know and insisted that they needed a licence. Out of desperation the official gestured with his finger and took Tom outside, whereupon he pointed up to the chimney stack which clearly had a TV aerial with a cable going into their flat. That had convinced him that Tom and Peter were breaking the law. Surely at the other end of the aerial there had to be a TV!

Appearances don't always tell the full story and that might be a trap we fall into when we read the story of the kind Samaritan man. Of course, it is so well known, we've heard it so many times, surely we know everything about it, don't we?

Well, let's see.

A man physically attacked is in desperate need of help. He has been ignored by his fellow countrymen who did not have the time to stop because, being religious leaders, they had important work to do. Assistance finally came from a hated stranger who would have been expected to despise the man in trouble.

We often take this parable as an encouragement to do good and helpful things to those in trouble without questioning their race or religion. If we see someone in a ditch or struggling we should go and help them, whoever they are. Of course we should.

Then when we remember that the Jews and the Samaritans hated each other, we find a further encouragement to offer ourselves to those we don't like and a lesson to resist any tendency to racial and religious prejudice. Of course we should help them.

Then, again, if we can think a little deeper and build on the hatred angle, we remember that the hatred between Jews and Samaritans can be seen in the modern Middle East as a violent, horrific war blazes away. Just as in Christ's day both sides, Israel and the Palestinians claim to be the true inheritors of the promises made to Abraham and Moses which enables them both to claim they own God's promise to give them the land. So, they put their demands ahead of God's, with the ownership of land and political power being preferred to God's urging to love and support each other. This poses the question to us, do we always put God's way above our wants that seem so appealing in daily life? Of course we should.

But even then we haven't finished.

The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a known problem area and Jesus would often take a different route to avoid the gangs that operated there. Not much has changed really, because this road goes through part of the West Bank and is still a dangerous place to visit.

It has many twists and turns which makes it easy for robbers to hide and then take their victims by surprise. In our story, we should perhaps have some understanding for those who passed by the lonely traveller, half dead and in a heap on the floor. The priest and the Levite were fearful for their own safety and had more pressing things on their minds. After all they were officials at the Temple and had purified themselves ready for their work. It was important that they should remain pure and touching a corpse would ruin their cleanliness: better

to pretend not to see and get to the Temple, everyone there would be relying on them. It can be so messy to get involved with God's work. Does that ever make us shy away? Of course it does.

But, there is no denying that the opportunity to do something special was grabbed by both hands by a warm hearted Samaritan.

The lawyer had asked Jesus, 'Who is my neighbour?' When Jesus returns the question to him, he has to concede the truth. The neighbour turns out to be the one who helped this half-dead Jew, his enemy, as he lay abandoned at the roadside. The enemy was the neighbour.

So, what is Jesus trying to say here? Perhaps, the question now becomes, 'Can we recognise our neighbour in the most hated members of our society – the politically extremists, the religiously deviant, the radical terrorist, the people we don't understand or those thriving on hatred and disgusting behaviour – can we see our neighbours in these strangers?' We don't have to like or agree with their views or behaviour but we still have to treat them as having been created by God and so are children of God. Tough isn't it?

If that is beyond us, then we should think again because there may be trouble ahead. We are custodians of God's will and if we can't open our hearts and show God's grace to all we run the risk of being the ones left for dead at the side of the road. If we dare to reject people or consider them beyond the pale, we might just have to watch as God finds a way to use even these people to do His work where we have failed. How embarrassing for the priest and the Levite to be outdone by a Samaritan, how embarrassing for us to see others doing God's work?

It is not for us to judge people but to give out God's agape universal love, agape to all. When someone we can't stand does something good we are told to, 'Go and do likewise. Go and do what your enemy has just done.'

We are to copy the goodness displayed even in those we hate.

There is nowhere at the moment where hatred is so evident than in the turmoil of the Middles East, so does this story, 2000 years on, have anything to say to us about this. Well we have been talking about a road where people travelled to and fro to Jerusalem. Jesus will soon take this road Himself to fulfil His mission. It is still there and it runs through the notorious West Bank. It is well known as a place of violence and suspicion. In Christ's day, it was used by everyone, the Samaritans, the Romans, the Jews and pagans would have used it regularly. Different religions, beliefs, different displays of power and weakness. The same can also be said of Gaza today, the home of the Palestinians and a place where Israelis and Palestinians have always come into regular contact and where the recent war has brought so much destruction and pain.

Two sides each hating the other, bearing their teeth at each other and coming from such different visions of what the future should look like: two visions giving no quarter to the other side and so little room within either of those visions for each other or for God's grace.

Christ in His conversation with the expert lawyer is urgently seeking to offer a way of peace because only the 'children of peace' will escape self-inflicted judgement. He so wants us all to see a vision of the future He is offering. The lawyer had asked a clever question, 'Who is my neighbour?' to trap Jesus into taking sides. Jesus made him answer his own question, so it would become clear to him that the meaning of neighbour included far more people than the lawyer or most Jews had ever considered. Don't discount someone as your neighbour because he is your enemy!

What Jesus was offering to the lawyer and his friends and what he is offering to all of the warring factions throughout the world, He is offering nothing less than the grace of God, to temper their hatred and bring light into their hearts. What Jesus is still offering to anyone who seeks peace is new life, lived to new rules that embrace all types and classes of people rather than rejecting them. He is offering His living water of fresh life to all those filled with hatred, and all those whose sight is blinded by prejudice. He offers a holy form of water that refreshes, renews, reforms and redirects.

The lawyer had the answer to his question. Our neighbours are those who show us whole-hearted mercy and who don't hold back because what it is required is inconvenient or from someone we don't like.

The TV aerial on the roof didn't tell the whole story of the TV in the flat and neither does a first glance at the story of the kind Samaritan who broke convention to offer compassion without boundaries.

We are a people of action and God requires that action to be on His terms, not ours. No church, no Christian can be content to just sit back and observe the world lying half dead at the roadside without thinking that we should be the ones offering to help.

We live in a broken world and we can't force those clothed in evil to see the error of their ways. Neither can we immediately overcome those who snatch power and look to use it to beat down the poor, and lowly – but we must never cease praying, we must never cease grabbing any and every opportunity to show God's grace in the world and never stop offering ourselves humbly in God's service.

God is expecting us to do extraordinary things in His name – be prepared to be surprised. Amen

STF 251 -

Jesus Christ is waiting,
Waiting in the streets;
No one is his neighbour,
All alone he eats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am lonely too.
Make me, friend or stranger,
Fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging,
Raging in the streets,
Where injustice spirals
And real hope retreats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I am angry too.
In the Kingdom's causes
Let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is healing,
Healing in the streets;
Curing those who suffer,
Touching those he greets.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I have pity too.
Let my care be active,
Healing just like you.
Jesus Christ is dancing,
Dancing in the streets,
Where each sign of hatred
He, with love, defeats.
Listen, Lord Jesus,
I should triumph too.
On suspicion's graveyard
Let me dance with you.

Jesus Christ is calling,
Calling in the streets,
"Who will join my journey?
I will guide their feet."
Listen, Lord Jesus,
Let my fears be few.
Walk one step before me;
I will follow you.



John L Bell & Graham Maule

POEM - ONE PERSON'S THANKSGIVING by Andrew King

I have never been blighted by leprosy,
nor lived in a place called Samaria.
I have not known the rejection, the hate
that some people have known
because of the colour of their skin
or because of the way they pray
or the gender of the person that they love.
And for that I am thankful, thankful.

I have never been homeless because of war,
or afraid of my government's soldiers.

I have never had to carry my possessions
on my back as, desperate, I flee from terror.
I have never been so poor I could not pay rent
nor find food for tomorrow's small meal.
I have never gotten sick because of bad water,
nor suffered in inadequate shelter.
And for that I am thankful, thankful.

I drink coffee whose ripened beans
were picked by somebody else;
I wear a shirt sewn by hands overseas.
The grain for my bread did not grow
where I live. This keyboard was not made by me.
I am enriched by the labours
of countless, nameless others,
and for that I am thankful, thankful.

Holy One, when I pass by you
in the glory-coloured autumns,
miss you on city side-walks, the crowds
hurrying past; when I fail to notice
your presence in the day and world I take for granted:
have mercy on my selfish coarsened soul,
and prod me once again to be conscious,
caring. And thus show I'm thankful, thankful.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

In Isaiah 40 (11) we read:

*Like a shepherd He will tend His flock,
In His arm He will gather the lambs
And carry them in His bosom;
He will gently lead the nursing ewes.*

Heavenly Father we praise You for Your great power and strength as well as Your mercy and tender love as we seek Your blessing on every part of Your church whether it is witnessing in village chapels, great cathedrals or the homes of the faithful. Gather Your flock, O Lord, and build them up. We ask that those congregations facing danger and persecution should be honoured for the risks they take and the determination they display to serve Your will. May Your people gathered here today know of Your presence amongst them and look to You for inspiration.

We pray for a world full of beauty and riches; the world You created, that seems to be falling into a downward spiral of exploitation, hatred and despair. Bring those who would sink the world still further into trouble to learn of Your ways and pull back from the darkness that war and greed visit upon us.

In John we also read 10 (3-4):

To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. "When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice."

There are true riches in all the gifts You shower upon us and we thank You for all the diversity of race, language and ethnicity that we encounter every day. May the world become ever more inclusive and open to all of Your people.

May we never flinch from seeking justice for the poor, the ostracised, and the disabled. May those who struggle to find clean water and stable living conditions be given special help and all affected by disease, pain or grief know Your hand of care resting upon them.

In Psalm 23 (1-2) we read:

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

We thank You for all the work done on Your behalf in and through Your church. Especially at this moment we offer to You of all those on our minds who need comfort, care, support, love and healing. All of us have issues that cause us concern and we present them to You now and ask that You look upon us with Your compassion.

Be with those we know who are feeling uncertainty, pain, grief or stress. We seek Your peace, comfort and healing touch as well as all the benefits that come from You our, Good Shepherd.

We remember those close to us who have died and lay before You the pain of separation. Turn our dark times into light for it is Your light that will guide us home to our place in eternity.

In Psalm 23 (3) we read:

He restores my soul;

He guides me in the paths of righteousness

For His name's sake.

We ask all these things in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

STF 238 -

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us:
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston

BLESSING

May all our hearts and souls be filled with the Spirit of God and grant us His peace.

Romans 15 (13):

"May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace as we trust in Him, so that we may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

And now we go in peace and may God's peace go with us and those close to us. Amen

