

A Month of Sundays February 2025



Preston Ribble Circuit

Sunday 2nd February 2025

Call to worship

God is love.

Those who live in love, live in God and God lives in them.
Let us receive afresh the love of God for us and for those
around us.

Bible reading

Psalm 71

Prayer for Lifelong Protection and Help

In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.
In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.
Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.
For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.
Upon you I have leaned from my birth;
it was you who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 628

Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you again and again.
I call out to you again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 628

Words and Music: © 1989 Vineyard Songs and ION Publishing.

Administered by Song Solutions CopyCare, 14 Horsted Square,

Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 1QG. <www.songsolutions.org> Used by permission.

Reflection

It is not always popular to speak the truth. Some people who have spoken out against injustice within their own organisations have since suffered recriminations and persecution. Jesus is speaking in his hometown but his words are designed to be provocative. He names a number of people who God has blessed historically – but all of them are from other nations and not of Israel. We know that God's love is for the whole world, but this was not a popular truth for Jesus' hearers. Israel was struggling under Roman rule and was wanting God to step in and save them now. God calls us to be loving to others but sometimes this means speaking the truth to them whether they want to hear it or not.

When Jesus began preaching, Israel had become inward-looking and isolated from other nations. It was not fulfilling its God-given mission to be a blessing to the nations around them. Jesus listed examples of God's grace experienced by foreigners and outsiders – his audience rioted and wanted to kill him. Throughout Jesus' ministry, we see him unafraid to say difficult things to the people God chose and loved. Similarly, Jesus will also sometimes say hard things to us, not because he doesn't love us but precisely because his love is so great he cannot leave us set in ways that will hurt us or others. If we are brave, we will hear this message of tough love and be changed for the better.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Almighty, everlasting God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, so much of who and what you are has been gifted to us by those around us.

We give you thanks and praise.

So much of our relationship with you and our spiritual growth

has been gifted by those who worship with us.

We give you thanks and praise.

So many of your examples of love comfort us, uphold us, sustain us

and create in us a yearning to love more as we are loved.

We give you thanks and praise.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Loving God, thank you for your great love for us,
love which is patient, kind, protecting and persevering.
Help us to take your love out with us this week
and show it to those who feel they are outside of your
family.

Give us your heart for those who don't yet know you.
We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Sunday 9th February 2025

Call to worship

Our God is holy, our God is mighty.
We gather in his house in awe at his presence.
Let us still our hearts and prepare to meet
the Lord of heaven and earth.

Bible reading: Isaiah 6: 1-13

A Vision of God in the Temple

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts;
the whole earth is full of his glory.’

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!’

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said:

‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’ And he said, ‘Go and say to this people:

“Keep listening, but do not comprehend;
keep looking, but do not understand.”

Make the mind of this people dull,
and stop their ears,
and shut their eyes,
so that they may not look with their eyes,
and listen with their ears,
and comprehend with their minds,
and turn and be healed.’

Then I said, ‘How long, O Lord?’ And he said:

‘Until cities lie waste
without inhabitant,
and houses without people,
and the land is utterly desolate;
until the Lord sends everyone far away,
and vast is the emptiness in the midst of the land.

Even if a tenth part remains in it,
it will be burned again,
like a terebinth or an oak
whose stump remains standing
when it is felled.’

The holy seed is its stump.

Reflection

Both Isaiah (6:5) and Peter (Luke 5:8) recognise their sinfulness when they are called. Both of them are forgiven, despite feeling unworthy. How can we foster a humility that understands we are sinful and in need of repentance but also called and chosen? Think about other seemingly unsuitable characters in Scripture who are called by God for specific work, e.g. Jonah, David, Paul, Tamar, Rahab. Or some more contemporary examples, such as Mick Fleming, a former violent drug dealer and addict who now leads Church on the Street in Burnley. These people were called by God and redeemed after their failures. Their stories guide us in understanding how we, despite our sinfulness, can be forgiven and undertake what God calls us to do.

Both Simon Peter and Isaiah are chosen when they recognise who God is and obey his call. Their obedience is their only qualification. Isaiah is made clean only by the angel's intervention and Peter knows he isn't good enough to be with Jesus. By recognising something of who God is, and following what he tells them, Peter and Isaiah show us all that we need to do if we are to be missionaries, telling others about Jesus.

Hymn Stf 489

- 1 All I once held dear,
built my life upon,
all this world reveres,
and wars to own,
all I once thought gain
I have counted loss;
spent and worthless now,
compared to this.
*Knowing you, Jesus,
knowing you,
there is no greater thing.
You're my all, you're the best,
you're my joy, my righteousness,
and I love you, Lord.*
- 2 Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours.
To possess by faith
what I could not earn,
all-surpassing gift
of righteousness.
- 3 Oh, to know the power
of your risen life,
and to know you in
your sufferings.
To become like you
in your death, my Lord,
so with you to live
and never die.

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number **489**

Words and Music: © 1993, Graham Kendrick / Make Way Music Ltd, PO Box 320,
Tunbridge Wells, Kent. TN2 9DE UK. <www.grahamkendrick.co.uk> Used by permission.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Almighty God, you have given us a fresh glimpse
of your glory and majesty.

We are not worthy to walk with you,
but you have made us clean.

Send us out, in the power of your Holy Spirit,
to speak your words and to show your love.

Amen.

Sunday 16th February 2025

A call to worship

Our God is holy, our God is mighty.
We gather in his house in awe at his presence.
Let us still our hearts and prepare to meet
the Lord of heaven and earth.

Reading

Psalm 1: The Two Ways

Happy are those
 who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
 or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law they meditate day and night.
They are like trees
 planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
 and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Luke 6: 17-26

Jesus Teaches and Heals

He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Blessings and Woes

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

‘Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.

‘Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.

‘Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.

‘Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.

‘But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.

‘Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.

‘Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.

‘Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.

Reflection

Trees grow best when they grow alongside other trees, particularly those with which they have something in common, for example those of the same species that grow in 'community'. Isolated trees have a far shorter lifespan than those in a forest. Trees in 'community' help to nourish each other. Underground, their network of roots is connected. Food and water are shared via this network. Sometimes, when a tree is felled, its stump lives on, nourished by this underground network. What might this say to us as Christians about what it means to grow deep roots?

Plants or shrubs that shoot up in the desert often have a short season to grow, fruit and seed. Their roots have little time to develop so, when the hot dry conditions return, they have no root system to sustain them. They dry up and die. The shrubs described in Jeremiah 17 have limited growth potential as the conditions in which they live do not provide what they need to grow and flourish. This is contrasted to the trees growing by the river whose roots are deep with space and good conditions to grow, similar to the trees mentioned in Psalm 1. The well-developed roots sustain and nourish the tree when storms and drought come. Its green leaves and fruit indicate that it is surviving well. In what or who are we 'rooted'? Are we being nourished and sustained in our growth and development?

The reading from Luke's Gospel almost reiterates the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew's Gospel, but on closer inspection the words chosen by Luke offer a

spiritual perspective beyond the physical. 'The poor' may be those who have not stored up financial riches but shared them, who live with what they need and no more. 'The hungry' may represent those who are still seeking fulfilment and a deepening of their 'Christlikeness' and relationship with God. The people who weep may be showing empathy with those suffering in many situations across the world. They share in the sorrow and suffering of others and, when resolution comes, they will find their joy. People who are persecuted, shunned, or mocked for being a disciple of Jesus, are compared to those who are rooted in modern culture with its attitudes and values.

Hymn Stf 99

1 All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
alleluia, alleluia!
O burning sun with golden beam,
and silver moon with softer gleam:

*O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

2 O rushing wind that is so strong,
and clouds that sail in heaven along,
O praise him, alleluia!
O rising morn, in praise rejoice;
and lights of evening, find a voice:

3 O flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for your Lord to hear,
sing 'Praise him, alleluia!'

O fire, so masterful and bright,
giving to all both warmth and light:

4 Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfolds rich blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that bloom and grow,
let them his glory also show:

5 And all who are of tender heart
forgiving others, take your part,
sing, 'Praise him, alleluia!'
All who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God, and on him cast your care:

6 Let all things their creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness;
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:

St Francis of Assisi (1182–1226)

translated William Henry Draper (1855–1933) (*alt.*)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 99.

A prayer of adoration

Almighty, everlasting God, you give us good ground to
grow in, rich and full of life.

You are our foundation, our rock, our scaffold.

You support us and uphold us.

You soothe our pains, are balm to our suffering, a comfort
in our distress and hope eternal.

You stand with us, walk with us, talk with us, feed us and quench our thirst.

You bless us day by day and we worship and adore you.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Life-giving God,
keep us well rooted in you,
so we can grow and be strong
through all that happens this week.

As you encourage us,
may we encourage others to live and grow well.

Amen.

Sunday 23rd February 2025

Call to Worship

We are called into this place, at this time,
to worship: God who loves us;
Christ who teaches us,
and the Holy Spirit who enables us.
Let's be ready to respond
to the generosity of God.

Bible reading

Luke 6: 27-38: Love for Enemies

‘But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

‘If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Judging Others

‘Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.’

Reflection

Jesus' teaching here has a focus on the actions and responsibilities of the people of God, people who are learning to live by kingdom values. In the bigger picture, is Jesus encouraging us to take our eyes off ourselves and look at the people around us? In shifting our focus, we become more aware of the needs of others and become open to sharing the love God has shown to us with others, both those we like and those with whom we may have a more strained relationship. These are the actions coming out of a spirit of generosity, a generosity that has already been shown to us through Christ's love and is developing in us as we try to live by his values.

As we interact with others, we too can expect to be recipients of generosity. The generosity shown goes beyond what can be earned or bought. It goes beyond what is deserved or not deserved. It is generosity echoing the generosity of God who loves unconditionally.

This is echoed in verse 31 – 'do to others as you would have them do to you' – and is also echoed at the end of the passage when we are encouraged to act as we would like others to act towards us. How grateful are we when we are shown generosity of spirit, when we are treated not as we deserve? This is how God treats us, showing mercy and love. When we treat others with the same mercy and love we are responding with the same generosity as shown by God. We are also beneficiaries of these actions as bitterness, hatred, unforgiveness and retribution can rob us of peace and fellowship with God. Although the passage can be seen to be overstating our expected generosity, it is with the aim of making our relationship with God our life focus, rather than material wealth and status.

Hymn: StF 520

- 1 Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart
and a discerning mind;
give, as I play the Christian's part,
the strength to finish what I start
and act on what I find.

- 2 When, in the rush of days, my will
is habit-bound and slow,
help me to keep in vision still
what love and power and peace can fill
a life that trusts in you.

- 3 By your divine and urgent claim,
and by your human face,
kindle our sinking hearts to flame,
and as you teach the world your name
let it become your place.

- 4 Jesus, with all your Church I long
to see your kingdom come:
show me your way of righting wrong
and turning sorrow into song
until you bring me home.

Thomas Caryl Micklem (1925–2003)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 520.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Praise to the Lord in whom we trust.
Give thanks to the Lord who puts trust into our hands.

Praise the Lord who blesses us with happiness.
Give thanks to the Lord that we can share it with others.

Praise the Lord for being patient with us.
Give thanks to the Lord that we are taught patience
with each other.

For all God's blessings to us,
seen and unseen, known and unknown,
we give thanks and praise.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

A sending out prayer

Help me to be forgiving
when others are unfair or unkind or unfriendly.

Help me to show a generosity of spirit
in the way I respond to others,
for that is how you treat me.

Amen.