

A Month of Sundays
March 2025

joy

Preston Ribble Circuit

Sunday 2nd March 2025

Call to worship

Come, let us worship God who calls us together.
Come, let us hear his voice speaking to us.
Come, let us respond to the one who lights up our life.

Bible reading

Psalm 99

Praise to God for His Holiness

The Lord is king; let the peoples tremble!
He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!
The Lord is great in Zion;
he is exalted over all the peoples.
Let them praise your great and awesome name.
Holy is he!
Mighty King, lover of justice,
you have established equity;
you have executed justice
and righteousness in Jacob.
Extol the Lord our God;
worship at his footstool.
Holy is he!

Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel also was among those who called on his name.
They cried to the Lord, and he answered them.
He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud;
they kept his decrees,
and the statutes that he gave them.

O Lord our God, you answered them;
you were a forgiving God to them,
but an avenger of their wrongdoings.

Extol the Lord our God,
and worship at his holy mountain;
for the Lord our God is holy.

Hymn: Singing the Faith 338

- 1 There is a Redeemer,
 Jesus, God's own Son,
 precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
 Holy One.

*Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us your Son,
and leaving your Spirit
till the work on earth is done.*

- 2 Jesus my Redeemer,
 name above all names,
 precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
 O for sinners slain.
- 3 When I stand in glory
 I will see his face,
 and there I'll serve my King for ever
 in that holy place.

vv. 1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946)

v. 3 Keith Green (1953–1982)

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Reflection

The mountaintop experience of the disciples in our Gospel passage was one they wanted to prolong. The closeness of God, the amazing things they saw, the depth of spiritual awareness were all things they wanted to hold onto. They had been taken up the mountain by Jesus away from the crowds and the distractions of everyday life. Their experience must have filled them with awe and a new awareness of the power and glory of God; they

wanted to stay in that place, in that moment, with that experience. No troubles, no problems, no woes. But Jesus leads them back down the mountain, back to the other disciples, back to the crowds, back to the struggles and mess of everyday life. Their secret mountaintop experience was over, but the effect of it on their lives was not. It was something to carry around and remember when things got tough, an encouragement to trust Jesus even when they didn't know what was happening.

Seeking mountaintop experiences may become a priority in our spiritual lives. We can continually look for such experiences and be disappointed when we are unable to find them. We may feel disappointed that we cannot always experience the closeness of God and the glory of his presence. The problems and distractions of life and the people around us can weigh us down and we long to be back up the mountain, face-to-face with God.

Our deep spiritual experiences are given to strengthen us and prepare us to live our lives as Christ's people. We are affirmed and aware in a deeper way of our relationship with the God who loves us. Our connection with the world in which we live means that we will have doubts and anxiety. Having spent time in God's presence prepares us for this, and encourages us to take opportunities as they are given to meet with him again and again.

A prayer of thanksgiving

Praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Father God, we praise you,

for sending your beloved Son.

Jesus, we praise you,

for granting us freedom and joy in everyday life.

Holy Spirit, we praise you,

for mountaintop experiences,

and for helping us become more Christ-like, day-by-day.

Amen

Say the Lord's Prayer

We pray for young people and schools especially our Methodist schools in the Circuit.

A sending out prayer

Go with us, Lord, and be the light that shines through us.
As we take your light into the world,
help us to reflect your love in all we do.
Amen.

Sunday 9th March 2025

Call to worship

As we gather together, may we feel among us
the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
in our worship, our prayer,
in hearing God's Word
and in the fellowship we shall enjoy.
Amen.

Bible reading: Luke 4:1-13 The Temptation of Jesus

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone." '

Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to

me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.’ Jesus answered him, ‘It is written, “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.” ’

Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, “He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you”, and

“On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.” ’

Jesus answered him, ‘It is said, “Do not put the Lord your God to the test.” ’ When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

Reflection

Jesus didn’t begin his ministry until after he had spent time in the desert. It would have been quite a challenging time for him – deserts don’t take prisoners. Did he need this time alone, without distraction, in order to prepare? The Desert Mothers and Fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries also retreated to the desert, where they could commune with God without distraction. They did not choose an easy life. The Israelites found themselves in the desert too. We see through their constant whining that they didn’t find it an easy life either.

Sometimes we will find ourselves in a desert – perhaps it is a spiritual one, when we question our connection with God, or our faith altogether; perhaps it is a ‘life desert’, when we are weighed down by personal difficulty. Yet here’s the thing about deserts: no matter how big they are, they all have an edge. One day, after what seems like months of hardship and deprivation, little sprouts of green will begin to appear, then grass and scrubby plants,

trees, and finally the place where the desert gives way to a more fertile landscape. And what of the journey? Arab traders knew where all the oases and wadis were, travelling from one to another for sustenance and rest before tackling their arduous journey once more. So where might the oases be in the desert you are travelling through? What are they? Are they so very small that you might not spot them? Or so big you ignore them as you would a mirage?

Hymn Stf 455

- 1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.
- 2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
what with care and toil we fashion,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.
- 3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom passing thought;
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4 Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;

his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.
5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all
ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844–1930) (*alt.*)

based on Joachim Neander (1650–1680)

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Say the Lord's Prayer

We pray for people of faith who are persecuted.

A sending out prayer

Creator God, you tell us that you will make a way in the wilderness.

Help us to see it, however faint it may be to our human eyes.

Guide us through the desert and help us to find the oases,
so we may flourish for you.

Amen.

Sunday 16th March 2025

A call to worship

Come, let us remember the promises of God,
who keeps his promises for ever.

God created and cares for all living creatures,
and keeps his promises for ever.

God sent to us his Son Jesus,
and keeps his promises for ever.

God lives among us through the Holy Spirit,
and keeps his promises for ever.

Reading

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18 God's Covenant with Abram

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, 'Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.' But the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.' He brought him outside and said, 'Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

Then he said to him, 'I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.' But he said, 'O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?' He said to him, 'Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.' He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates...'

Reflection

We are very quick to offer impossible promises. It's what we humans do. This week, there are three environmental days encouraging us to care for our water, trees and forests.

We may be well intentioned but why do we fail to keep important promises? Is it because they are too big for us? Do we forget our limitations sometimes? Nothing is impossible for God, but there are plenty of things that are clearly impossible for us. Or is it because we are making promises that we won't see realised in our lifetimes – a bit like God's promise to Abram? We may never see the effects of following through on those environmental promises – is it this that makes them too hard to keep and too easy to break?

We know that God's promise to Abram, of many descendants and a land where they could settle, was fulfilled, but Abram didn't know, nor did he live to see that fulfilment. It wasn't until Moses' time (well after Abram's lifetime) and 40 years after their release from Egypt that the promise of land came to fruition. That's a long time! We may struggle, both on an international, national and personal level to keep our promises (e.g. to reduce emissions by 68% by 2030 and reach net zero by 2050), but God can keep a promise for what is generally accepted to be 430 years. That, my friends, is nothing short of stunning.

Hymn Stf 495

- 1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
- 2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.
- 3 O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love!
- 4 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.
- 5 Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still small voice of calm!

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 495.

A prayer of praise

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we praise you for this day.
We thank you for the many ways you speak to us:
through your Word, visions, dreams and other people.
Thank you that you see the bigger picture –
you see the whole story from start to finish.
Each day for us is a new page in life's book,
revealing ups and downs,

promises for now and for what is yet to come.
Thank you that unwavering trust in you banishes
all dark shadows and uncertainties.

Help us to walk in faith.

All praise to you Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

We pray for those who struggle with mental health issues.

A sending out prayer

Lord, you have kept your promises to your people throughout the
ages.

Send us out with renewed confidence
that you are faithful to your Word.

Help us to see signs that you are at work in our lives
and the wider world this week.

In Jesus' name.

Amen.

Sunday 23rd March 2025

Call to Worship

Come and seek the Lord wherever you are.

We call upon God, he is always near.

Let go of your unkind ways of thinking and acting.

We call upon God, he always has mercy.

God will cleanse us of all our wrongdoing.

We call upon God, he always gives new life.

Bible reading: Luke 13:1-9 Repent or Perish

At that very time there were some present who told him about the
Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their

sacrifices. He asked them, ‘Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.’

The Parable of the Barren Fig Tree

Then he told this parable: ‘A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. So he said to the gardener, “See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?” He replied, “Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig round it and put manure on it. If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.” ’

Reflection

Some people have a button badge that says, ‘Practising Christian’. One person says that they wear it because they want people to know that they have a faith, but that there is an emphasis on the word ‘practising’! In other words, they are not going to get it right all the time.

It is the same for all Christians. The Church as a whole has a bad rap with those who call themselves ‘spiritual but not religious’. A badly behaved Christian will hit the headlines faster than a badly behaved non-believer. Despite our faith, we can all fail in ways big or small. Think of the gossip or judgemental comments that can go on in our churches – ‘Well, that’s not very Christian of her’; ‘I never thought he’d do that’; ‘I think we should stop them coming to our services’. We would do well to remember that when we point a finger at others, there are three more pointing back at ourselves!

This Gospel passage isn't the only time Jesus warns against judging others. It's good to remind ourselves that we never know the full story behind someone's actions. Think of an iceberg – you only ever see the top 25%; you don't see the 75% that drives it. Human beings are the same. Instead of judging someone's behaviour, perhaps find out why they acted as they did and give them the second chance you would hope for if it were you.

Remember that fig tree in the Gospel reading? The tree gets a second chance too – it's not too late. Notice, too, that the second chance is not in isolation – it is not left up to the tree to find its own way. There is a gardener (God?) prepared to nurture his charge (you?). He wants to help, support, feed, encourage – to put in a little bit of effort in the hope that the tree will respond. But he doesn't expect a fast turnaround. He gives the tree a year. We ought to be equally generous in giving people a second chance and giving them the tools to turn things around. And don't expect them to change overnight – it may take a few years of nurturing, understanding and kindness.

Hymn: StF 818 Venite (Psalm 95)

O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!
For the Lord is a great God,
and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.
O come, let us worship and bow down,
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!
For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture,
and the sheep of his hand.

From *The New Revised Standard Version*

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A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness

A prayer of confession

Father God, you give us the gift of abundant life,
providing for our physical and spiritual needs.

We're sorry for taking your provision for granted.

We're sorry: when we lose sight of your loving mercy
and get wrapped up in our own self-indulgent desires;

for failing to rejoice and sing your praises;

for focusing on the negatives instead of the positives;

for being judgemental and not giving others a second chance.

We repent, Father God:

help us to turn around and to bear good fruit.

Assurance of forgiveness

God has mercy on all who turn to him.

He freely pardons and forgives our sins.

We are free to begin anew.

Amen.

Say the Lord's Prayer

We pray for peace in places of war and violence.

A sending out prayer

Loving God,

thank you for your promise to do something new in each of our
lives.

Help us to give people a second chance, as you do for us,
today, in the week ahead and always.

Amen.

Sunday 30th March 2025

Mothering Sunday

Call to Worship

Here, there are no strangers,
for all are welcome in this house.

Here, there is only acceptance,
for all are welcome in this house.

Here, there are no divisions,
for all are welcome in this house.

So let us worship in unity and love.

Bible reading

2 Corinthians 1:3-7 Paul's Thanksgiving after Affliction

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ. If we are being afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation; if we are being consoled, it is for your consolation, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we are also suffering. Our hope for you is unshaken; for we know that as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our consolation.

Reflection

Food is so important for us: for some, it's just a means of staying alive; for foodies, it offers untold pleasures; for some, it's an addiction; for others, it's a means of torture that makes them feel bad about themselves. A lot of money goes into weight-loss research and products, while food manufacturers continue to add fats, sugars and other delightful flavours to encourage us to eat more of what we really shouldn't. We are told to: eat healthily; to

diet or not diet; to fast or to eat a little of what you fancy. We often socialise around food and drink. We go out for a pint or coffee and cake. Special celebrations are marked by eating out.

In the Bible, we see many instances where food is shared as part of a welcome. When Jesus heals Peter's mother, she gets up to prepare food for Jesus and his followers, perhaps in part as a thank you. When Jairus' daughter is raised from the dead, she shares a meal with her family (particularly significant as a dead person was considered unclean). Here Jesus uses food to draw her back into her community. She is welcomed back and accepted via food.

Is this perhaps the relationship with food that we should be looking for? One that goes beyond our personal relationship with food where we can use food and meals to welcome and celebrate with others? How might we do that in our church community and our lives outside of church?

Hymn: StF 1

- 1 All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice:
him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
come ye before him and rejoice.
- 2 The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make:
we are his folk, he doth us feed;
and for his sheep he doth us take.
- 3 O enter then his gates with praise;
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud, and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.
- 4 For why, the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is for ever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.
- 5 To Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
the God whom heaven and earth adore,

from earth and from the angel host
be praise and glory evermore.

William Kethe (d. 1594)

Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 1.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Generous God, on this Mothering Sunday,
we thank you for mothers, parents and all who care for us.
Love shapes our life.

But none more so than your love, which is beyond any other.
Thank you that you do not leave us wallowing in the mess
we make of life, but wait patiently for us to come to our senses.
Thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, who paid for our sin
with his immeasurable sacrifice.

Thank you for your Holy Spirit, who keeps us on track.
Thank you that when we return to you, we are always sure of
a warm, comforting embrace.

**Father, Son and Holy Spirit, thank you for restoring us.
Amen.**

Say the Lord's Prayer

**We pray for parents, Mothers and those for whom
Mother's Day is hard.**

A sending out prayer

As we go into the coming week, O God,
and strive to walk as people of welcome,
fill us with your grace, mercy and peace.
Bless us, keep us and transform us all,
and help us to share these gifts with all we meet.

Amen.