

Justify

Sunday 09 May 2021

Call to Worship

Psalm 98

O sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm have gotten him victory.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody.

With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it.

Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming to judge the earth.

I serve a risen Saviour

I serve a risen Saviour, He's in the world today.

I know that He is living, whatever men may say.

I see His hand of mercy; I hear His voice of cheer;

And just the time I need Him He's always near.

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!

He walks with me and talks with me a

Along life's narrow way.

He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know He lives?

He lives within my heart.

In all the world around me I see His loving care,
And though my heart grows weary, I never will despair;
I know that He is leading, Through all the stormy blast;
The day of His appearing Will come at last.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, Lift up your voice and sing
Eternal hallelujahs To Jesus Christ the King!
The Hope of all who seek Him, The Help of all who find,
None other is so loving, So good and kind.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

The Rev. Terri C. Pilarski, <https://revgalblogpals.org/2021/04/27/tuesday-prayer-255/>

God of the wilderness

who meets us in unexpected ways

who journeys with us, our guide

our Hope and salvation;

We give thanks for all the blessings of this life.

May we love one another as you love us.

God you illuminate

the path before us, Jesus, beloved

Leads us into your truth

May life with boldness, love!

We offer prayers for the Church universal, and all people.

May we love one another as you love us.

God you grow in and through

all creation, gentle compassion

bringing forth new life from the

Broken places, pruned, made new.

May we be the source of new fruit,

May our lives birth hope, inspired by your Spirit.

May we love one another as you love us.

God of peace and mercy

enfold us in your grace,

Release us from our limitations

Greed, bigotry, injustice

Prune the vines that bind us.

We ask for wisdom and courage, your perfect love to cast out sin.

May love one another as you love us.

God, heal us from despair

through your gaping wounds

Open us, enable us to have the courage to love

Scarred as we are by the trials of life.

We ask for your grace to heal us in mind, body, and spirit.

May we abide in you as you abide in us.

Amen.

Reflection

Loving God includes loving people.
You've got to love both. 1 John 4:21



How does this image make you feel?
What personal experiences come to mind?
What is God saying to you?
What will you do about it?

Notices

The Peace

Find one person you don't know well. Share the peace. Then share one good thing you have experienced this week and one bad thing.

Open the eyes of my heart

Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
Open the eyes of my heart
I want to see You
I want to see You

To see You high and lifted up
Shining in the light of Your glory
Pour out Your power and love
As we sing holy, holy, holy

Holy, holy, holy
We cry holy, holy, holy
You are holy, holy, holy
I want to see you

Jesus, we enthrone you

Jesus, we enthrone You
We proclaim You are king
Standing here, in the midst of us
We raise You up with our praise

And as we worship build Your throne
And as we worship build Your throne
And as we worship build Your throne
Come Lord Jesus and take Your place

Reading Luke 10:25-37

The Parable of the Good Samaritan

²⁵ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ²⁶ He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" ²⁷ He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." ²⁸ And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

²⁹ But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" ³⁰ Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" ³⁷ He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Message Justify

Lord, would you guide us into your truth through these halting words of mine and in the power of the Holy Spirit. May our hearts be fertile soil for the seeds of the Spirit to take root and bear good fruit. Amen.

Yes, but. Have you ever found yourself saying, 'Yes, but'? It's nearly always a precursor to something along the lines of, 'I'm right and you're wrong.' Yes,

but you haven't thought of this. Yes, but my solution is better than yours. Yes, but it can't possibly work that way. The other thing we can reliably get from the words, yes, but, is that in most cases you haven't heard what I actually said. Certainly you likely heard the *words* I said, but you haven't heard what I was attempting to convey. What is really happening is that you are attempting to justify your position rather than receive mine.

This is exactly what we see in the response the lawyer had for Jesus. The lawyer wasn't interested in what Jesus had to say, he was simply interested in finding fault with it in any way he could. Let's pause with that a little and have a look at the context for this story. You could imagine that Jesus is in something like a lecture theatre. He is standing at the front following a lecture and the floor is open to questions. It is a hostile audience and they are looking to trip him up over what he has been saying. That means that every question is designed with a hook in it.

Then a lawyer stands up to test Jesus. Immediately we are on the lookout for what is about to happen. This is not some innocent question from a curious bystander, it comes with the knowledge that the intent in the question is devious. And that means that we need to examine the question to see why it might be a problem.

"Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

On the surface a perfectly reasonable question. But we know that a good lawyer will always know the answer to the question before they ask it. For the Jews the answer was that you needed to follow the Torah with all its rules about behaviour. The Torah itself wasn't the problem. The problem was a labyrinth that had been created over centuries to ensure people didn't break the rules of the Torah. The tiniest details were mapped out over what you could and couldn't do. It still happens today. An example. Lighting a fire is considered work and since you are not allowed to work on the Sabbath, you can't light a fire on the Sabbath. Today that extends to turning lights on or off. Why? Because the act of switching has the potential to create an electrical spark that is defined as fire. So to avoid the possibility you don't turn on lights on the Sabbath. Leaving aside the arguments over the sensibility of this, it is an example of how easily you could be caught out by missing small details. It is likely that this is what the lawyer was angling for. Catch Jesus in a small detail and he could go to town on him.

Unfortunately for the lawyer, Jesus takes an entirely different route. Instead of dealing with the mass of rules and expectations laid down over centuries Jesus replies with a question. “What do you think?” In an instant the interrogation moves 180 degrees. It is no longer the lawyer attempting to catch Jesus out, it is Jesus examining the heart of the lawyer.

The lawyer, not wanting to be caught out by his own trick answers, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.”

Immediately we see that the lawyer had come with his own answer prepared as a part of the trap. He knows that there is no way anyone could possibly fulfil all the details built up over centuries and that there was really only one reasonable response. Then Jesus springs a trap of his own. He knows that the lawyer has this answer down pat. He also knows that having an answer and following through on the implications of that answer are two different things. He can see that the lawyer is not actually interested in him or anyone else inheriting eternal life. It’s entirely possible, given the various religious stances of the Jewish parties, that he doesn’t even believe there is such a thing as eternal life. No, the lawyer is only interested in catching Jesus out on something he says. Which means he is completely unprepared for Jesus’ next words, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.”

It really is rather funny if you care to ponder it for a moment. The lawyer, standing there having expected to put Jesus on the spot finds him put on a rather uncomfortable spot himself. This wasn’t supposed to be about him. But now everybody is watching him and waiting for his next response. How can he answer without digging an even deeper hole than he already finds himself in?

So, we come to the famous line, ‘But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”’ By now the audience must be on the edge of their seats. Jesus vs. the Lawyer. First the question. Good question, plenty of potential for upset, score: 1-0. Then the reply question. Ah, getting interesting, nice return, score 1-1. The answer. Good answer, right down the party line, score: 2-1. Massive reply, going to be hard to return this one: score 2-2. Weak response, look like he’s rolled over here: score 2-3. Game still on, but not looking good for the lawyer. Good story in response, leaves the lawyer with little to work on: score 2-4. Now the lawyer concedes the next point, the story has backed him into a corner: score 2-5. And Jesus doesn’t leave it there – ‘Go and do likewise.’ Home run, that’s a six, slam dunk: score ‘you’re outta here!’

The problem the lawyer faced is that he brought legal arguments to a faith table which is a little like bringing a knife to a gunfight, or a cake-mixer to a flower competition. Entering the kingdom of heaven isn't about whether you follow a list of rules and regulations. It is about faith. We are told in Romans 4 that Abraham trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own. Hebrews 11 reminds us that without faith it is impossible to please God. In Galatians 2 we read that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ.

The truth the lawyer had lost sight of was he had no way of justifying himself before God if all he brought were rules and regulations. He knew full well that it was impossible to follow all the rules. It's why he asked the question in the first place. His mistake came in missing the fact that not only could Jesus not follow all the rules and regulations, neither could he. And worse, even if he could follow them all, without faith it meant nothing.

I want to leave us on this note. James reminds us that faith without works is dead. When Jesus tells the lawyer to show mercy, he is asking the lawyer to begin from the rule of faith and to measure all his actions by that rule of faith. It doesn't mean he will get everything right in the process. We know Abraham certainly failed in that respect. Yet, through acting in faith, even making mistakes in faith, God responded with love, grace and mercy and justified him through that faith. Just as God does for each of us.

We Pray

God of our faith who sees our hearts and knows that we deserve nothing, yet gives us life. We confess that we often attempt to justify ourselves, to ourselves, to others, to you. We try to attach blame to others, point out failings in others, all to deflect from our own blame and failings. Gift us, we pray, with faith that works itself out in love and mercy toward ourselves and others. Let us learn from the lawyer that it is not about who our neighbour is, but rather how we treat that neighbour. That it is not about them, but about us. That we are measured not by the actions of someone else, but by our own actions. Help us to show mercy to our neighbours, and to ourselves.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Brother, Sister let me serve you

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christlight for you
in the nighttime of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Offering

God of unimaginable love, we have known of your caring since we were babies in our mother's arms. We have been told the stories of your love, and we have sung songs about your love. These things bring us comfort. What challenges us is the command of Jesus, "As I have loved you, so you should love one another" – not just those who think as we do, pray as we do, and look the way that we do. Help us, through our giving, our living and our loving, to live up to the challenge of loving as you would have us love. In the name of our risen Saviour, we pray. Amen.

Prayer for Ourselves and Others

Argentina, economic failure as the economic effects of the pandemic devastate the lives of the poor and even the middle class.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

Great power tensions – China, US, Russia. An unnecessary and untenable longing to be greater than, better than that leads to economic barriers, clandestine war. All of which is to the gain of the powerful and comes at great cost to the poor.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

People in New Zealand who have no or unsuitable housing.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

Weston Church

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

Our own. Particularly those suffering loss, those unwell, those separated from loved ones. Our pets.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

We bring all these prayers and our private prayers in the wonderful name of our Lord Jesus who taught us how to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in Heaven, holy be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever.

Amen

Will you come and follow me

Will you come and follow me

If I but call your name?

Will you go where you don't know

And never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown,

Will you let my name be known,

Will you let my life be grown

In you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
In you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go
Where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
In you and you in me.

[Benediction and Grace](#)

May the Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Love of God,
and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.