Float Like a Butterfly

Sunday 10 October 2021

## Call to Worship

Psalm 22

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;

my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

**The poor shall eat and be satisfied;**

**those who seek him shall praise the Lord.**

**May your hearts live forever!**

All the ends of the earth shall remember

and turn to the Lord;

and all the families of the nations

shall worship before him.

**For dominion belongs to the Lord,**

**and he rules over the nations.**

## Because He Lives

God sent His son, they called Him Jesus

He came to love, heal and forgive

He lived and died to buy my pardon

An empty grave is there to prove my Saviour lives

Because He lives, I can face tomorrow

Because He lives, all fear is gone

Because I know He holds the future

And life is worth the living, just because He lives

How sweet to hold a newborn baby

And feel the pride and joy He gives

But greater still the calm assurance

This child can face uncertain day, because He lives

And then one day, I'll cross the river

I'll fight life's final war with pain

And then, as death gives way to victory

I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He reigns

## Prayer of Adoration and Confession

*Based on a prayer by Kate Compston*

When nothing is right,

when we are weary and lost,

when clouds dull the sky,

**help us to be still.**

When our cries are unheeded,

when no effort bears fruit,

when the sun sets,

**help us to be still.**

When love is over,

when hope is gone,

when darkness covers the land,

**help us to be still.**

For in being still,

in refusing to panic or despair,

we shall come to know that God is there,

suffering alongside and with us,

waiting to show us stepping-stones through the swirling waters,

**and to help us sing a new song.**

When stillness is too much to bear

And we push into being and doing

Ignoring the gentle beckoning of God

Help us to hear and receive forgiveness

From ourselves, and through Christ.

Amen.

## Reflection

Here are some words used to describe God. Take a moment to sit with each one and think about how God might look to you with each word.

Present, Faithful, Gentle, Patient, Strong, Kind, Eternal

## Notices

## The Peace

From a distance. Think of a gesture you might make to extend the peace to people around you.

## Celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

Celebrate, Jesus celebrate

He is risen, He is risen

And He lives forevermore

He is risen, He is risen

Come on and celebrate

The resurrection of our Lord

Reading Mark 9:33-37

33Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” 34But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. 35He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.” 36Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, 37“Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.”

## Message Float Like a Butterfly

As we dwell in your Word this morning we ask, God, that you would grant us eyes to see and ears to hear what your Spirit is saying to us today. Gift us too the courage to change to become more like Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Amen

Do you remember the times, usually at school, when it came time to pick teams? The team leaders would be chosen and they would then pick who they wanted on their teams. There would be those who were always chosen first – for their speed or their strength or their skill, or because they were mates with the team leader. Then there were the rest of us, silently begging to not be picked last and undergo the ignominy of inclusion through necessity. On the odd occasion when I got to be team leader I don’t think I was any better than anyone else – searching out those players who would most likely lead to a win. In the end it came down to survival of the fittest, and those who weren’t up to it either gave up their dignity by showing up, or never bothered to try, derided by everyone else as the losers or the nerds or whatever derogatory name came most easily to the lips that day.

For the most part I tended to end up in a strange, in-between place, neither one of the chosen, nor one of the ignored. I could hold my own with the cool crowd and I could happily hang out with the trainspotters.

If anyone asked, I wanted to be the greatest, the coolest, the fastest, the best. I never really had a hero, but people like Muhammed Ali with their, ‘I am the greatest,’ seemed pretty cool. I secretly dreamed of world domination and not so secretly could treat others, especially my siblings, as if I was already ruler of nations. For the most part I just dreamed and imagined.

The funny thing is, it doesn’t matter whether you are part of the cool crowd or the trainspotters, there is always a jostling going on to determine who is the best. It does seem to reduce in intensity as we get older, but I do wonder if it ever goes away. I’ve heard people in their 90s boast of past successes.

So when we see that the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest it comes as no surprise at all. Even as mature apostles it wasn’t unknown for them to argue over who had the most authority. They were, after all, human beings and it seems to be in our nature to measure ourselves against each other. It does kind of feel like that school ground measuring and picking for teams. OK, so Peter and John, you’re the captains, who are you going to pick for your teams? You can imagine the arguments over who is the best and at what. Is it the best fisherman, the best preacher, the best healer, the best scrounger, the best fund raiser? It’s hardly any wonder that Jesus calls them over to talk it through.

When he does pin them down, they fall silent. I do find it rather funny that they didn’t want to admit to the topic of their conversation. A bit like a teenager not wanting to talk to their parents about their latest crush. Even if Jesus didn’t know exactly what they were talking about the silence would have been a loud and clear message that they were embarrassed, and he likely could have worked out the rest from there.

So he sat them down with him and made what must have seemed to be a rather strange and even crazy statement “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.”

 I can see the disciples staring at each other across the room wondering what on earth Jesus is talking about. If you want to be first, you must be last? What does that even mean? And a servant of all? What about the poor people? What about the Romans? What about those nasty Pharisees? He can’t be serious! Can he?

Even today that statement sounds ridiculous. Everybody knows that if you want to get to the top of your field there will almost certainly be bodies left behind. You have to be ruthless. Anyone not prepared to do what it takes will never make the upper grades of anything, whether it is sport or business or the professions. Even flower growers seem to have a bit of ruthless in them when they are competing. All of which points to Jesus coming to the subject from a very different perspective. It is a perspective that reimagines what first and last means and brings a very different set of priorities to how we might think and act.

Let’s think about first and last. First is that which comes before anything else. If I come first in a race, then everyone else is behind me. If I am first in the class, I received better marks than anyone else. First place distinguishes me as stronger, faster, smarter than everyone else. And last, well everyone else is clearly ahead of me. At least I get to see their mistakes before it’s my turn to make them. If I am always last, then I must be a loser. And the first-place person must be a winner. But loser and winner of what, exactly? Of other people’s adulation perhaps. Of a certain place in society. Of money or fame or recognition.

Which leads us to a little history. Well, it’s not so much history as it is the story from which we understand God’s purpose with the world. Genesis 1:1 begins with the words, ‘In the beginning, God…’ Ultimately, God comes first. God is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.[[1]](#footnote-1) To put it one way, the best I can ever do is second place, no matter how hard I try, because God is there before me, always and constantly. And perhaps as consolation, I can never be last either, because God is there behind me as well.

God, this first and last God, created. God created human beings in the image of God. Most of us are familiar with how Adam and Eve ended up separated from God, the image tarnished yet still there. The creation was broken and began to decay[[2]](#footnote-2), yet somehow, we human beings retained the vestiges of the image of God within us. That image that remains is one of eternal connectedness. Of support and validation. There is no coming first or last with God as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit whirl in a dance of mutual support, working together to serve each other in love.

I think perhaps this is where our understanding of the first being last breaks down. We fail to see that in God’s economy first and last don’t exist. Rather it is an unbroken circle where each person supports each other to the best of their ability. It’s not capitalism where each person stands alone. It’s not communism where every person is forced into a predetermined role. It is unique in each of us living in community, with all our strengths and weaknesses, searching for ways to create, with God, something better. It does not require that we all aspire to be the greatest preacher or the greatest singer. It encourages us to become the best we can be. The best person we can be. Seeking to support those around us to become the best they can be.

Which is where the little child comes in. Who here has ever taken a 2-year-old on their knee and expected them to have a solution for the problems of the world, then berated them when they don’t have a workable answer? Of course we don’t do that. We look for every way we can find to support and encourage them. We teach them, we laugh with them, we play with them, we feed them and clothe them. And we rejoice as we see them grow and develop. Often we are disappointed when they make poor choices that we have to clean up after. We stay up late waiting for them, we argue with them, and we love them.

I don’t know about you, but a lightbulb went on when I saw where this was going. There is a sense that in God’s economy we are all 2-year-olds, no matter how long we have spent on this earth. We desperately need everyone around us to care for us, to love us, just like we love the 2-year-old. Not sitting around judging and saying, ‘I wouldn’t had done that when I was 2!’ Gathering around, getting in there and being a part of the development and growth. Celebrating the successes, sorrowing in the failures, occasionally disciplining where needed and in everything there is LOVE.

The disciples had grown up in an economy of first and last. They knew that in their world they had to fight for everything they had. Being first simply meant there was no-one above you to fight – you only had to concentrate on those behind you. Jesus, in just a few words showed them that God’s economy is a different beast altogether. Where first and last have meaning only in the fact that if you have come first your task is to bring others alongside you. Because in love there is no other option.

There is lots more we could say about how the enlightenment placed so much emphasis on individual responsibility and how social media has ripped apart genuine community. We could lay blame at so many feet. In the end we must look to ourselves and the community in which we live and learn to love as Jesus loves. Then we will find that first no longer matters and last no longer exists as we treat each other as those 2-year-olds to love and support and see grow into the image of God as we are designed.

How does the image of the 2-year-old speak to you?

Has your understanding of first and last changed at all? How?

What are you going to do about it this week?

## We Pray

God of little people seeking to understand the world, pushing against constraints, learning to communicate, every new experience challenging and life-changing. We come to you as little people ourselves. Yes, we have plenty of experience, and yet much of our experience does little to prepare us for the new kingdom you have in mind. Help us to learn what it means to love and to be loved, not because we have earnt it or deserve it, but because we are. Teach us to live in your love economy where first and last lose their earthly meaning and come to signify that dance of mutual support and encouragement. Gift us eyes to see how we might serve you and each other in love. Amen.

## I Danced in the Morning

I danced in the morning when the world was begun,

And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,

And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:

At Bethlehem I had my birth.

Dance, then, wherever you may be,

I am the Lord of the dance, said he,

And I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,

And I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.

I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,

But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;

I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;

They came with me and the dance went on:

I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:

The holy people said it was a shame.

They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,

And they left me there on a cross to die:

I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;

It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.

They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;

But I am the dance, and I still go on:

They cut me down and I leapt up high;

I am the life that'll never, never die.

I'll live in you if you'll live in me:

I am the Lord of the dance, said he.

## Offering

God of the cosmos and God of every heartbeat: Your work touches every corner of creation; yet, when times are hard, we wonder if you’ve deserted us, and we become tight-fisted and fearful that sharing with others will leave us empty handed. As we bring these gifts to your altar, give us the eyes to see and the hearts to know that you never desert us and never send us away in need. In the name of your Son who came to remind us of your closeness and to give his life so that ours might be eternal. Amen.

## Prayer for Ourselves and Others

For the many who struggle to make sense of the world in which they live. When fear, hunger, poverty, disappointment, anger and all the other broken aspects of how humanity conducts its affairs take over and destroy lives. Would you break in upon these things and bring hope to the hopeless?

Make your ways known upon earth, O God,

**your saving power among all peoples.**

For the church, so often wedded to doing things as they have always been done even in the face of steep decline. Teach us to see the world as you see it, not simply as we have been taught and to live as beacons of hope.

Renew your Church in holiness,

**and help us to serve you with joy.**

For the leaders of nations, of municipalities, of cross national bodies, grant new vision and courage to serve the people they represent, not to their own ends or even party agendas, but for the best for every individual and community.

Guide the leaders of this and every nation,

**that justice may prevail throughout the world.**

For those who are forced to live day to day, who do not have well stocked cupboards and who live in fear of an emergency that will take food from themselves and their children.

Let not the needy, O God, be forgotten,

**nor the hope of the poor be taken away.**

For ourselves as we seek to love and support and grow ourselves, our families and our communities into the image of God.

Make us instruments of your peace,

**and let your glory be over all the earth.**

## 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

## Shout to the Lord

*Darlene Zschech*

My Jesus, my Saviour,

Lord, there is none like You;

All of my days, I want to praise

The wonders of Your mighty love.

My comfort, my shelter,

Tower of refuge and strength;

Let every breath, all that I am

Never cease to worship You.

Shout to the Lord, all the earth, let us sing

Power and majesty, praise to the King

Mountains bow down and the seas will roar

At the sound of Your name.

I sing for joy at the work of Your hands,

Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand,

Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.

## 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.

1. Revelation 21:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Romans 8:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)