

**Worship for 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (World Day of Social Justice)**  
**(complete text. A video version is also online)**

**Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

Hello and welcome to worship with the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit, my name is Michael. I am pleased to be joined today by our preacher, Mr Stafford Mortimer who will be sharing thoughts with us about life after death as well as celebrating life before death in this world.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

To prepare us for worship, I welcome now Ann Whale who will lead us in our call to worship which is taken from Psalm 37

Trust in the Lord, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for him.

We sing our first hymn, which is number 520 in Singing the Faith – Give to me Lord, a thankful heart

Hymn: StF 520 – Give to me Lord, a thankful heart

- 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)

Opening Prayers

Let us pray

Heavenly Father, you call us to live in this land, trusting in you and doing good, we come to you now in prayer asking that you will take delight in us as we take delight in you.

With just a few weeks still left to go of Winter, we sense the promise of Spring in the air, we see signs of new life in our gardens and in the milder weather and we say thank you for your creation.

Comfort us Lord God in the struggles and the concerns of life,  
be with us in all things, showing us your will,  
help us Lord God, to seek good news, work towards life in all its fullness, not just for ourselves but for all people and all creation.

On this World Day of Social Justice, may we remember those for whom life is not easy, for refugees, for victims of abuse, for single parents,

the lonely and unloved. For those who fear truly living as their true selves.

Lord God, forgive us for the parts we have played in their oppression, for our ignorance, for our neglect, for our selfishness and our failure to speak up, to be as Christ to them.

Lord God awaken us today to our responsibilities to be good neighbours, and as we turn to you we hear your words of comfort – our sins are forgiven.

**Amen**

Before we move into the set scriptures for today and Stafford's reflections, I invite you to meditate over a song that picks up on the theme of world social justice and the Church's part in helping people to live fully before they die. For those using the Singing the Faith Hymn book, this is number 415

Hymn: StF 415 – The Church of Christ in Every Age

- 1. The Church of Christ, in every age beset by change but Spirit-led, must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.**
- 2. Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry for shelter and for bread to eat, and never live until they die.**
- 3. Then let the servant Church arise, a caring Church that longs to be a partner in Christ's sacrifice, and clothed in Christ's humanity.**
- 4. For he alone, whose blood was shed, can cure the fever in our blood, and teach us how to share our bread and feed the starving multitude.**

**5. We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord: to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating Word.**

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Luke 6:27-38 (NRSVA)

*Love for Enemies*

<sup>27</sup> 'But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup> bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup> Do to others as you would have them do to you.

<sup>32</sup> 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup> If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

*Judging Others*

<sup>37</sup> 'Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; <sup>38</sup> 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.'

1 Corinthians 15:35-38, 42-50 (NRSVA)

### *The Resurrection Body*

<sup>35</sup> But someone will ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?'

<sup>36</sup> Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

<sup>42</sup> So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. <sup>43</sup> It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. <sup>44</sup> It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> But it is not the spiritual that is first, but the physical, and then the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven.

<sup>50</sup> What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Sermon

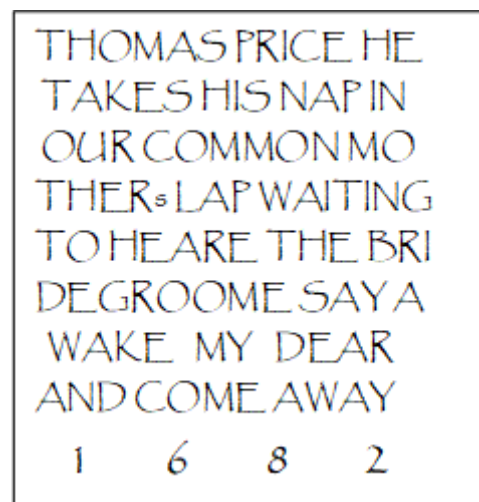
Life: after death, before death

Come with me for a moment to the Welsh border, one Eastertime. My wife and I had left our little hotel and were walking between

picture-book fields of lambs and daffodils. Catherine spotted a small brown church on a hillside and we found the lane that took us there.

We discovered that the medieval St Martin's, Cwmyoy, is believed to be unique. Every wall inside and out and even the squat tower lean at different crazy angles. The ground has suffered many landslips, though now the church is safely clasped between buttresses like fat fingers.

Among the historic memorial tablets inside is this quaint one:



It tells of a villager waiting in his grave for Christ to take him up into heaven. With references to Mother Earth and, from the New Testament, the Second Coming likened to a master returning suddenly from his wedding feast, it reads like this: "Thomas Price, he takes his nap in our common Mother's lap, waiting to hear the Bridegroome say: 'Awake, my dear, and come away.' "

I love those homely expressions "nap" and "my dear". They soften a theme that could overwhelm us in its solemnity: death, resurrection and eternal life. That theme is put squarely before us by one of the lectionary Bible readings for this Sunday.

The apostle Paul had written a letter to the Christian congregation in the Greek city of Corinth. The extract begins with the question: “How are the dead raised?” Drawing illustrations from the natural world, the apostle argues that we will have a radically different kind of body in the next life from the one we have now.

How are the dead raised? The Corinth question was a tough one then and it’s even tougher now. Scientific discovery over several centuries has given us a new understanding of the natural world, of which we are a part. There is no scientific evidence of human existence beyond the grave.

For many people that makes it harder to believe in an afterlife. Perhaps you are among them. What do Christianity and the Bible say that could help us? Two things: 1, life after death has always been something that we have to take on trust; 2, life *before* death must be our chief concern.

There are many places where the New Testament sets forth an expectation of eternal life. The First Letter of Peter, for example, says that God “has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you”.

But even there it speaks of “a living hope”. True, that does mean more than merely crossing our fingers – a living hope is one that you live by, something that you dare to bet your life on. But it is still hope. “We walk by faith, not by sight” agrees Paul in Second Corinthians.

That hope, that faith, rests ultimately on Jesus. “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (John 14.2)

If we trust him for everything else, why not for this?

The important thing is to concentrate on being Christians now and to leave that unknown future in God’s hands. “Dear friends,” says the First Letter of John, “now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.”

That brings us back to the points we started with: 1, life after death has always been something that we have to take on trust; 2, life *before* death must be our chief concern.

Because death is the one thing that we can believe in. Yet we’re good at ignoring it. Most of the time we treat this life as an endless motorway disappearing over the horizon and not, realistically, as a no through road.

If that sounds gloomy, it isn’t. The fact of death is a reason to celebrate and use this marvellous world while we can. People who have had a close brush with death, such as recovering from a serious illness or escaping a severe accident, tell us: “Now I savour every day, now I value every little thing.” Shouldn’t that be true for all of us?

I’m struck by the fact that the Jews of the Old Testament had little or no belief in an afterlife and yet were the most deeply religious people you could imagine. It was enough for them that you could know God intimately in *this* world and that you must serve him or deny him in the here and now.

“The days of our years are threescore years and ten,” says the psalm, “and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away . . . So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.”

Christian wisdom means walking cheerfully through the world, enjoying God's creation and seizing the opportunities that come our way. It means living by the spiritual values that God reveals to us in Christ. In the New Testament, "eternal life" is not confined to what happens after death. It is a *quality* of life that starts now, in this world, strong enough to stretch beyond the grave. "And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." (John 17.3)

Which is why the lectionary's gospel reading for this Sunday is relevant. Christ sets out such commands as loving our enemies and giving to those who beg from us. It is by walking the Jesus way that we have eternal life here and now.

To borrow the motto of Christian Aid, the relief agency: "We believe in life *before* death". Today we are especially reminded of the urgent need to bring new life to all sorts of people. February 20 is the World Day of Social Justice, in which bodies like the United Nations focus our attention on such issues as poverty, unemployment and human rights. Michael is leading us in prayer on such needs.

Life before death! As for life *after* death, there is a sentence in the Nicene creed that is right for all of us. Whatever stage of doubt or assurance you have reached, make this your creed and leave the rest to God:

"I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come".

+ + +

The lengthy Nicene creed is not often used today. It is very much a product of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and its traditional English wording needs clarification – for example, "catholic" meaning universal. But it is still a ringing affirmation of

faith, so together let us say or read some of its key phrases now:

**I BELIEVE in one God, the Father Almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten  
Son of God,  
who was made man and was crucified also for  
us under Pontius Pilate.  
And the third day he rose again according to the  
Scriptures and ascended into heaven.  
And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and  
giver of life.  
I believe one catholic and apostolic Church  
and I acknowledge one baptism for the  
remission of sins.  
And I look for the resurrection of the dead,  
and the life of the world to come.  
Amen.**

In the same spirit, let us share hymn 466: "Have faith in God my heart".

Hymn: StF 466 – Have Faith in God, My Heart

- 1. Have faith in God, my heart,  
trust and be unafraid;  
God will fulfil in every part  
each promise he has made.**
- 2. Have faith in God, my mind,  
for when your light burns low;  
God's mercy holds a wiser plan  
than you can fully know.**
- 3. Have faith in God, my soul;  
his cross for ever stands;  
and neither life nor death can pluck  
his children from his hands.**
- 4. Lord Jesus, make me whole;  
grant me no resting place,  
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,  
the captive of your grace.**

Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

## THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

Thank you, Stafford for those words of hope and encouragement, we hold on to them and ponder over them as we come once more before God in prayer.

Let us pray.

God of all creation, of Heaven and earth, giver of life, sustainer of our souls we come before you now reflecting on what we have heard, reflecting on what we have experienced.

Some come to this point with hearts full of grieving,  
some with sorrow,  
some with regrets,  
others come uplifted and enthusiastic to start afresh,  
challenged to go into the world determined to live as you would want them to.  
However we come to you right now, greet us parent God, greet us with arms wide open, sharing your loving mercy with us.

All who are hungry,  
All who are thirsty,  
All who are weak,  
All who are suffering  
Come to the table of God  
– come as you are before your maker,  
you are loved,  
you are precious,  
choose life, choose life in all its fullness,  
God is inviting you to a new start, and new hope,  
a new covenant, to live lives full of joy, lives focused on him – the creator of all good things.

And Lord as you bless us,  
bless also those around us,  
those known to us,  
those in our communities

and those so far removed from our lives we may never meet them,  
those who need you so much at this time.  
May we not take our privilege for granted, but continue to work for social justice,  
to continue to campaign,  
to come alongside the marginalised  
and to be as Christ to those who do not have a voice in our society.

Grant us peace, O Lord,  
a peace that transcends all understanding,  
a peace in knowing that our lives are in your hands,  
that you promise new life with you in Heaven  
and that one day we will come to that place where we can be with you for all eternity – keep us in mercy and love.

We pray for those who have gone before us  
and give thanks for their legacy,  
we pray for those left behind,  
that they may find comfort in knowing that their loved one is with you and that you are everlasting.

Be with us in our sorrows and joys,  
in the thrill of life and the despair of life,  
hold us in your arms of love,  
walk beside us and never let us go.

**Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**Our Father in Heaven,  
Hallowed be your name,  
Your kingdom come,  
Your will be done,  
On earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive 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**

The Offering & prayer

As ever, it has been a joy to share worship with you, I pray that you were blessed by today's worship, if you were joining us for the first time today, thank you for joining us, we meet here on YouTube every Sunday, please feel free to subscribe to the channel and explore other worship services we have on offer.

As is our custom, we will just pause at this point to offer to God our gifts, of time, money and skills.

Almighty God, giver of all we have, accept back we pray, our gifts to you; may they be used in your service as life-giving contributions to your kingdom here in Warwickshire and beyond.

**Amen**

THE DISMISSAL

In preparation for today's service I came across a wonderful new song by Stuart Townsend called "Streets of the City," and in a moment we will use that song as our closing song, but first I will use the words of the first verse as our blessing:

Prayer & blessing

Lord, we stand in the shallows of all you have given,  
Grateful for mercy yet hungry for more,  
For the power of grace to go out from this place  
To the ends of the earth.  
We have praised you with passion and worshipped in wonder,  
Thrilled by Your Spirit and fed by Your word.  
Now to fully delight in the riches of Christ

We must go to the world.

**Amen**

God bless you all, have a wonderful day,  
Go in peace – to love and serve our God

**Amen**

Hymn: Streets of the City

**Lord, we stand in the shallows of all you have given,  
Grateful for mercy yet hungry for more,  
For the power of grace to go out from this place  
To the ends of the earth.  
We have praised you with passion and worshipped in wonder,  
Thrilled by Your Spirit and fed by Your word.  
Now to fully delight in the riches of Christ  
We must go to the world.**

*For you live in the streets of the city,  
You stand with the weak and the needy,  
You walk with homeless and hungry and poor.  
And your hands are the hands I am lifting,  
Your voice is the life I am living;  
Your love longs to meet them, but how will they know,  
Unless I am willing to go?*

**Lord, where are you hungry and where are you thirsty,  
Naked, imprisoned, with no one to care?  
To give of our best to the poor and oppressed  
Is to give back to You.  
So cause us to see with the eyes of the Saviour,  
Give us a heart that will love as you love;  
Courageous compassion in words and in action  
Brings hope to the world.**

*For you live in the streets of the city,  
You stand with the weak and the needy,  
You walk with homeless and hungry and poor.  
And your hands are the hands I am lifting,  
Your voice is the life I am living;*

*Your love longs to meet them, but how will they  
know,  
Unless I am willing to go?*

**That you live in the streets of the city,  
You stand with the weak and the needy  
You walk with homeless and hungry and poor.  
And your hands are the hands I am lifting,  
Your voice is the life I am living,  
Without us there's no other way they will know,  
So send me, I'm ready to go.**

Stuart Townend



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Hymn: StF 415 – The Church of Christ in Every Age

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

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Streets of the City

Stuart Townend

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Thomas Caryl Micklem (1925–2003)

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StF 466 – Have Faith in God, My Heart

Bryn Rees (1911–1983)

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