

Worship for the Fifth Sunday in Lent (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

God of grace and growth,
in this season of Lent and with spring
blossoming all around us,
we bring to you in word, music and prayer,
our desire to change for the better –
trusting in your patience,
rooting ourselves in your Scriptures,
believing in your love,
appreciating the limitations of time,
and celebrating the gift of life
and all that there is to look forward to.
In Jesus' name.

Amen

WELCOME

Welcome to worship with the South
Warwickshire Circuit this morning.

**HYMN Stf 499 Great God your love has called us
here**

- 1 Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed;
we come, with all our heart and mind,
your call to hear, your love to find.**
- 2 We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined,
yet seeking hope for humankind.**

- 3 Great God, in Christ you call our name,
and then receive us as your own,
not through some merit, right or claim,
but by your gracious love alone;
we strain to glimpse your mercy-seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.**
- 4 Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends;
suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.**
- 5 Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share;
give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do,
while love is making all things new.**

~(Lord God, your love has called us here)

Brian Wren (*b.* 1936)

Prayer of adoration

God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
You nurture and nourish the soil of our lives,
You watch over us patiently and expectantly,
You fill us with the nutrients we need in order to
grow.
And you rejoice when we too,
Nurture, protect and watch over others in your
name.
Amen.

A prayer of confession and an Assurance of Forgiveness

Lord God,

Forgive us when we are slow to change, but quick to judge;

when we take more from life than we give back;

when we give up on others too soon and offer support too late;

when we deny others the opportunity to grow, and uproot their dreams.

Forgive us and grant us your patience, perseverance and vision, and inspire us to care for all you have made. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen

Loving God, in whom all things are possible, For giving us time enough to change and grow:

For giving us the desire to change and grow: For giving us the opportunity to change and grow:

And for forgiving us when we rush, judge and deny others those same opportunities: **we thank you with all our mind, soul and strength.**

Amen.

Lord's Prayer (traditional version)

Our Father who art in heaven

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come,

thy will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen

We give our thanks to all who have contributed to our worship this morning – to Ann Howe for the sermon, to members from Tysoe and Warwick who have provided our readings and to all those whose technical expertise put this service together.

We join in a hymn of praise and adoration

HYMN StF 88 – Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of Creation

1 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!

O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!

All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near, praise him in glad adoration.

2 Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;

surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:

ponder anew what the Almighty can do, who with his love doth befriend thee.

3 Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,

fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,

then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,

spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

4 Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,

who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,

sheddeh his light, chaseth the horrors of night,

.

5 Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!

All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!

**Let the amen sound from his people again:
gladly for aye we adore him.**

Joachim Neander (1650–1680)
translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878) and Rupert E.
Davies (1909–1994) .

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 1 (NIVUK)

¹ Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
² but whose delight is in the law of the Lord,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of
water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither –
whatever they do prospers.
⁴ Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the
judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶ For the Lord watches over the way of the
righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

Encouraging verses (NIVUK)

Psalm 23:4

⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

Psalm 46

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth
give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the
sea,

Isaiah 40:11

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd:
he gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

Isaiah 40:1-2a

¹ Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,

Isaiah 43:1b - 2

^{1b} Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.
² When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.
When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

Isaiah 41:10

¹⁰ So do not fear, for I am with you;
do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Psalm 61:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Hear my cry, O God;
Attend to my prayer.
² From the end of the earth I will cry to You,

When my heart is overwhelmed;
Lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

³ For You have been a shelter for me,
A strong tower from the enemy.

Sermon

He will keep me safe

From Psalm 1:1 – 3,

Blessed is the one
whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law, day and
night.

That person is like a tree planted by
streams of water.

We've all been through so much in the last two years and, like most of us, I have had issues of my own and haven't been available to preach for some time. So I want to say something a little different and share a testimony of some of the things which have helped me through this time, hoping they might help you, too.

How can peace be restored in our hearts?
Where is our hope?
How can we not be overwhelmed?
How can we look after our emotional health?
How can we know our strength restored?

Back in January 2020, just over 2 years ago, Dale St Church in Leamington began a very child friendly, Family Service called 9.15 (followed by the more usual 10.30 service). It only ran for a couple of months at that point before that first lockdown, but in that time, the song *My Lighthouse* by Rend Collective became a firm favourite, almost a theme tune, and I suspect helped many of us deal with what followed:

Your great love will lead me through
You are the peace in a troubled sea
You are the peace in a troubled sea

... You will carry me safe to shore.

Then, as a group of varying number met almost daily for prayer and fellowship on Zoom, we took it in turns to find and share a wealth of encouraging worship songs, hymns and scriptures, for example the UK Blessing from Numbers 6:

The LORD bless you and keep you,
make his face shine upon you and be
gracious to you,
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace.

As a retired Special School teacher, I particularly am moved by the Makaton version.

Paula Gooder has written a beautiful book, *Journalling the Psalms, A Guide for Reflection and Prayer*, and I've been using it during Lent. The writer of Psalm 1 believes that good things happen to those who love God, whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on God's Word day and night. We know that sometimes bad things happen to good people, but the Psalmist uses a picture of a tree planted by a river, firmly rooted in God's Word. Paula Gooder sees a parallel with Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders. She says your foundations or roots really are important in difficult times. My challenge to you is to repeat Paula's question, 'Where are your roots? How confident are you that they will hold when the storms come?'

It takes years of nourishment for a tree to grow tall with healthy roots.

Am I, are you, so immersed in worship songs and hymns and scriptures, in God, over months and years that we find strength when we need it most?

Are my roots/foundations based on delight in the law, in meditation on the Word of God, written on my heart?

I was reading this one week into the Putin/Ukraine war and amid struggles of my own and the Lord brought lines from another song to my mind, from *10,000 reasons*. I wrote my response in the blank, journalling spaces,

‘Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me, let me be singing when the evening comes’.

Lines from another song, *Faithful One*, popped into my heart, changing the metaphor,

‘All through the storm, your love is the anchor, My hope is in you alone’.

On yet another occasion, I had several phone calls from my oncologist and specialist nurse that they needed to see me and change my treatment as a result of a CT scan. I got into the car and Graham had left a Stuart Townend CD just at the start of *It is well with my soul*. It was timely, just right for that moment and I repeated the track three times on my 10 minute journey.

It is well with my soul when the storms of winter blow,
And the cares of this world take their toll.

In the heat of the day there is grace enough to say
It is well, it is well with my soul.

As we journey through Lent towards the wonder of Jesus’ death and resurrection, the next verse sums up what Jesus provided for you and me on the cross,

And when Satan should tempt me and trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control:
For he sees every weakness and knows every fear
And has shed his own blood for my soul.

Back in the Autumn, Jemima asked if I would go with her to see the Methodist Art Collection in Coventry Cathedral. Surprisingly, what spoke to me was not the Methodist Art, but a notice on the wall near the entrance to the Chapel of Gethsemane, the one where you enter the chapel through the opening of a huge, metal Crown of Thorns, behind the altar, underneath the Graham Sutherland tapestry. Tears streamed as I read:

‘In Gethsemane Jesus faced an agony of fear, loneliness and suffering. This cave-like chapel is a safe space to feel held by God even in places and times of darkness when your fears and worries can feel overwhelming.

The white candle is always lit as a sign of Jesus’ presence with us and those we love, the light of the world.’

Being held by God even in places and times of darkness when your fears and worries can feel overwhelming continues in the familiar words of

Psalm 23. We know The Shepherd leads me
bedside quiet waters and restores my soul. In
verse 4, even in the worst times,

even though I walk through the darkest
valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with
me, your rod and your staff, they comfort
me.

Paula says that 'It is during the darkest times that
God's presence is most keenly felt, the
relationship experienced most deeply'.

She continues, 'Notice it is God's presence that
makes all the difference – "you are with me". It
doesn't make the danger any less dangerous, but
God's presence makes it bearable'.

She also explains that the word 'comfort' is one
of those words that has changed meaning over
the years. Historically it is not so much about
compassion and care, but 'courage', from the
Latin root com (with) + fortis (strength). Your rod
and staff are bringing strength to me as I walk
the darkest path.

There are a surprising number of occasions in the
Bible where the writers find safe refuge in God
when life threatens to be overwhelming. Today's
'second reading' is a collection of some of the
verses which have spoken to me over the last 2
years.

That 'even though' theme is in Psalm 46:1 – 2,

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear, (even) though
the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the sea.

I love Isaiah's picture of the Lord carrying me
close to his heart, Isaiah 40:11,

he gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;

In our housegroup, we studied Steven Croft's
*Comfortable Words, a call to restoration,
Reflections on Isaiah 40 – 55*. The exiled people
are finally going home and need a new hope
strength and courage in God. Beginning with
familiar words in Isaiah 40:1 – 2a

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been
completed,

Steven also points out the use of 'comfort' again
as bringing strength.

I'd like to repeat his challenge to us as a church
to speak tender words of healing. When
everyone around us is overwhelmed ... we are to
be the ones who listen to the word of God, to
point beyond ourselves and find strength to
change the world.

The prophet Isaiah's vision 'is to regather the
people of God, to help them, first of all, to stand
again, to give them strength and purpose and to
remind them of who they are. And then it is to
put courage, fight, faith and joy back into their
hearts'.

More from my personal collection of comforting
verses: Isaiah 43: 1b – 2,

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name, you are mine.

When you pass through the waters
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.

The waters won't sweep over you, or overwhelm you, because like in the darkest valley of Psalm 23, God is with you.

We've already seen we are held by God in times of darkness and he carries me close to his heart. Here the prophet says he will hold you in his hand: Isaiah 41:10,

So do not fear, for I am with you;
Do not be dismayed, for I am your God.
I will strengthen you and help you;
I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Finally, when life threatens to be overwhelming, these words from Psalm 61,

Hear my cry, O God;
attend to my prayer.
² From the end of the earth I will cry to You,
when my heart is overwhelmed;
lead me to the rock that is higher than I.

I'm not suggesting we develop a stoic attitude of whistling in the dark. Our storms of life are real enough, but made easier knowing the reality of God's strength, to be like the blessed one of Psalm 1, planted by streams of water and knowing our roots are in meditating and delighting in God's word, whether through prayer, reading or singing.

Let's pray,

Thank you for you are with us and bring courage and strength as we walk the darkest path.

Thank you that you are my peace in the troubled sea.

Thank you that we can know that all through the storm, your love is the anchor, that my hope is in you alone.

Thank you that because of what Jesus accomplished on Good Friday and Easter Sunday, we can find grace enough to say, it is well with my soul, despite winter storms and extreme heat.

Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me, may we too still be singing when the evening comes.

SONG

**Now when peace like a river attendeth my soul,
And when sorrows like sea billows roll,
Then whatever my lot You have taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.**

**It is well with my soul when the storms of
winter blow,
And the cares of this world take their toll.
In the heat of the day there is grace enough to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.**

**And when satan should tempt me and trials
should come,
Let this blessed assurance control:
For He sees every weakness and knows every
fear,
And has shed His own blood for my soul.**

Words: Horatio Spafford (1828 – 1888) Adpt. Stuart Townend & Phil Baggaley

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

We praise you, living God, that through the life, death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus, we have the chance to begin again, as we learn from his words;
we have the opportunity to flourish, as we follow in his footsteps;
we have the calling to serve, as we grow in his likeness;
we have the time to do what is ours to do, as we trust his promises –
slowly but surely, day by day.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

To the bidding - **Lord, in your mercy,** please respond - **hear our prayer.**

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for the Church throughout the world, and that we might have the courage to declare with our words and our actions that you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Strengthen us by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we might be united with all who confess that you are Lord and so that we might, together, carry out your mission here on earth.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for all who are concerned about money, all who struggle to provide for their families, and all who do not know life in all its fullness. Help us to share the gifts of your creation and to mirror your abundant generosity.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ,

Give us the courage to offer all that we have and all that we are in your service, and to pour out our resources so that we might bless those around us. In a moment of quietness, we lift to you those who are known to us who are in need of God's healing and blessing. We pray for those who mourn.

[Silence]

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, as we remember that you laid aside your power and majesty and journeyed willingly towards Jerusalem and the cross, we pray for all those in positions of power and authority, and for those who govern. Bless them with wisdom and compassion, and guide each of us into the path of peace. We hold before you the people of Ukraine. Bring comfort to the bereaved, bring an end to violence. May hope and grace triumph over fear and hate.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen.

The Offering & prayer

Blessing the Offering

Thank you Lord for all we have received. We remember that all we have is a gift from you. Help us to use gifts of money and also our talents and skills to bring your love, peace and hope to all who need it this week. We ask this in Jesus name.

Amen

THE DISMISSAL

HYMN StF 696 For the healing of the nations

- 1 For the healing of the nations,
Lord, we pray with one accord;
for a just and equal sharing
of the things that earth affords.**

**To a life of love in action
help us rise and pledge our word.**

- 2 Lead us forward into freedom;
from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred,
all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness
fear will die and hope increase.**
- 3 All that kills abundant living,
let it from the earth be banned;
pride of status, race, or schooling,
dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice
may we hallow life's brief span.**
- 4 You, Creator-God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.**

Fred Kaan (1929–2009)

Prayer

We go into the world
To walk in God's light,
To rejoice in God's love
And to reflect God's glory
Amen

Copyright Notices

Hymn Words:

One Licence

The following hymns / songs are reprinted with permission under ONE LICENSE, License # **A-736737**. All rights reserved

StF 499 Great God your love has called us here

Brian Wren (b.1936)

Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic words edition Number 499

Words: (c)1975,1995,Stainer & Bell Ltd,23 Gruneisen Road London N3 1DZ www.stainer.co.uk

StF 696 For the healing of the nations

Fred Kaan (1929-2009)

Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic words edition Number 696

Words: (c) 1968 Stainer & Bell Ltd,23 Gruneisen Road London N3 1DZ www.stainer.co.uk

Integrity Music

The following hymns / songs are reprinted with permission from Integrity Music, under License number **007417**. All rights reserved

Now when peace like a river attendeth my soul

Words: Horatio Spafford (1828 – 1888) Adpt. Stuart Townend & Phil Baggaley Music: Phil Baggaley Copyright ©

2011 Thankyou Music (Adm. by CapitolCMG Publishing.com excl. UK & Europe, adm. by Integrity Music, part of the David C Cook family, songs@integritymusic.com) All rights reserved

Public Domain

The following hymns are all in the Public Domain.

StF 88 Praise to the Lord the almighty

Joachim Neander (1650–1680) *translated by* Catherine Winkworth (1827–1878) and Rupert E. Davies (1909–1994)

Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic words edition Number 88

Bible Verses

New King James Version (NKJV)

Scripture readings marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

Scripture readings marked NIVUK are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version® Anglicized, NIV® Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

If you would like to take part in these online services, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on 07365 806391 or swc.crc3@gmail.com

