

The Bridgwater Drive Church, 27 June 2021. Written service circulated to both churches

Call to Worship (based on Psalm 130)

Healing God, we come together in our brokenness,
to call to you in your mercy, to make us whole again.
Wholeness-giving God, listen to our prayers, we pray.
Restoring God, we gather to worship you, even as
we hopefully seek to be renewed and restored again.
God, our Quiet-Centre, listen to our prayers this day.
Foundational God, we come to praise and thank you!

In the depths of your Holy Being we find peace and rest.

God – our Beginning and our End, we hope always in you. Amen

© 2012 Joan Stott – "The Timeless Psalms" RCL Psalm Year B, used with permission.

Opening prayer based on today's readings

Living and faithful Spirit,

the God in whom we live and move and have our being,

the God who is made known in Christ Jesus,

bless us one and all as we wait on you this day.

Please remove from our minds and hearts

whatever impediments hinder worship or dampen our joy.

Increase within us that holy longing for closeness which can open our lives to fuller delight
and to a deeper commitment.

May our hymns and prayers,

our searching thoughts, and our hearing of the Scriptures,

be an exercise in the holiest love making.

By you, with you and for you, may our lives publish your praise.

In the name of Christ Jesus. Amen

By Bruce Prewer

HYMN God of promise, God of caring (Tune Ar Hyd Y Nos) by John Campbell

1. God of promise, God of caring, you lead the way;
on the road our lives sustaining, day after day.

When we hurt your healing mends us,
constantly your joy attends us,
day and night your love defends us; lead us, we pray!

2. Yet when dangers loom before us, fear can return;
doubts unnerve, new problems floor us – you, then, we spurn.

Promised Lands seem cruel, shocking,
fruitfulness a pointless mocking,
all your words just empty talking – when will we learn?

3. When fresh hope seems non-existent, help us to see
that with love, unchanged, persistent, you'll set us free.

In the past you've rescued, fed us,
through the barren deserts led us,
with protection overspread us, so fear must flee!

4. Still with promise, still with caring, you'll lead the way;
in new lands our lives sustaining, day after day.

When we hurt, you'll somehow mend us,
ever with new joys attend us,
day and night with love defend us; lead us, we pray.

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The Old Testament reading for today is from 2 Samuel (1:17-27). We are not reading it, but it is David's lament over the death of Saul and Jonathan, and the main phrase you will know from it, which is repeated a few times is – 'how the mighty have fallen'. Our next prayer, from the URC Prayer Handbook, is inspired by this reading and by the psalm for today, 130.

Prayer

Offering

You are reminded to send in your gifts for the work of the church.

Holy One, receive our gifts by your grace.

Multiply and use them through the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish Christ's work of love in the world. **Amen.**

Our opening prayer says, 'it is so easy to feel overwhelmed and helpless in the face of the world's challenges. Even our best efforts feel woefully inadequate.' Before we come to our readings for today, there are three things that made me want to share something that links to today's non-Gospel readings:

We have just finished our House Group series on making change happen and I was very pleased that the group decided that our next series should focus on Climate Change, recognising that it is probably the most important and urgent issue of our times, and that we should take time to really research and learn what we can realistically do, as Christians, to tackle that.

Last Sunday, I was with my former placement church, on an away day, looking at the future of the church and how they, as a very small, mostly elderly congregation, are going to move forward. And they decided that they would try to focus on one thing, working with the community, and do that one thing as well as they possibly could. And, recognising that so much has changed during the pandemic, and we really can't go back to the way things were before, they would like to move away from 'traditional' Sunday worship and make their gathering more social and use the time to learn how they can be inspired to work in the community, and spend time sharing what each of them is doing as an individual Christian out in the world, through volunteering, donating to charities and/or praying – that might be something you would like to try here at Bridgwater Drive – but maybe not on the Sundays when we are live-streaming!

And finally, on Monday, I read the Daily Devotion from the United Church of Christ (USA), which seemed to tie in with the readings for today and I'd like to share that:

It is based on a phrase from Psalm 52 – 'God's faithful love lasts all day' and the writer Vicki Kemper says:

"Here are some things I learned from almost four years of walking with the faithful, strong, courageous, and utterly vulnerable Guatemalan immigrant who took sanctuary in our church:

Powerlessness is exhausting. It affects every single thing.

Powerlessness will chew you up, spit you out, and then come back for what little is left of you.

Powerlessness will leave you gasping for breath and grasping at straws. Some days will feel like a roller coaster ride, others like a train wreck.

Fear and desperation will never be far away. The temptation to despair will be constant. Anger and bitterness will nag you to feed them.

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Powerlessness can be existential or circumstantial, trivial or life-threatening, imagined or all-too-real. You may feel powerless over the design flaws of your kitchen, powerless to change your partner's annoying habits, powerless to end systemic racism, powerless to get out of debt, powerless to fix the climate crisis, powerless against the ravages of Covid-19, other diseases, or the bittersweet march of age. You may feel powerless in the face of your job's nonstop demands or the constant clamouring of your children.

So here are some other things I learned, most of them from Lucio Perez, the seemingly powerless immigrant who lived in our church: God's faithful love lasts all day long, every day. Prayer is the key that unlocks the door. There is power in community and strength in solidarity. Blessed are the powerless, because they know their need. Blessed are the powerless, because God dwells with them." So, as our opening prayer says:

Let us patiently wait on the Lord. Let us tirelessly, impatiently work for justice. Let us eagerly, faithfully do what we can. Amen

HYMN Beauty for Brokenness – Graham Kendrick © 1993 Make Way Music

<https://youtu.be/08utbDFP9AE>

Selected verses here:

Beauty for brokenness
hope for despair
Lord, in your suffering world
this is our prayer.
Bread for the children,
justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset,
Your kingdom increase!

Rest for the ravaged earth,
oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned -
our future, our dreams
Lord, end our madness,
carelessness, greed;
make us content with
the things that we need.

Shelter for fragile lives,
cures for their ills,
work for the craftsman,
trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause
of those who can't speak.

*God of the poor,
friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray:
melt our cold hearts
let tears fall like rain;
come, change our love
from a spark to a flame*

**Readings: Psalm 130
Mark 5:21-43**

One of Mark's favourite ways of writing is to place two stories in a sandwiched relationship. Our text today, begins with the healing story of a young girl, the daughter of the synagogue leader Jairus. This is then interrupted by the story of a woman who has had haemorrhages for twelve years, and then concludes with the raising of the first young girl even though she had died while waiting for Jesus to arrive. This sandwiching of stories, brings a greater depth: the two stories of a young girl and a persistent woman, one sandwiched within the other, are there to interpret each other and reveal more about Jesus. It seems this Jesus can heal even when he doesn't initiate it, and can raise someone from the dead, even though he'd failed to get there in time to heal her!

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These stories are sandwiched together because some things just taste better together. Like cheese and pickle, rhubarb and custard, or bacon and egg – they go together and one brings out the particular flavour of the other.

These are stories about faith, more than they are about Jesus' gifts as a healer. Jairus' faith comes through his voice: he believes Jesus' laying on of hands can make his daughter well now and alive in the future. He says, come and if you only lay hands on her, she will be made well and live. Jesus goes with Jairus, but straight away the crowd starts pressing in on him and his journey to the sick girl is impeded. But the woman with haemorrhages sees her chance in that crowd. Her faith will cure and save her. Mark goes to great lengths to describe the woman in a long periodic sentence full of past participles (at least they are in the Greek): having suffered, having spent money, having not benefitted from that expense, having gotten worse, having heard about Jesus, and having come from behind ... we finally get the long delayed main verb: she touched his garment. At the very end, after all these things have happened to her, the unnamed woman still has agency, she is not powerless - she touches the one who she knows can heal her. Hers is no passive healing, she takes things into her own hands, and so it is her faith that heals her, not Jesus who is blissfully unaware. The confirmation of healing does not come initially from Jesus - the woman feels immediately in her body that she has been healed.

Jesus, by contrast, knows something has happened, but is at first disoriented. He even asks his disciples who touched him. The healed woman comes forward, full of fear and trembling, yet also knowing and telling the truth. Jesus calls her "daughter" an intimate term, used for close followers. Jesus sees her and talks to her only because she is now graciously restored. Jesus can only confirm her healing by joining together a blessing of peace and of release from her affliction – 'go in peace and be healed'.

Now the first healing story can conclude at the home of Jairus. But Jesus is too late. Already the grief has begun, because the young girl is dead. Jesus offers words of encouragement to Jairus – 'do not fear, only believe.' But they find the already dead girl surrounded with what looks like professional mourners. Jesus' comment about the girl merely sleeping is greeted with laughter. In a beautiful moment he addresses her and takes her hand. The young girl rises and is restored to her family. But Jesus is not quite finished: he strictly orders them to keep quiet about what had happened. Secrecy, and the slow reveal of who Jesus really is, is another characteristic aspect of the gospel of Mark. We are left with wonder at Jesus' commands not to tell anyone about these events. We are invited to continue to ask just where this story intends to lead us. What will it be like to follow this Jesus on the journey of discipleship? In what way will our lives be transformed by this person whose words call us to 'stop being afraid' and instead to 'live by trust'?

These stories of a young girl and a persistent woman help us see the range and the reach of this mystery we call Jesus. Their sandwiched stories interpret each other and at the same time reinterpret us toward an emerging vision of not just healing, but of a new creation. Jesus' healing power goes beyond mere fixing of an illness, to restoration to life and empowerment through the

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saving faith of others. And in this story, there are also the crowds, a father, friends, disciples, professional mourners, and above all women, young and old alike, released from death and invited into a new creation going forward.

Hymn It surely would have been enough (Tune Crimond) omitting v. 2

This hymn was written by John Campbell to accompany a series of Bible materials called 'Encounters in Mark's Gospel'. It isn't so much a hymn as a song 'voiced' by the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment. It expresses something of the pain and the glory of what she may have felt when Jesus asked 'Who touched me?'

It surely would have been enough if he had let me be.
He'd cured what others could not cure, his touch had set me free.

He would not leave without a word exchanged before them all;
his question hung, unanswered, sharp, and held me in its thrall.

It hurt, it shocked – I feel it still – yet in that cruel pause,
the fullness of the grace of God made me its only cause.

So, somehow, by that selfsame grace, I tumbled at his feet,
I owned his touch before them all, he made my joy complete.

And by the love he showed me then, and by his cross of pain,
we each and all can be received, made human once again.

So, sisters, brothers ev'rywhere, ignored, despised, unseen,
receive, with me, God's welcome back, no matter what you've been.

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Prayers of Intercession

God our holy Friend, you allow us share some of your love for the world. While we are here praying for the world's healing, others are busy implementing that healing. Later, when we are out there trying to give of our best, may others remember to pray for us.

Give your grace to all peacemakers; those who endeavour to resolve with justice all conflicts between nations, and within communities, commerce and industry, parliaments, families, marriage partners, colleagues, and friends.

Let your grace support those who fight with and for neglected people; those small ethnic groups with no political clout, the little people who are being ripped off by the rich and unscrupulous, and the deserted wives or husbands who are raising a family alone.

Endow the merciful folk with your sustaining grace; those who treat diseases, bind up wounds, feed the hungry, re-settle the homeless, care for the orphan, visit the prisoner, encourage the handicapped, watch with the dying and grieve with the sorrowful.

Endorse the work of this church with your enabling grace. Keep it close to the agenda of Christ. Let us be joyful in worship, warm in fellowship, inclusive in outreach, open in decision making, humble and sensitive in evangelism, and gracious in our ecumenical endeavours.

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Bless any servant of yours who is keeping the faith against the odds: those without the encouragement of other Christians at hand, or without even a distant congregation that can pray their names with affection. Please let your grace renew them daily, and may they know your Spirit as Friend and Counsellor.

Visit each of us with your grace, loving Friend. Dismantle our fears, build up our faith, deepen our love, clarify our goals, sharpen our insight, widen our compassion, and open our minds to the new words you wish to speak to our situation.

In the name of the patient, insightful, and healing Christ we offer these prayers. **Amen.**

By Bruce Prewer

Lord's Prayer

Hymn Jesus' hands (R&S 197)

Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all,
healing pain and sickness, blessing children small,
washing tired feet and saving those who fall.
Jesus' hands were kind hands, doing good to all.

Take my hands, Lord Jesus, let them work for you.
Make them strong and gentle, kind in all I do.
Let me watch you Jesus, till I'm gentle too;
till my hands are kinds hands, quick to work for your.

Blessing (inspired by Mark 5:21-43)

Go, confident in the knowledge of God's steadfast love for you,
assured of the healing touch of Jesus upon you and
emboldened by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit within you. Amen

written by Moira Laidlaw

The Bridgwater Drive Church sung Blessing.

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