

Christ Church, 16 Oct. 2022.

Call to worship (inspired by Psalm 66)

Come and see the works of God,
God's awesome deeds among us.
Come and hear, all who respect and admire God,
Listen for God's quiet voice in our tired world.
Come and touch the sacred, extraordinary in the ordinary,
God's presence in bread and wine.
Make a joyful noise to God and give him glorious praise

Hymn All creatures of our God and King R&S 39 omit vs 5 & 6

All creatures of our God and King,
lift up your voice and with us sing,
alleluia, alleluia!
Thou burning sun with golden beam,
thou silver moon with softer gleam,
*O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
ye clouds that sail in heav'n along,
O praise him, alleluia!
Thou rising morn in praise rejoice,
ye lights of evening, find a voice,

Thou flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for thy Lord to hear,

alleluia, alleluia!
Thou fire so masterful and bright,
that givest all both warmth and light,

Dear mother earth, who day by day,
unfoldest blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!
The flowers and fruits that in thee grow,
let them his glory also show,

Let all things their creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness,
O praise him, alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:

W.H. Draper

Children's Time – Presentation of Child & Youth Friendly Award

Prayer for Sunday Club

Gifts

Holy One, all that we have comes from you. Accept our gifts for your work in the world,
and to you be the glory and praise always. **Amen**

Hymn Stand up, clap hands, Red folder 86, omit v2

*Stand up, clap hands, shout thank you, Lord,
thank you for the world I'm in,
Stand up, clap hands, shout thank you, Lord,
for happiness and peace within.*

I look around and the sun's in the sky,
I look around and then I think oh my!
The world is such a wonderful place,
and all because of the Good Lord's grace:

I look around at all the joy I've had,
I look around and then it makes me glad
that I can offer thanks and praise
to Him who guides me through my days:

Roger Dyer, © 1970 Hugh-Fye Music Ltd.

We say the grace as the children leave for SundayClub

Christ Church, 18 Sept. 2022.

Opening Prayer

Blessed God, we celebrate who You are, and all that You have done for us.
You hold our lives in Your hands and catch us when we stumble.
So, we come together today, led by Your Holy Spirit,
to worship You: to sing Your praise,
to confess our mistakes, and to receive Your love and mercy,
made possible through the sacrifice of Your Son, Jesus Christ.
Be present among us as we worship You, and as we open ourselves to Your Word.
To You be all glory, now and forever. Amen.

URC Prayer Handbook p62

Hymn To God be the glory R&S 289

To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved He the world that he gave us his Son
who yielded his life an atonement for sin,
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the earth hear his voice!
Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son;
and give Him the glory - great things He has done!*

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood
to every believer the promise of God!
And every offender who truly believes
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives:

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer, and higher, and greater will be
the wonder, the beauty, when Jesus we see:

Fanny Crosby

Bible readings: **Luke 17:11-18**
 Mark 14:3-9

Today we are exploring the third, and probably final, story of Jesus being interrupted, combined with some elements from last week's gospel reading. We hear that while Jesus was at Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper, an unnamed woman came and anointed his head with costly perfume of pure nard. Just as an aside and for those of you looking for quiz questions – I looked up what nard is – it is an aromatic oil that comes from a plant of the honeysuckle family which grows in China, India and Nepal, so we can imagine that in the times of Jesus that would have been very rare and extremely expensive.

This story appears in all four of the gospels, but with slightly different details in each. In Luke's Gospel, Simon is not a leper but a Pharisee and the woman is described as a 'sinner' who anoints Jesus' feet, first with her tears and then with the perfume. That version contrasts her extravagant love with Simon's lack of hospitality – the self-righteousness of

Christ Church, 18 Sept. 2022.

the pious person who should have known better. In John's Gospel, Jesus is at the house of Martha, Mary and Lazarus and it is Mary who anoints his feet and wipes them with her hair, perhaps as a sign of gratitude for Jesus having raised her brother from the dead.

But in Mark's version (and Matthew's is similar) it is an unknown and unnamed woman, not a sinner or a friend of Jesus, who interrupts the dinner party to anoint Jesus. She appears suddenly and then disappears again. The fact that she anoints his head rather than his feet has layers of meaning – it shows hospitality and respect to an honoured guest; it symbolizes the embalming of a body, soon to be dead, but it is also a consecration – the outpouring of divine anointing for a role, task and purpose. In those days, kings were believed to be divinely appointed and the head of the king was anointed with aromatic oil, as in fact Queen Elizabeth was at her coronation. In this act, the woman makes Jesus the 'anointed one' which is what Messiah actually means. Her action is the trigger for the start of Jesus' journey to the cross. Immediately after this action, Judas went to the chief priests to betray Jesus. Jesus receives her anointing, he accepts it, and he defends her actions from those who criticize her.

Two world-views clash in this story. There is the view of the critics, represented in John's version by Judas, who are experts at counting, who know the exact monetary value of the jar of perfume. And then there is the view of the transforming gift that breaks in from the outside – unannounced, uninvited, interrupting the meal and changing the paths of the central characters, particularly Jesus, but Judas and the others too. The woman interrupts and changes the disciples' understanding of who Jesus is. She interrupts their assumptions and expectations about the Messiah and kingship. Jesus is not a king who comes in power, but in humility, to suffer and die. He is a servant king.

The view of the critics, the disciples, is a utilitarian one – the greatest good, for the greatest number of people – if the perfume had been sold, they would have had a lot of money to take care of the poor. This at first seems like common sense, why wouldn't we want to help as many people as we can? Our society is ingrained with a principle of usefulness, or making the most of our resources, so we tend to agree with this thinking and don't understand Jesus' defence of the woman. The disciples think they need the money, otherwise there would not be enough to go around. In the same way that they wanted Jesus to send away the crowd of 5000 because they did not have enough to feed them. They also didn't reflect on the fact that the perfume was not theirs to sell – as far as the Bible tells us, the woman brought it with her – it was hers to do with what she wanted. We too have the idea that resources are scarce and finite, and of course many natural resources are finite, but if we were more careful with them and shared better, there is

Christ Church, 18 Sept. 2022.

enough for everyone – just as there was enough for the 5000 with baskets of food left over. This idea in our society that for others to have more, we will somehow end up with less leads to all sorts of fears and prejudices. It is this model of scarcity and competition that the woman interrupts. By lavishing the perfume on Jesus, ‘wasting’ it, in the view of the disciples she is pointing out something important – this only looks like a waste in a world-view of scarcity and utility and that is not the world-view of Jesus or of God. Jesus came to show us that God’s kingdom is not like that. In God’s kingdom there is enough for everyone. In God’s kingdom, the rich will be poor and the poor will be rich. In God’s kingdom, the Messiah, the anointed one, is a servant who will suffer for the people.

Last week’s Gospel reading, which we heard this morning, was the story of ten lepers who were healed and only one turned back to give thanks and praise to God. The one who turned back was an outsider, a foreigner and as a Samaritan an enemy of the Jews. In today’s story of the woman anointing Jesus, they are in the house of Simon the leper – an outsider, someone considered ritually unclean, someone Jews, particularly the most pious or religious, would not have had anything to do with.

The only healed leper who turns back to praise Jesus is a Samaritan. By telling us this, Luke alludes to a long history of religious rivalry and ethnic friction which his Jewish audience would have known. The Jews saw Samaritans as enemies. Luke’s gospel contains the most references to Samaria and Samaritans. It is clear that Samaritans play a key role in Luke’s depiction of the universal significance of Jesus’ mission – that it wasn’t only to the Jewish people, but was for everyone. It is this thinking that those who are not like us, must be our enemies that the story of the Good Samaritan is addressing. It identifies the Samaritan enemy as the “neighbour” whom Jesus’ Jewish hearers are called to love. But the good Samaritan is not only the object of neighbourly love—he is also, and perhaps more importantly, the *subject* of neighbourly love. So, we find a narrative development in Luke from “love your enemy” (Luke 6:27, 35) to “love your *worst* enemy” (the Good Samaritan) to “see your worst enemy, no longer as enemy, but as an agent of God’s love” (again the Good Samaritan). Luke is building a case for indiscriminate love and radical inclusion, not only of the foreigner, but of all outsiders, like Simon the leper.

Significantly, the Samaritan leper who gives thanks, mirrors the Good Samaritan as a loving subject, but with this crucial difference: while the Good Samaritan is the subject of neighbourly love, the Samaritan leper is the subject of godly love: “when he saw that he was healed, [he] turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him”. How provocative that Luke presents Samaritans as models of the dual love commandment - “love your neighbour as yourself” and “love the Lord your

Christ Church, 18 Sept. 2022.

God with all your heart.” It is a revolutionary way for a Jewish Messiah to imagine the kingdom of God – inclusive of all.

Often in the media immigrants and asylum seekers are portrayed as our ‘enemies’ – they are flooding into the country illegally, taking our jobs, houses and benefits. As we can see at the moment, political parties can often be found fighting among themselves about the right policy and the right way forward. Sometimes churches, and people within in them, end up fighting because everyone believes so strongly in what they are doing and sometimes express that passion in a way that inadvertently offends or upsets someone else.

What Jesus teaches us, is that we must try to love our ‘enemies’ – perceived or real and we must love God. And the story of the woman anointing Jesus shows us that sometimes the message about what we need to do can come from a completely unexpected place, from outside our ‘church’ bubble, from an outsider who sees the world in a completely different way. Perhaps we need to have our assumptions and expectations interrupted and challenged – our assumptions about where growth will come from, and how and when – it may not be in our lifetimes, but we don’t not plant a tree just because we won’t be around to see it fully grown.

It is easy to preach good news. It’s harder to wait with people until that good news is realized. It’s hard to struggle alongside people when good news is a long time coming. It’s easier to paint a positive slogan on a wall or a social media post, to promise the good news everyone wants to hear, and be self-satisfied with the impact of grand gestures. It’s harder to work for good news, to sweat over its advent, to remain ever ready to leap in faith as soon as good news arrives. Promising good news is easy. Practicing good news is the harder work to which we are called and that includes listening for the interrupting and challenging voices from outside.

Hymn Sing to the Lord a joyful song R&S 77 (tune *Gonfalon Royal* at 136)

Sing to the Lord a joyful song,
lift up your hearts, your voices raise;
to us his gracious gifts belong,
to him our songs of love and praise.

For life and love, for rest and food,
for daily help and nightly care,
sing to the Lord, for he is good,
and praise his name, for it is fair.

For strength to those who on him wait
his truth to prove, his will to do,

praise ye our God, for he is great,
trust in his name, for it is true.

For joys untold, that from above
cheer those who love his sweet employ,
sing to our God, for he is love;
exalt his name, for it is joy.

Sing to the Lord of heaven and earth,
whom angels serve and saints adore,
the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
to whom be praise for evermore.

J.S.B. Monsell

Lord's Supper

We remember, as we come to this table, the gift of the life and death of God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Come to this table, you who are beloved in Christ. Come, not because you must, but because you may.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

Loving God, the world you made is beautiful and full of wonder.

You made us, with all your creatures, and you love all that you have made.

You gave us the words of your prophets, the stories of your people throughout the generations, and the gathered wisdom of many years.

You gave us Jesus, your Son, to be born and to grow up in difficult times where there was little peace.

He embraced people with your love and told stories to change us all.

He healed those in pain and brought to life those who had lost hope.

He made friends with anyone who would listen and loved even his enemies.

For these things, he suffered. For these things, he died.

And he was raised from death and lives with you forever.

You give us your Holy Spirit, to teach and to strengthen us,

to remind us of Jesus Christ and to make us one in him.

For all these gifts we thank you, and join with all your people on earth and in heaven, in joyful praise, saying:

Holy, holy, holy Lord

God of power and might,

heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

This is the mystery of faith:

Christ has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again.

Lord God, send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine,

and upon your people, that Christ may be with us,

and we may be ready to live for you

and do what you ask of us, today and every day to come. **Amen**

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he took the cup after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Sharing of bread and wine

Most gracious God, we thank you for what you have given us.
You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service.
Now we give ourselves to you, and ask that our daily living
may be part of the life of your kingdom,
and that our love may be your love
reaching out into the life of the world, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Prayers of intercession

Because we have preserved our joy in manna jars for the long winter of despair,
storing them in the dark corners of our souls, we have forgotten its gritty taste;
because we have put a tight lid on our joy, and put it in the back of the pantry,
we have forgotten how it can tickle our noses;
because we are so busy prattling pious platitudes
about the poor, the least, the lost,
we ignore your words which anoint them as your children;
because we have put up the shutters and storm doors
to keep Your future from sneaking in,
we have missed the sweet breeze carrying your hope to us;
because we are who we are, restore us, Holy One,
and make us a fragrant offering to the world.

At the end of Mental Health Awareness week and the start of Challenge Poverty week,
we pray for and with all those living with mental health conditions and those who care for them.
We pray for the poor and homeless. Make us gracious in our welcome and generous
in our support of them in words and actions.
We pray this day for all those who face illness and because of it, stress and anxiety.
We pray that you would provide your healing touch for all of us, and especially those known to us in
this congregation who are ill and in hospital at the moment.
We pray that you would be with us when we are anxious and fearful and provide a sense of your
steadying peace and we pray for and with all those who mourn the loss of loved ones, that your love
and grace may bring them peace.
We pray that you would give us the courage to reach out in faith,
and to accept interruptions and challenges. Grant us your wisdom to accept
challenges from places where we might not expect them and to see your grace and your image
even in the outsider, the stranger, the person who does not look or think like we do.

God, giver of the most expensive gift of all, help us to learn from you.
May we who are so adept at catering for our own wants,
make ourselves more vulnerable to the needs of others.
Let us live unselfishly and more sensitively, that we may spread love's fragrance
wherever the odour of cynicism and despair hangs in the air.
Through Jesus Christ, our Saviour, who taught us when we pray to say... **Lord's Prayer**

Hymn Praise the Lord, ye heavens adore him R&S 116

Praise the Lord: ye heavens adore him;
Praise him, angels, in the height;
Sun and moon, bow down before him;
Praise him, all ye stars and light.

Praise the Lord, for he hath spoken;
Worlds his mighty voice obeyed:
Laws which never shall be broken

For their guidance hath he made.

Praise the Lord, for he is glorious;
Never shall his promise fail:
God hath made his saints victorious;
Sin and death shall not prevail.

Christ Church, 16 Oct. 2022.

Praise the God of our salvation;
Hosts on high, his pow'r proclaim;
Anon. based on Psalm 148

Heaven and earth and all creation,
Laud and magnify his name.

Blessing (inspired by Psalm 66)

Go forth singing God's praises, remembering God's promises and blessings.
Joyfully give back to the world the love you have received
believing that God loves all creation and abides with us.
And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all now and ever more. Amen

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