

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Deacon Jacqueline Esama-John. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.

Introduction

A Happy New Year to you. I like to remind myself that we are still at the beginning of the brand-new year 2022. Some of us have made resolutions, some of us have renewed our covenant with God. And with all that is going on around us in the world, I am guessing that a lot of us would welcome the opportunity of starting afresh.

Our prayers, hymns and readings today point us to a call to embrace the opportunity of a fresh start because the spirit of the Lord is present with us empowering, enabling, and equipping us to spread the good news and to boldly proclaim that the Joy of the Lord is our strength.

Let us pray:

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

Help us to remember that you are here with us.

**May we pray to you in faith,
sing your praise with gratitude**

**and listen to your word with eagerness.
through Christ our Lord. Amen**

The Methodist Worship Book P. 27

Hymn: Be Still for the presence of the Lord (Singing the Faith 20)

I have always enjoyed singing David Evans Hymn “Be still for the presence of the Lord” It celebrates the awesomeness and supremacy and majesty of God in Jesus. There is a call to embrace the presence, the glory and the power of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://youtu.be/ZugvUQ4m90U>

Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.
come, bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found,
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.

Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned.
How awesome is the sight,
our radiant King of light!
Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place,
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace.
No work too hard for him,
in faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (1957)

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Prayer of confession

Let us confess our sins.

Silence

Loving God, we have sinned against you

In what we have thought, said, and done.

We have not loved you with our whole heart.

We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and turn away from what is wrong. Forgive us for the sake of your son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Silence

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

This is his gracious word.

Your sins are forgiven.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

(The Methodist Worship Book P. 29)

1st Reading: Nehemiah 8: 1-3, 5-6, 8-10 -New Revised Standard Version

8 All the people gathered together into the square before the Water Gate. They told the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel. ² Accordingly, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. This was on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law.

⁵ And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was standing above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Then Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. Then they bowed their heads and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

So they read from the book, from the law of God, with interpretation. They gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

⁹ And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, "This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, "Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our LORD; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength."

2nd Reading: Luke 4: 14-21 New Revised Standard Version

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

¹⁴ Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

¹⁶ When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet

Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Reflection

Our two readings today have origins in the post-exilic period, and just a quick backstory to the Old Testament passage: Nehemiah is a minor figure in the court of Artaxerxes, the king of Persia. Nehemiah heard that Jerusalem had become a broken, fire-razed city, so he begged the king to allow him to return to his homeland and rebuild the city of his forefathers. He was faced with a lot of obstacles as one would

expect but Nehemiah would not give up. He persisted and eventually succeeded in rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall and gates. He then invited his people back from exile and asked them to gather in the square before the Water Gate for an assembly.

And so, our lectionary passage for today picks up from here; the exiles have returned and as they wondered about the future of their city, we learn that Ezra, one of the priests in Judah, gathered the people together, from early in the morning right through to the middle of the day. He then read from the “Torah”- the book of the law of Moses to everyone present. We are told that as he opened the scroll, Ezra blessed the Lord, he read the stories of creation, of Noah and the ark, of Abraham and Sarah, of Joseph and his brothers, of the Egyptian captivity, of Miriam and Moses, of the Ten Commandments and God’s instructions for creating a community. He together with the other priests translated the stories into the people’s everyday language, to explain and instruct, and help them to understand. Then a hush came over the people. They shout Amen, they raise their hands and then bow down and worship the Lord with their faces to the ground. They were so moved they began to weep. It had been a long 70 years in Babylon, long enough to forget what it meant to have God in the centre of the culture. Our God is full of surprises. God says, “*Do not be grieved.*” The people are stunned. They say, “How can we not weep?” But Nehemiah goes on to

say, *“Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions of them to those for whom nothing is prepared, for this day is holy to our Lord; and do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength”* (Neh 8:10). It is sometimes difficult to understand the ways of God. Scripture tells us that God’s ways are past finding out. Joy and rejoicing do not seem to make sense when people are in a state of peril but here is the thing: God reminds us of the ground on which we stand. God wants us to remember that no matter what we meet on the road, one thing will remain constant: the love of our God. In the Luke passage, Jesus has just returned to his hometown of Nazareth after his Baptism by John and the descent of the Holy Spirit (Luke 3: 21-22) and then spent a time of testing in the wilderness (Luke 4: 1-13) All of these have prepared him to begin his public ministry of teaching, healing the sick and performing signs and miracles.

Luke 4: 14-21 our gospel passage for today, marks the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and is often referred to as the “Nazareth Manifesto”. It is in this manifesto that Jesus proclaims his identity, his purpose, and his vocation. He reads from [Isaiah 61:1-2](#) and [Isaiah 58:6](#) which was written for Hebrew people facing exile and captivity many centuries before Jesus came into the scene. He uses the words of Isaiah to announce that he engages this ministry because “the Spirit of the Lord” is upon him, because God “has anointed” him, and because God “has sent” him to bring liberty, to bring words of

God’s Jubilee, healing, and salvation not only to the Jews but rather to all of humanity. Jesus is the one who embodies what the scriptures have been pointing to.

However, it is good to be reminded that prophets are often not received well in their own countries or towns or cities so unlike the assembly that joyfully received Ezra’s proclamation, Jesus’s audience were rather shocked when he makes the words of Scripture his own and affirms that he is the Messiah, the one who will bring the good news, freedom to the poor, to the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind and liberation of the oppressed. And yet just for a moment, when Jesus stood before them, unrolled the scroll, and read that Isaiah passage of scripture, they were completely absorbed.

Pairing the Nehemiah and Luke readings for today, gives occasion for reflection on new beginning and new awakening. Jesus transformed Isaiah's words, Isaiah's prophecy, into a powerful invitation for the whole community to act on behalf of God's justice. Jesus is concerned with poverty, imprisonment, disability, oppression, and economic justice. We too should be concerned.

And as I read the texts, I am conscious that, Like Nehemiah’s Jerusalem, things are not great in our generation. We are living in this moment in history facing what is hard and uncertain. Covid 19 has catapulted us into uncharted waters. We are all challenged by these times, and it might not feel like you have

the energy or enthusiasm to hear the words of these Bible passages today, yet there is hope and it is important that we stand firmly rooted and grounded in the things of God. These ancient texts provide a desperately needed gospel for a world that is ravaged by sickness and disease, war and violence etc. There are so many examples for us to learn from in scripture. Words and stories that give us encouragement and inspiration to share the good news. The Apostle Paul gave us countless examples of this: In Romans 8: 36-39, Paul admonishes that *"...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us..."*

Paul and Silas were placed in prison, their hands were chained but they did not lose the joy of the Lord, *"They were singing hymns to God... Suddenly there was a powerful earthquake. It shook the prison from top to bottom. All at once the prison doors flew open. Everybody's chains came loose".* Acts 16:25-26

In James 1:2 *"count it all joy when you fall into various trials"*, Another example is the prophet Jeremiah's trust in the Lord even in the face of adversity : (Lamentations 3: 21-23) *But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: :²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,^[a] his mercies never come to an end;²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I can go on and on. As individuals, as groups as a community of faith we are reawakened with *the joy of the Lord.**

I started this service by wishing you all A Happy New Year and

saying that some of us have made resolutions, some of us have renewed our covenant with God. Three weeks into the new year, some of those resolutions might be waning already. There is work to do.

Let me finish this sermon with some of my learning. During my time of studying at Theological college in Birmingham, there was a note in the college chapel which read "our worship ends and our service begins". I have always reflected on those words. If the most important thing about Jesus' ministry is his mission to the poor and oppressed and the salvation of humanity, how far is this same emphasis part of our life priorities? What does service mean?

The challenge remains for us to recommit ourselves to the daily reading of scripture and to reclaim the joy of the Lord with the testimony of the Holy spirit. I would like us to consider the words that both Ezra and Jesus bring to all of us today – "The Joy of the Lord is our strength" and the spirit of the Lord brings gifts to us, tools that enable and equip us to serve in our communities and in the world. We do not all have the same gifts and calling, but we are each important to the whole. This should give us encouragement and inspiration to go out into the world of our daily lives, serve the Lord with gladness and proclaim the good news. **Amen.**

Prayers of Intercessions

Silence

God our Father,
grant us the help of your Spirit
in our prayers for the salvation of all people.

We pray for the Church throughout the world,
for the Methodist church and all its members,
for us here in the Enfield circuit,
that in faith and unity we may be constantly renewed by your
Holy Spirit for mission and service

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray our troubled world, its peoples, and their leaders, we
pray for those caught up in war and violence. For the refugees
and displaced. We pray for justice, freedom, and peace for all.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray for our country here in the United Kingdom.
For those who have authority and influence

For all the issues emerging at No.10 Downing Street, and for
members of the cabinet. That all may serve with integrity and
compassion

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray for those among whom we live and work
For all our neighbours, friends, and family
For all our outreach projects across the circuit;
The planning for building work at Edmonton
The Space project and the work of the builders
The newly refurbished halls at Ponders End and the various
mission initiatives on site.
We pray for continued discernment for the work of mission At
Goffs Oak, Grange Park, Bush Hill Park, Ordnance Road,
Southgate, and Trinity churches.
We pray that we may so use your gifts to serve
That together we may find joy in your creation.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

We pray for all in sorrow, need, anxiety or sickness
We pray for healing all affected by the various strains and
variants

of the Covid -19 virus and other illnesses.
For those known to us.
For those that we do not know.
That in their weakness, they may know your strength
And in despair find hope.

Lord in your mercy
Hear our prayer

In you Father,
We are one family on earth and in heaven.
We remember in your presence
Those who have died
Giving thanks especially for those
Who have revealed to us your grace in Christ.
Help us to follow the example of your saints in light
And bring us with them
To the fullness of your eternal joy.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Merciful father, accept these prayers for the sake of your son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Sunday, 23rd January 2022

**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.**

Hymn: And can it be that I should gain (Singing the Faith 345)

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQeIGbKqiW8>

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
Tis mercy all Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more

He left His Father's throne above -
so free, so infinite His grace -
emptied Himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
Alive in Him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,

bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Benediction:

This is what the Lord says:
The Spirit of the Lord is upon you.
Be just and fair to all.
Do what is right and good.
For the Joy of the Lord is your strength
We go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen

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