

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Nancy Hands. 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.

Call to Worship

As we come into God's presence, let us open our hands and hearts; let us invite God to fill us with the treasure of his Spirit : the treasure of his compassion for others, and the treasure of his unconditional love for us.

The writer to the Hebrews declares: 'Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.'

Hymn: StF 51 Great is thy faithfulness

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2eQ1oal44wU>

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be
Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love
Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
Blessings all mine with 10, 000 beside
Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Edward Hayes Plumtre (1821-1891)

Prayers of Praise and Thanksgiving

Faithful God, Creator and Father, we worship you. We offer you our thanks and praise for your enduring promises, for the gift of your Son and for your Holy Spirit filling us with strength and hope, passion and purpose. Dependable God, we adore you. We offer you our thanks and praise for the love you so freely shower upon us, for gifts of faith and hope and the blessings which surprise us. Ever-present God, we worship you.

Prayer of Confession

Father God, too often we take you and your gifts for granted. We confess that we have spent too much time and energy ensuring our own comfort and security, at the expense of our relationship with you and the needs of our neighbours. We have missed kingdom opportunities you lay before us, because of our distraction and complacency. We have failed to trust and follow you, allowing our fears to take over, forgetting your faithfulness to us. Forgive us. Open our eyes to see where lasting treasure lies, where values have true value and how to be faithful disciples.

Assurance of Pardon

God in his mercy forgives all our sins: what we have done and what we have left undone; what we have said and what we have failed to say; what we have thought and what we have ignored. He sets us free to share his peace and love. Thanks be to God. Amen.

OT reading : Genesis 15: 1-6

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision : "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very reward." But Abram said, 'Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.' Then the word of the Lord came to him : "This man will not be your heir". He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars - if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

NT reading : Luke 12: 32-40

"Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve,

will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." Thanks be to God.

Hymn: StF 254 Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFxZeY2D5tc>

Seek ye first the Kingdom of God,
And His righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you;
Allelu, Alleluia:

Ask and it shall be given unto you;
Seek and ye shall find;
Knock and it shall be opened unto you;
Allelu, Alleluia:

We shall not live by bread alone,
But by every word

That proceeds from the mouth of the Lord;
Allelu, Alleluia:

Reflection

Luke 12 is a chapter of warnings and encouragements. Last week we heard the story of the greedy Rich Fool who thought only of himself, and in the end gained nothing. There is the passage about not worrying : the lilies of the field and the birds of the air - about clothes and food and the immediate things around us. Jesus says, '*do not set your heart* on what you will eat or drink'. Of course we have to wear appropriate clothing and eat sensibly, but I think it means don't make that your focus; don't be obsessed and consumed about ourselves and our things. Have perspective about what we are here for and what is important; how we are living and serving, trusting God . There is a connection between what we value and what values drive us.

And then this lovely line that begins our reading today, 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'. We need to hear that. 'Do not be afraid.' Not about the state of the world, or the war, or wild fires, or rising costs or job security. Be concerned and active and responsible, but trust and do not be afraid. 'Little flock'. We are the little flock - his flock. He cares about us and always will.

'Your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom'. Really. Not perhaps, the house of your dreams, or an affordable utility bill, or that holiday you have been waiting for. His kingdom. So much more than we could ask or imagine. The Kingdom. But what does that look like?

The kingdom of God is within us, whenever we are in tune with God, and it is present wherever love dwells. We see the kingdom in Jesus, so following his example with the Holy Spirit guiding us, carries seeds of the kingdom to others. As his mission was his life, so our lives are to be our mission : always caring, always including, always being alert and ready to help, always kind.

And Jesus says 'be ready' : ready for the unexpected, because God is unpredictable and has a habit of surprising us; be ready to act faithfully, but also be ready for Jesus to come again.

The impact these words must have had on the disciples is possibly lost on us. Their nation had waited centuries for the coming of the Messiah - and here he was, with them at last, able to establish the kingdom of God and put right all that was wrong in the world. They must have been bewildered and confused as to why he had to leave them, why he couldn't lay claim to his kingdom now. For centuries, it had been hard keeping faith, holding on to the promise and belief that Messiah would come, and now they were being asked to stay

expectant again for his return, with no idea about when. It takes courage to go on trusting when time is like an endless piece of string ; it is a tough kind of faith that keeps hope alive. And yet they were being told to be ever ready and watchful. As are we. It doesn't take long for carelessness, complacency, boredom or even laziness to creep in on us. We tell ourselves there's plenty of time for serious discipleship ; perhaps when life is a little calmer, or the children have grown up, or the job is more secure, or when we have retired, or the political situation is more stable. We know Jesus will come again, and we pray for it, but it won't be today or tomorrow; probably not even in our lifetime. We can go with the flow for now and do our bit here and there.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves, is our faith alive and active - vibrant as it once was? Does it make a difference to what we own and what we share, what direction we travel in, whom we are with and what we buy? Have we become a bit anaesthetised by habit and familiarity? Has our prayer ceased to be expectant?

I don't believe Jesus wants us to be workaholics in any sphere; he teaches his disciples that they need time apart to rest; he models the time apart to pray. We need our recreation time and family time, and none of us should be overburdened with practical duties - particularly in the church- which can and

should be shared out. I think what it does is prompt us to reflect on our closeness to God and his will for our lives; on how, in his strength, we help to bring the kingdom a little closer, where we are.. It is not something to put off.

A fable is told of three apprentice devils that were coming to Earth to finish their apprenticeship. They were talking to Satan, the king of devils, about their plans to tempt and ruin humanity.

The first said, 'I will tell them there is no God'. Satan said, 'No, that's not going to work. People know in their hearts there is a God.' The second one said, 'I will tell them there is no Hell'.

'No', Satan said, 'Most people know there is a Hell and judgement to come. They get a taste of it here.' The third said, 'I will tell them there is no hurry.' Satan smiled and said, 'Go, and you will ruin them by the thousands.'

We hear Jesus telling his disciples to sell what they have and give to the poor. He adds , 'where your treasure is, there your heart will be also'. Jesus often talked in extremes - using exaggeration to make his point clear. We know from stories in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke's second volume, that immediately after Pentecost, that is what early converts actually did, selling possessions and sharing what they had with any in need. We also know it didn't last as a way of life. In Paul's ministry, he worked amongst rich and poor , those who

could work and those who couldn't, and Christians lived in regular houses. But he encouraged generosity. The Christian ethic was not to make one's possessions an idol or goal, and not to cling on to them, but to keep a generous servant- heart. Real treasure is a gift from God and lasts forever, and we find it by looking around at what God is doing here and now, and joining in his kingdom work.

Jesus liberates us from covetousness, acquisitiveness, greed and anxiety, if we allow him to - if our focus is on God's kingdom. The result is awareness of others, what we have to offer, and generosity of spirit. We don't have to do anything spectacular or special to be deemed ready and watchful; living well, honestly, humbly and faithfully - is readiness.

Every moment we are alive is a moment of possibility and one that will not come again. If we tread lightly, not weighed down by our stuff and our concerns, we will notice what we are meant to see and hear and act upon.

Faith is constancy : *knowing* we walk with God and that every day brings Christ's coming closer. We wait as Abraham waited for an heir - and an unlikely nation of heirs : something he thought impossible and way in the distance, but which was promised.

There is a lovely old hymn by William Longstaff, called 'Take

time to be holy', which is in many hymn books, including the United Methodist Hymnal, the Baptist Hymnal and the Songbook of the Salvation Army, but is not in ours.

Born in 1822 in Sunderland, Longstaff was the son of a wealthy ship owner and became a man of independent financial means. He had everything he could want but still felt empty inside. He attended church one day and a China Missionary on furlough in England, Griffith John, preached on the text from 1 Peter 1:16, 'Be ye holy, for I am holy'. It struck him so deeply that he gave his heart to the Lord, was baptised and dedicated his life to God. He became a generous philanthropist, contributing to the work of William Booth of the Salvation Army and financing Dwight Moody's evangelical crusades in England and Scotland. He did not forget that first sermon he heard and it prompted the writing of this hymn.

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in him always, and feed on his word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, let Him be thy guide;
And run not before Him, whatever betide.
In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord
And looking to Jesus, still trust in His word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.
Amen

*William Dunn Longstaff 1822-
1894*

Prayers for ourselves and others

Loving God, we find it hard sometimes to hold on to our faith in your kingdom, to keep believing that the day will dawn when we shall see justice established, racism conquered, peace among the nations, an end to sorrow, and good finally triumphant over evil. When we look at our world today, we see no sign of that happening, no suggestion even that anything is any different from when you walked on our earth long ago, but we cannot help but wonder why you delay. We are bemused by questions, plagued by doubts, and, the more time passes, the more difficult it becomes to keep the edge on our belief. Teach us to remember the fact that you did come, that, after

all those years of waiting, you took on our flesh and endured our death, so that we might rise with you to new and everlasting life. Teach us to remember your promise that, just as you came, so you will return. Teach us to go on trusting you, despite all that might seem to deny your purpose, confident that the day will come when wrongs are righted, hope is vindicated and love is triumphant over all, to the glory of your name.

Father God, we know we can open our hearts to you and that you hear our words, our sighs and our longings. We pray with hope and faith for the power of your Holy Spirit to sweep our communities, our country and our world; to purify the thoughts and actions of politicians and governors; to sow those seeds of peace and generosity and love among all people and for your Church to be a symbol of your Kingdom. Hold and restore those who suffer from pain, sickness and torment, and comfort those who grieve. May we be the agents of light and love in your world, faithful disciples and constant friends, confident of all you have prepared for us in your infinite mercy and grace. May your kingdom come, here and in all places, In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

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: HP 784 Thy hand O God has guided

Sing/Read/pray/proclaim the words or listen to it here
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44RNKcp-hCY>

Thy hand, O God, has guided Thy flock from age to age;
The wondrous tale is written, full clear on every page;
Our fathers owned Thy goodness, and we their deeds record;
And both of this bear witness:
One Church, One Faith, One Lord.

Thy heralds brought glad tidings to greatest, as to least;
They bade men rise, and hasten to share the great King's feast;
Their gospel of redemption, sin pardoned, right restored,
Was all in this enfolded:
One Church, One Faith, One Lord.

Thy mercy will not fail us, nor leave Thy work undone;
With Thy right hand to help us, the victory shall be won;
And then, by men and angels, Thy name shall be adored,
And this shall be their anthem:
One Church, One Faith, One Lord!

E.H. Plumptre (1821-1891)

Blessing

From the Psalm for today, Psalm 33

‘We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in His holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, Lord, even as we put our hope in you.’

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you and on those you love, now and always. Amen.

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