

# A month of Sundays – August 2022

# Worship

Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

# **Sunday 7th August 2022**

## **A Gathering Prayer**

God of all,  
we thank you for being here with us.  
We thank you that in your presence  
we find heavenly riches beyond any earthly treasure.  
As we come to worship,  
help us to seek and find the treasure of your kingdom,  
so we can live our earthly lives holding treasure  
that will transform us – right here and right now.  
**Amen**

## **Bible Reading: Hebrews 11,v1-3, 8-16**

How do we understand faith? What does it mean to trust someone? This passage is one of the Bible's grand statements of faith. It's fleshed out by a telling of the story of Abraham that focuses on his faith (leaving out his doubts and contradiction of God's word!). The key to his faith, and that of the others mentioned, is that it was in something beyond the things around us that catch the eye. Faith is about living in uncertainty, in something temporary, while always looking ahead to the permanent home that God is creating for the faithful. The writer is aware not only of the narrative arc of the Old Testament, but also of the message of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus – something that is here and yet is still coming. And so, he calls us to faith.

## Reflection

A time-honoured classroom activity is to invite children to make a treasure map. You may well have done this yourself. Such a map almost always consists of a wobbly outline denoting the shape of a desert island and is probably surrounded by shark-infested waters. The island will have mountainous areas, thick forests and beaches strewn with palm trees. But somewhere in this complex geography will be a small 'X'. And we all know what the 'X' means. It marks the spot where the treasure is buried. Find the place marked, get digging and, if you are lucky, you will uncover a chest of untold riches.

The idea of buried treasure has captured imaginations for many years. One of the most famous stories must be Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. In this story, young Jim Hawkins finds a map in a dead man's chest and takes a role as a ship's cabin boy in a thrilling search for the pirate gold hiding under the 'X' on his map. Enid Blyton's *'Famous Five'* also have an encounter with a cargo of gold ingots. In this tale, the intrepid gang deal with ruined castles, hidden dungeons, shipwrecks and storms as they hunt for the treasure stashed on Kirrin Island. Even very contemporary stories use the treasure hunt as a major plot device. Amy, in Gillian Flynn's novel *Gone Girl*, sets up little treasure hunts for her husband on their anniversary, a seemingly romantic tradition that turns very sinister when Amy disappears, and she becomes the treasure he is hunting for. On a lighter note, the film *Paddington 2* makes use of a hunt for treasure that takes the bear, his family and his nemesis, Phoenix Buchanan, on a search of London looking for a lost fortune.

If something is highly prized, the human impulse is to work very hard to find it. Think about the times when you have lost something precious. For those items there is no handy treasure map with an 'X' to tell you where you left it but, when it's valuable or important to you, you will search as hard as possible to try and find it.

In other words, whatever – or perhaps whoever – we value has high priority in our life. Whatever we deem to be our treasure naturally occupies our thoughts, fills our senses and often guides our behaviour and how we choose to spend our time.

The challenge embedded in the Gospel reading is for us to see that the most precious treasure of all, the valuables marked by 'X' in the universal map of life, are the riches we gain from doing the work of God's kingdom. Real treasure is found when we draw close to Jesus, and this treasure has a beauty and value that eclipses anything else. And the exciting news is that this treasure is not buried or hidden, it's available right here, right now. The treasure is not in a hidden box but in a relationship with Jesus – and everyone is invited to share it.

## **Hymn – Let all the world StF 57**

- 1 Let all the world in every corner sing :  
my God and King!  
The heavens are not too high,  
his praise may thither fly ;  
the earth is not too low,  
his praises there may grow.  
Let all the world in every corner sing :  
my God and King!
  
- 2 Let all the world in every corner sing :  
my God and King!  
The Church with psalms must shout,  
no door can keep them out ;  
but above all, the heart  
must bear the longest part.  
Let all the world in every corner sing :  
my God and King!

George Herbert (1593–1633)

## **A sending out prayer**

Lord, go with us.

Help us to seek your treasure.

Help us to look for all you're doing right now.

Help us – by our example as much as by our words – to share your treasure and your life-giving story with the people we meet this week.

**Amen.**

## **Sunday August 14th 2022**

### **A prayer of confession**

What I don't understand, God, I cast aside, ignore, object to, ridicule and rebuke. What I don't understand I think must be wrong. People that are different sometimes worry me, frighten me, disturb and concern me, so I ignore them, turn my back on them, ignore their needs, their cries for help, their pain and anguish.

Almighty God, I'm sorry that in my vulnerable moments, I can hurt these people and make them feel worthless, unloved and unwanted. Forgive me, I pray, and strengthen my resolve to see other people's lives and views, needs and desires. **Amen.**

### **Assurance of forgiveness**

God understands our vulnerability and our confusion and forgives all those who truly repent, who are really sorry for wrong deeds and wrong thoughts and wrong ways. God forgives; journey in peace. **Amen.**

## **Bible Reading: Psalm 82**

The psalm pictures a dialogue in heaven. It is unclear who the protagonists are, but clear that God speaks and acts justly and in the midst of others who don't – perhaps human governments who function as God's stewards on earth. The poet longs for the true God to rise and bring judgement. Judgement is always a good thing in the Psalms, a time when things are put right, justice is done for the poor, the weak and needy.

## **Reflection**

Whatever you thought about Oprah Winfrey's now infamous interview with Harry and Meghan, it projected to the world the fragility of family, the complexity of familial relationships and how quickly things can fall apart.

Many of us will have a story about a family rift. Some family divisions last for decades and can even be passed down from generation to generation. Clearly, there are many and complex reasons for a family fall-out, but one of them stems from fundamental differences of opinion. During the Brexit vote, several news outlets carried statistics about the impact of the vote on family harmony. It is thought that disagreement on the politics of Brexit led to one in 20 people falling out with their family. You may recall that Boris Johnson's own brother, Jo, famously left the government citing irreconcilable tension within himself over family loyalties and the national interest. However, when a family member moves beyond expressing different opinions and starts to live in a way that others don't understand, or follows a set of beliefs not shared by the rest of the family, things can get really hard for everyone.

Today's Gospel reading portrays something of the difficulties of holding a deep set of beliefs that is at odds with the people you love the most. For the first believers, the decision to follow Jesus and the consequences of signing up to a life of faith in him were hugely complex. Following Jesus divided people from

their families, because the decision to follow him required disciples to put their trust fully in Jesus and align themselves to him above and beyond anything and anyone else. Jesus took priority.

Perhaps to us this seems a little extreme. But even in today's world there are many that face this level of cost for their faith. Being divided from family members is a very real prospect for people across the globe choosing a life of faith in Christ. And yet people still make this choice. People today are opting into a life that will divide them from family, friends and communities they have grown up in. The choice for Jesus and the associated costs can give us pause for thought, particularly if our life of faith brings us little conflict or division.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

We pray...

for those living on the edge, in fear of the future:

    bless them with a deepening sense of hope and trust in you;

for those caught up in the ways of the world,

    relying on worldly treasures:

    give them a blessing of release and joy in you;

for those battling with ill health:

    give them the blessing of strengthening hope and healing;

for all who have the responsibility of leading your flock:

    give them your blessing of wisdom and strength.

Lord, you watch and protect.

Strengthen all who are in need

with an unshakeable trust in you;

give them a glimpse of the treasures

that are theirs when they put their hope in you.

Amen.

## Hymn – Great is thy faithfulness, StF 51

- 1 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 for ever wilt 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.*
- 2 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:
- 3 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 ten thousand beside!

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

### A sending out prayer

Lord, go with us.

Help us to seek your treasure.

Help us to look for all you're doing right now.

Help us – by our example as much as by our words –  
to share your treasure and your life-giving story  
with the people we meet this week. **Amen.**

# Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> August 2022

## Call to worship

As we come to worship,  
let us think about what it means to be free.  
As we come to worship,  
let us remember what it feels like when people see our needs.  
As we come to worship,  
let us consider how we can respond to the needs of  
those around us.

## Bible reading - Luke 13.10-17

When Jesus encounters a crippled woman in the synagogue he heals her. However, it was a sabbath and some in the synagogue didn't like it. Jesus accused them of hypocrisy: they would happily care for their animals, so why do they object to him caring for this woman?

Whether the woman, who had lived with her condition for many years, had been ignored or overlooked we don't know, but Jesus saw what she needed and responded immediately. There is no excuse for a lack of care and compassion. What might we be missing, overlooking or ignoring? How can we respond like Jesus to the needs of others even when they're hidden or ignored?

## Reflection

Have you had that experience of meeting someone in real life after months of Zoom/Facetime calls? You have seen their face on a screen. You have heard their voice through your computer or iPad speakers. But you've never actually met them. It can be

quite a strange experience, not least because people behave subtly differently 'off screen' than they do on it, and you finally get to see how tall they are! In times gone by, you might only have heard them on the phone and that might have been what some call a 'telephone voice'.

With that in mind, let's turn our attention to the Gospel story. Can you imagine the scene in your mind's eye? Can you imagine what it would have felt like for those around the woman, family and friends perhaps, to see her, some for the first time, at her full height, and to experience her physical presence in a different way? Of course, nothing to do with being trapped behind a computer screen, but she had been trapped by her own body for a very long time – 18 years, Luke tells us.

The story prompts many questions about how people viewed this woman and her needs. Where was she when Jesus spotted her? Did she come to the synagogue hoping that he could heal her? Or did she simply want to meet him, to listen to him? How had she managed over those 18 years? Did the synagogue goers ever notice her, or was she just part of the crowd – and even on the fringes of that? Jesus must have been observing people carefully; presumably she would have been hard to see in the crowd, given she couldn't stand up straight. Did Jesus bend down to her level when he laid his hands on her?

But aside from the questions, one thing is certain, Jesus saw her, saw her need, and responded to it. He didn't accept her and her condition as just part of the landscape, the way things are. He intervened, he broke established rules, he healed her and set her free.

The response of the community is interesting. The need of the woman is lost underneath the outrage, the perceived need to maintain the rules. We might wonder: does the craving for order always obscure human need? Perhaps we should answer that by looking for evidence. Are there members of our 'local

landscape' that we find hard to see? Do we have ways and systems, or do things, that might be obscuring the needs of people? Can we cast our eyes around us and try to see what Jesus sees – the hidden people, those in the margins, those imprisoned by circumstances or illness?

If we do, we may find that we see people for the first time, in person, and we notice for the first time the full space they occupy – or maybe just how tall they really are.

## **A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

We are so thankful, Lord, that you see us for what we are, for who we are and where we are. You know us by name, you know

us through and through. Ashamed of ourselves as we are at times, we are thankful that you stick with us, persevere with us, encourage our good intentions and forgive our failings.

We are thankful for all the help, support and guidance we have been given. We are thankful that people throughout our lives have introduced us to you, to your ways, to your love, to your power and glory. We are thankful that, in your name, people have noticed us and picked us up and guided us. We are thankful

that you have led others to lead us and reach out to us. We are thankful for a rich history recorded in the Bible, stories of prophets, priests and kings, stories of love, help and healing. We give you thanks and praise, Lord God, for all the ways that, and all the people through whom, you are revealed to us.

**Amen.**

## Hymn – Light of the world Stf 175

1 Light of the world,  
you stepped down into darkness,  
opened my eyes, let me see  
beauty that made this heart adore you,  
hope of a life spent with you.

*So here I am to worship,  
here I am to bow down,  
here I am to say that you're my God,  
and you're altogether lovely,  
altogether worthy,  
altogether wonderful to me.*

2 King of all days  
oh so highly exalted,  
glorious in heaven above.  
Humbly you came  
to the earth you created,  
all for love's sake became poor.

*So here I am to worship ...*

And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross.  
And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross.

*So here I am to worship ...*

Tim Hughes

### **A sending out prayer**

Heavenly God, as we go from here  
give us the compassion we need to meet people's needs,  
help us to make time for those around us,  
and may this community be a place of love and freedom –  
for all. **Amen**

# Sunday 28th August 2022

## A gathering prayer

Welcoming God,  
thank you that we all have a place at your table;  
thank you that we sit alongside the lowly,  
the disadvantaged members of our society who are  
disregarded;  
thank you that you turn everything upside down  
and give priority to the poor not the powerful.  
May we learn more about genuine humility  
and how to make a place for everyone. **Amen.**

## Bible Reading - Luke 14.1,7-14

Jesus is invited to dinner on the sabbath where he is closely watched. He challenges the behaviour of his host and other guests by telling two parables: one reminds people to be humble, and the other to give without necessarily expecting anything in return.

## Reflection

One of the fascinating aspects of experiencing different cultures around the world is the way each one 'does' hospitality. Many Eastern cultures have fascinating traditions that might seem unintuitive to Westerners, often based around dining habits. For instance, in China, finishing a bowl of food you have been given is taken as a signal that your host hasn't provided enough, and they will feel compelled to refill your bowl until you are, apparently, satisfied. Ethiopia has a tradition called 'gursha', which involves taking an, often large, morsel of food, wrapping it in injera – a type of flatbread – and placing it in the mouth of a dining companion. Sharing food in this way is seen as a sign of honour and a way to build social trust. In Japan, guests are very important, and the tradition of hospitality also has a name, 'omotenashi'. It means having complete dedication to

the guest, the desire to entertain with all your heart. It can be experienced almost everywhere, not only at home, and is expressed in various ways including, for example, bows, warm welcomes and various gestures of kindness.

In Britain, in days gone by, there were very strict rules of etiquette governing hospitality. The Victorians wrote many books on the subject. Did you know, for example, that when hosting a dinner party, the hostess would inform the gentlemen as to which lady they were to accompany into the dining room. And, rather like those in this week's Gospel story, the order in which people were seated was an indication of their rank and importance. Even what you were to say to your dining companion was carefully directed by the etiquette manuals.

And, however strange some of them may seem, there is no doubt that these rules, conventions and traditions help societies navigate social interaction and help people behave in ways that are polite and acceptable.

So, what must the host have thought when Jesus started quizzing the conventions of his day and telling stories that questioned the social norms? First, Jesus says don't jostle for the best, highest, position at the table. You might be disappointed. Instead, take the lowest place and see what happens – you might be pleasantly surprised. Of course, he is not attempting to teach table manners. He is asking people to live with humility, and this in a society where humility was very rarely considered a virtue. Yet, humility is a mark of being a follower of Jesus.

Then he goes on to question the whole dinner party system. It still happens today: you invite us, so we have to invite you – all vying to put on the best show. Jesus says, invite those who really can't give anything in return. That's true hospitality and generosity. It's also counter-cultural; but it speaks the message of full inclusion. Everyone is invited. And, to really rub it in, those who would usually be excluded are to be given priority, he says. Inclusion is also a mark of being a follower of Jesus.

## **Prayers of intercession**

Lord God, we bring before you those we don't consider to be within the bounds of our hospitality: the poor and sick of other nations; refugees; the homeless on our own streets; all who are on the edges of society. We do our bit, we give money for their needs and pay our dues as Christians should; but we cannot invite the whole world into our homes. And yet...help us to understand that hospitality is a 'moveable feast'. Jesus was a host although he had no home to call his own. It was in his welcome and the warmth he showed. So, Lord, when we come across those who are on the margins, move us not just to walk on by. We thank you for those who work, paid or as a volunteer, for those in need and we pray for their continuing strength and resolve in righting the injustices of society. And may we be given the grace to extend the hand of friendship, and maybe drop a kind word or deed here and there, even if we can do little else. Show us, Lord, what you would have us do.  
**Amen.**

## **Hymn – At the name of Jesus StF 317**

1 At the name of Jesus  
every knee shall bow,  
every tongue confess him  
King of Glory now.  
'Tis the Father's pleasure  
we should call him Lord,  
who from the beginning  
was the mighty Word.

2 Humbled for a season,  
to receive a name  
from the lips of sinners  
unto whom he came,  
faithfully he bore it  
spotless to the last,  
brought it back victorious  
when from death he passed :

3 Bore it up triumphant  
with its human light,  
through all ranks of creatures  
to the central height,  
to the throne of Godhead,  
to the Father's breast ;  
filled it with the glory  
of that perfect rest.

Caroline Maria Noel (1817–1877)

## **A sending out prayer**

Lord, go with us today as we think about including all people.  
Inspire us to pray for those in our own neighbourhood who are  
often excluded.

Inspire us to be active in seeking to include others and find a  
place for everyone in our community.

Thank you that no one is beyond your love and care.

Help us to be people who live and spread that message.

**Amen.**