

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 7th August 2022

Preparation

As we prepare to worship let us keep silence for a moment as we calm our minds and focus on God's unfailing presence with us all.

Call to Worship

God, lover of the lost and healer of the broken, you reconcile those divided by sin and you call the outcast to be a guest at your table.

Be with us here in this place today,
teaching us mercy and love.
Help us to praise, love and serve you
in our worship and in our lives.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation (StF 88)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0JvCmvlm-Qg>

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters, draw near,
praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee:
ponder anew what the Almighty can do,
who with his love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life and restore thee,
fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever before thee,
then to thy need he like a mother doth speed,
spreading the wings of grace o'er thee.

Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin is abounding,
who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue confounding,
sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of night,
saints with his mercy surrounding.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again:
glady for aye we adore him.

Joachim Neander (1650-1680)

Prayers of Approach and Confession

Eternal God, creator of all, giver of life,
we praise and worship you.

We thank you that you have always loved the world you have made; and that, however far we stray from you, your love is always there to welcome us home.

We do not deserve your love,
but we dare to believe the good news of your mercy declared by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Be present with us this day as with penitent and forgiving hearts we celebrate your sacrifice of love.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit, that our worship may truly express our love for you and for one another.
Make us glad and give us joy and peace.

Silence

God of justice and mercy,
we come before you
knowing that we are all in need of forgiveness.

We have sinned against you
in our speaking and in our silence;
in our thinking and in our thoughtlessness;

in our actions and in our inaction.

We have sinned against you,
in not loving you with our whole heart
and soul and strength;
in not loving our sisters and brothers in
Christ.

Grant us, O Lord, your forgiveness,
restore us in the image of your Son,
and lead us along the way to your kingdom,
to the glory of your name.

Silence

Lord Jesus,
we recognise that you have given each one of
us a part to play in your body.
We thank you that you believe in us and have
a vision for your church.
Strengthen us where we are weak,
guard us where we are strong,
give us humility where we are proud,
and in your patient love
continue to call us to serve you
wherever and whenever needed. Amen

Read Hebrews 11.1-3, 8-16

Read Luke 12.32-40

Reflection

With the Commonwealth Games now drawing to a close, not to mention the recent performance of our wonderful Lionesses, we've been spoilt for choice in sporting heroes. You'll have your own favourites, but my top three have been the fast bowler Katherine Brunt for her accuracy and economy in the T20 cricket, Alex Yee for his double-gold medal performances in the triathlon discipline, and, of course, the fantastic Mary Earps in her defence of England's goal throughout their victorious Euro 2022 campaign. What a summer!

As you can tell, I, like so many others, want to believe in and look up to heroes who inspire us to greatness. We all have our own heroes, whether from our sphere of work, or in our faith or in other areas of life. I think it's a natural human instinct to want to be inspired by acts of greatness and heroism. So many of the people we might list for their greatness have indeed achieved it only through the help and encouragement of their own heroes, many of whom will never be remembered more widely.

It's to such figures of inspiration that chapter 11 of the Letter to the Hebrews draws our attention to: to our 'heroes' of the faith. This week's passage reminds us of the father of faith: Abraham, and though not included in this lection, this part of Hebrews 11 also honours Abel, Enoch, Noah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. Next week we hear of Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets; *'who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.'*

All of these are great heroes of the faith. Just hearing names like Gideon and Samson evoke strong memories of Sunday School for me, whether of blowing bugles to recount Gideon's battle cry or of making cardboard temples designed to collapse on a beleaguered and hairless Samson. Yet at the end of this mighty list of Old Testament greats we hear from v.39 that; *'all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰since God had provided something better so that they would not, without us, be made perfect.'*

Despite their greatness, despite commendations a-plenty, they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided

something better. Something better? Something better than all these! And not only something better, but the suggestion that those great heroes of the faith could only receive the promise of Christ with us, through us, and alongside us?

It's undeniable that our own personal walks of faith are made up of a rich tapestry of heroes, most likely just ordinary people who did extraordinary things for God but who, through that, have inspired us to do the same. The crescendo of this week's reading, and it's very *raison d'être*, comes next week in chapter 12 vs. 1-2 when we read; *'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, ²looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.'*

It appears that the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews was setting the scene all along, but the scene of what? The scene of a race! More more interestingly in that picture, it is all those great heroes, all those who have gone before us who are lining the way as spectators, the great cloud of witnesses. They are no longer the central figures, the protagonists. Now the central figure, the runner, the rower, the heptathlete, is us! We are centre stage in a race already won by Christ.

We need no special skills, no acts of power, no heroic conquests. God's better way simply calls us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus who perfects our faith and brings it to completion. Ponder this: have you ever thought of yourself as a hero of the faith? Who else sees you as someone to look up to in their own walk of faith, in their own quest towards

Christ? Who might see your face in that great crowd of heroes encouraging them on, finding in your face inspiration to overcome despair and to hold onto Jesus?

Never cease from setting your minds on Christ. Always listen for the shouts of encouragement from those heroes of the faith that line the track at our own race. Always be prepared to accept that you may be just as much of a hero to someone else because you inspire them to greatness in Christ. Amen.

Prayers of Concern

Loving God,
in all the changes and chances of our lives,
all the many uncertainties we face,
we thank you that you are a God we can
depend on,
always good,
always loving,
always merciful and always faithful.

We thank you for the assurance that,
whatever we may be confronted with,
your love will go on reaching out,
your hand go on supporting,
and your purpose go on being fulfilled.

Loving God,
hear our prayers for all those in our world
who seek to further your will here on earth –
those who work for peace,
who campaign for justice,
who strive to relieve poverty,
who fight for the hungry –
all those who struggle for the oppressed and
exploited, the under-privileged and all denied
their proper rights.

Prosper their efforts and grant them
inspiration so that they may challenge people
everywhere to give of themselves in the
service of others.

Loving God,
we bring before you the sick and suffering of
our world,
all those wrestling with illness in body, mind
or spirit.

We pray for those afflicted in body –
enduring physical pain,
overwhelmed by disabling disease,
waiting for an operation or further treatment
and fearful of what the future may hold.

We pray for those afflicted in spirit –
those who feel their lives to be empty,
those whose confidence has broken down,
those unable to cope with the pressures of
daily life,
the lonely, and all who are bereaved.

In a moment of quiet, we bring before you
particular people and situations on our hearts
today, and the needs and concerns of our
own lives ...

Living God,
speak to each of them, as to us, in your still
small voice of calm,
grant us all your peace which passes all
understanding,
that quiet confidence which only you can
bring,
and so may our burdens be lifted
and our souls refreshed.
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along

I, the Lord of sea and sky (StF 663)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgLwH5RdtPk>

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,

I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.

They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord ...

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.

My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life for them.
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord ...

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

Dismissal and Blessing

May God who travels with us along the way
of faith, bless us on our way.
May God who thirsts for truth and justice,
bless us with an insatiable thirst for the truth.
May God who longs for us
to enjoy life in all its fullness,
bless us with a child-like delight in life in all its
wonder.
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,
be our way, our truth, our life
now, and always. Amen

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Service prepared by the Revd Tim Searle

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