

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 9 October 2022 – 17th Sunday after Trinity

The service can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley Benefice which has been put together by Liz Howlett, including liturgy from *The Wee Worship Book*, written by members of the Iona Community.

We come together across the valley in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Opening responses

Way beyond all journeying, truth behind all mystery, life within all living: **We praise you.**

Salve for every soreness, mender of every brokenness, midwife of a better future:

We praise you.

Ground of all being, judge of all nations, conscience of the universe: **We praise you.**

Maker, redeemer, confessor, companion, befriender, inspirer, God beyond all names:

We praise you.

Hymn: Praise my soul, the King of heaven

1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet thy tribute bring;
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
who like me his praise should sing?

Alleluia, alleluia,
praise the everlasting King.

2 Praise him for his grace and favour
to our fathers in distress;
praise him still the same for ever,
slow to chide, and swift to bless:

Alleluia, alleluia,
glorious in his faithfulness.

3 Father-like he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows;
in his hands he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes:
Alleluia, alleluia,
widely as his mercy flows.

4 Angels, help us to adore him,
ye behold him face to face;
sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space:
Alleluia, alleluia,
praise with us the God of grace.

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)) (Public Domain)

Prayer of Confession and Absolution

In the beauty of the earth, in the silence of our hearts, in the community of your church, in all acts of grace and kindness, in forgiving from the heart and in worship from the soul, your Spirit confirms the truth in which we seek to live.

If knowing this, we have failed to love you, our Maker, been hesitant to follow your Son, and suspected the power of your Spirit, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

If we have desired comfort more than devotion and if we have satisfied our wants more than we have served your will, Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

If we have limited our company to those like us and if we have restricted our conversation to matters of no consequence, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you: pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself, and so bring us at the last to your heavenly city where we shall see you face to face; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

First Reading: 2 Kings 5: 1-3; 7–15c

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, "Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. So please accept a gift from your servant."

Gospel Reading: Luke 17: 11 – 19

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus travelled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?" Then he said to him, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well."

Reflection

Two encounters in our readings for today, both reflecting the wideness of God's overflowing love for God's created beings; both about healing; but also with great contrasts in the way those suffering with disease are treated. So, first let's explore the reading about Naaman – and the title for this part of the reflection is 'The only way is down'. (Just to say, you have probably realised that this reading has got some bits edited out. I guess the editors of the lectionary felt that was needed to make the length more manageable for a Sunday morning.) So – the only way is down. What a tale! – it could almost be a pantomime – with Naaman, a successful but rather self important commander of the Aramean army, we can imagine him swooping around the countryside with horses and chariots and all the signs of wealth, hoping to be cured of leprosy – but he wants to keep his vanity intact. What a journey Naaman must go on in this story – and it is a journey downwards, the only way is down – he is going to have to let go of his self-importance and superiority and eventually, literally go down into the muddy waters of a river. But it isn't easy for him – witness his tantrum when Elisha the prophet doesn't even speak to him directly – Elisha sends his servant to the door to utter the words that can enable healing, but that is not how Naaman hears them. It is quite funny when Naaman storms off in a huff and a rage – 'I thought that for me he would surely come out and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and would wave his hand over the spot, and cure the leprosy!' But he cannot be cured whilst still high on his horse, clothed in finery. It is a powerful lesson in humility for a man with a strong sense of his own dignity and used to ordering others around. Not only is he told to go away and wash in a river – it isn't

even the best river available – he must go to the dirty Jordan. The only way is down for Naaman. But we mustn't overlook some of the other key characters in this tale, without whom there would be no healing. One of them appears only at the beginning – the servant girl, who works for Naaman's wife. The girl had been captured in Israel on one of the raids. She – the kidnapped alien – is a key link in all of this, for if she had kept silence, Naaman would never have made the journey and ultimately been healed. I wonder if the servant girl was ever tempted to curse her captors and those whose house she now had to live in, away from her own kin. On this occasion she chose to view Naaman through the eyes of compassion, seeing him as a human being in need and she spoke the words that eventually enabled healing. And there are other important players too. Naaman has wise servants of his own. They dare to address their master when he has stormed off in a rage because of his treatment by Elisha. They could so easily have added fuel to the fire – torching the prophet's home for example, or taking out their master's anger on the surrounding villages. How dare he be treated like this! But they didn't. They took the heat out of the situation – they talked calmly to him and pointed out how simple the request to wash and be clean was. They too spoke words that enabled healing. And Naaman returns to Elisha a new man. He returns as someone who has gone down into the muddy waters, removing his fine clothes, letting go of his self-importance and has come up, healed of the disease and convinced of the reality of the God who heals.

Turning to our gospel reading, the title for this is 'The only way is up'. We encounter characters – 10 people suffering from a skin disease, for whom the only way can be up, for they are at the bottom already. We join Jesus as he continues on his journey towards Jerusalem and on the way he goes through a kind of no-man's land. He is in the borderlands between Galilee and Samaria, and he isn't even in a village – he is on the outside of human dwelling. Because of their disease, those with leprosy don't belong anywhere – the usual boundary markers which help those within feel safe are for them a sign of their exclusion. Their lives are in a type of limbo. So many of those Jesus meets are on the outside, or at the bottom of the pile. Those deemed to be unimportant or suspect in some way. He goes out of his way and allows himself to be delayed by those who are forgotten, or ignored, or judged by regular respectable society. It is often remarked that Jesus came to bring a message of comfort to the afflicted and a message of affliction to the comfortable. The ten are told to show themselves to the priests – no bathing in muddy water for them! But I guess crossing the threshold into the village would have felt pretty daunting – I wonder when was the last time they did that. And as they go, they are cured of their disease. Their bodies are healed and hopefully they will be reintegrated into their families and communities and they can rediscover a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives once again. Like Naaman, the one person in the gospel reading who turns back to Jesus to give great thanks to God for his healing, is a foreigner. Even Jesus seems surprised by this turn of events. God's blessing and giving of life are not restricted by the barriers humans put up to distinguish who is different. God's love is not reserved for certain groups, or the expected people – God's love is like a fountain, generously overflowing to all who are made in God's image. Amen.

1 We cannot measure how you heal
or answer every sufferer's prayer,
yet we believe your grace responds
where faith and doubt unite to care.
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,
survive to hold and heal and warn,
to carry all through death to life
and cradle children yet unborn.

2 The pain that will not go away,
the guilt that clings from things long past,
the fear of what the future holds,
are present as if meant to last.

Hymn: We cannot measure how you heal

But present too is love which tends
the hurt we never hoped to find,
the private agonies inside,
the memories that haunt the mind.

3 So some have come who need your help,
and some have come to make amends,
as hands which shaped and saved the world
are present in the touch of friends.
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here
to mend the body, mind and soul,
to disentangle peace from pain
and make your broken people whole.

Jesus said: 'Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.'

Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Unless you change and become humble like little children, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them.'

Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Love one another, as I love you; there is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends.'

Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples, and I will be with you always, to the end of time.'

Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

God of mercy, **you know us and love us and hear our prayer: keep us in the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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

Closing Responses

From where we are, to where you need us,

Jesus, now lead on.

From the familiarity of what we know to the wonder of what you will reveal,

Jesus, now lead on.

To transform the fabric of this world until it resembles the shape of your kingdom,

Jesus, now lead on.

Because good things have been prepared for those who love God,

Jesus, now lead on.

Hymn: Tell out my soul

1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;
tender to me the promise of his word;
in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his Name!
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
his holy Name, the Lord, the Mighty One.

3 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!
Powers and dominions lay their glory by.
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,
the hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

4 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore!

*Timothy Dudley-Smith (born 1926) from Luke 1 vs46-55 © administered by Oxford University Press in Europe
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