

## THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

### Telephone Service for Sunday 24 September 2023 – 16<sup>th</sup> 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*

**Lord of creation, whose glory is around and within us: open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with reverence and know your peace at our lives' end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

#### *First Reading: Exodus 16: 2 - 15*

In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my

instructions. On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days.”

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?” Moses also said, “You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not grumbling against us, but against the LORD.”

Then Moses told Aaron, “Say to the entire Israelite community, ‘Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.’”

While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

The LORD said to Moses, “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.’” That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, “It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat.

### *Gospel Reading: Matthew 20: 1 - 16*

Jesus said, “For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

“About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

“He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

“‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

“He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

“When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

“The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

“But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

“So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

### *Reflection*

I’m going to start with the Sound of Music! Not literally, don’t worry! The song that Maria sings when she and the captain finally get together has always annoyed me. She sings something like this, ‘Somewhere in my youth or childhood, I must have done something good’. In other words, she could only have the good fortune to find a life partner who loves her and she loves him, if she had earned it. This does have a bearing on the rest of this reflection, honest!

We have two readings today that are full of complaints! We join the Israelites on their journey away from Egypt to what has been called a promised land for them. They have no idea what that might look like or feel, and in the mean time, six weeks into their travels, they see where they are – a hard, hot, dry place – and they don’t like it. They can’t help but remember back just a few weeks, when they had all the food they wanted in

Egypt. They were slaves there and they had been oppressed but just at this moment, their past life seems so much more bearable than the present. They cry out to Moses that they wished they had died back there. This is a generation that has only ever known slavery and nothing can prepare them for their current situation, which is a transition phase – it will not last for ever – or at least it shouldn't – but it does need to be gone through to get to the final place that they will be able to call home. So without suggesting at all that we ourselves were in slavery when Jane was here, I do wonder if we might be experiencing any of the same feelings as we go through a vacancy because our Rector left just two months ago! We are in a transition phase in our own journey of faith as churches in the Bride Valley. We remember when Jane was sharing in ministry with us and the stage we are at now, in between rectors, probably isn't a place we want to stay in for too long! There will almost certainly be situations and people we feel like complaining about just now!

We will come back to the Israelites a bit later, but for now, let's explore the gospel passage – this is the parable Jesus gave in which the landowner hires workers throughout the day and at the end chooses to give all the workers the same level of pay, no matter how long they have been working in the vineyard. I wonder what strikes you about this story. I wonder what feelings have been aroused within you by this reading. I wonder which character you most identify with – perhaps the worker who has been toiling away all day in the heat and glare of the sun and feels short changed and aggrieved when they receive the same pay as the person who has only been hired for one hour. 'I've been hard at work, my bones ache, I'm tired and thirsty – and these people come along hours later and they have hardly broken a sweat. It's not fair – why did I bother to get engaged at the start of the day?' Or perhaps you identify with the worker who must have been worried for most of the day because they were not being hired – the anxiety going through their minds – will I get any work today – will I get any pay today – will my family eat today? What relief, as well as surprise, they must have felt when the pay they received did not reflect the tiny part of the day that they had been working. Or maybe you identify with the boss, the landowner, who chooses to give the same payment to all the workers, no matter how many hours they have worked. So clearly this is not a story told with the aim of encouraging landowners across the country to adopt this as their working practice – it's not at all practical! It's not meant to reflect 'real' earthly life. Like so many of Jesus' longer parables, the way that the characters behave, especially in this case the landowner, is deliberately unexpected and shocking – it is an abrasive story and it refuses to become comfortable. So I wonder if you feel there is anything that links these two stories – of the Israelites struggling and complaining in the wilderness and the landowner and the workers in the vineyard? I would suggest that both offer a glimpse of God's grace towards God's creatures. In the exodus story, God is described as listening, hearing to the complaints of the people. This is what God had done when the people were in slavery and being oppressed – God listened to their cries and in that situation God called Moses to lead them from slavery to freedom. God's generous grace is experienced yet again through God's listening to their further complaints, now they are free from slavery but struggling in this frightening and unknown barren land. We see that food is provided for the Israelites that does not cost them any labour, nor do they need any knowledge of their surroundings to produce this sustenance. For this is not food that they have 'earned' in any way – it is given freely to them and there is enough for all to be satisfied. This encounter in the wilderness suggests to me that God takes human needs seriously – it is important that hungers are satisfied. Likewise, I would argue that God's grace shines through the parable. This was a story told to the inner circle of the disciples, not to the crowd at large. These were the folks who had been with Jesus from the start and in the verses just before this parable, they remind Jesus of all that they have given up to be with him. They have left livelihoods, families, property and they ask what they will get in return. So Jesus says they will receive a reward far more valuable than anything they had given up, but he also says these words, 'But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.' And then he tells this parable. God's grace is poured out on all, no matter how hard someone has 'worked for God's kingdom', or for how long, or whether they have come on board later on and not achieved anything of significance. So Maria, of The Sound of Music fame, enjoy your love and receive it as a gift of grace, not earned in any way, but freely given to you! **Amen.**

## Hymn: Amazing grace

1 Amazing grace! – how sweet the sound –  
that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,  
was blind, but now I see.

2 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear  
and grace my fears relieved;

how precious did that grace appear  
the hour I first believed!

3 Through many dangers, toils and snares  
I have already come;

'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.

4 The Lord has promised good to me,  
his word my hope secures;  
he will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.

5 When we've been there ten thousand years  
bright shining as the sun,  
we've no less days to sing God's praise  
than when we first begun.

*John Newton (1725-1807), William Cowper (1731-1800), John Rees (1828-1900) (Public Domain)*

## Prayers

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.

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.

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.

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!

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