

# **North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)**

## **Service Sheets For the Month of August 2024**

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## 4<sup>th</sup> August 2024 – 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom*

### **Prayer of Preparation:**

O God, giver of manna from heaven,  
you provided for Moses' followers in the desert.  
O Christ, bread of life,  
you fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fish.  
O Holy Spirit of the living God,  
here with us as we come together today,  
we ask you to feed us with all that we need,  
and that, thus fed, we might be satisfied.

**Amen.**

### **Hymn: To God be the glory (StF 94)**

To God Be The Glory, Great Things He Hath Done,  
So Loved He The World That He Gave Us His Son,  
Who Yielded His Life An Atonement For Sin,  
And Opened The Life Gate That All May Go In.

*Praise The Lord, Praise The Lord, Let The Earth Hear His Voice!  
Praise The Lord, Praise The Lord, Let The People Rejoice!  
Oh, Come To The Father, Through Jesus The Son,  
And Give Him The Glory, Great Things He Hath Done.*

Oh, Perfect Redemption, The Purchase Of Blood,  
To Every Believer The Promise Of God;  
The Vilest Offender Who Truly Believes,  
That Moment From Jesus A Pardon Receives.

Great Things He Hath Taught Us, Great Things He Hath Done,  
And Great Our Rejoicing Through Jesus The Son;  
But Purer, And Higher, And Greater Will Be  
Our Wonder, Our Transport, When Jesus We See.

### **Prayers of Adoration, Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Merciful God,  
we thank you that you are to be trusted,  
that you are faithful and provide for all our needs.

When we feel alone in the desert,  
that is where we meet you.  
In the wilderness of our lives,  
we can turn to you and know that you will sustain us.  
We worship you,  
and we thank you that in you there is always hope.

Lord, when we fail to trust you in all things:  
forgive us, and help us to trust you more.  
When we complain that you have forsaken us,  
you have left us, abandoned us:  
forgive us, and help us to trust you more.  
When we choose to go our own way  
because your way doesn't seem to make sense:  
forgive us, and help us to trust you more.  
When we don't challenge injustice,  
and instead, accept things as they are:  
forgive us, and help us to trust you more.  
When we keep asking for more signs,  
more proof, more of everything:  
forgive us, and help us to trust you more.  
When we trust a little, then snatch it back:  
forgive us, and help us to trust you more.

When we have not trusted God with our lives and walked away,  
we can always come back into God's everlasting arms,  
knowing that we are loved and forgiven.

**Amen.**

### **Hymn: Seek ye first (StF 254)**

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 the door shall be opened unto you.  
Allelu, Alleluia

We shall not live by bread alone,  
But by every word  
That proceeds from the mouth of God.  
Allelu, Alleluia

**Bible Reading: John 6:24-35**

<sup>24</sup> Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

<sup>25</sup> When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

<sup>28</sup> Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

<sup>30</sup> So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

<sup>34</sup> “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

**Thought for the Day:**

In response to his people’s plea for help in the wilderness, God gave them food enough for each day and said, in effect, ‘Trust me for tomorrow!’ As the Psalmist says, ‘they ate and were well filled, for he gave them what they craved.’ God fed and protected them, but he also required them to be obedient and faithful, in a two-way deal.

When the crowds asked Jesus for a miraculous sign, he gave them a similar answer, that in response they are to believe in him, the bread from heaven. That was an answer that raised even more questions!

It is good to ask challenging questions as we try to understand what God's work for us may be. God can deal with our complaints against him and he hears our questions. But perhaps, as is always the case with Jesus' teaching, we will never get a straight answer, to make sure that we are stretched by working it out for ourselves.

Our natural instinct is that, before we are willing to do the work God wants, we need to ask more questions. But perhaps God needs us to just make the first move, to step forward, not knowing where we are going but trusting him to guide our next step, to know where our next meal will come from. The living bread of which Jesus speaks is a gift that will do much more than just feed our bodies for the day. It will sustain us for life, in all its challenges and interactions. Just as a shared meal includes conversation, laughter, relationships and intimacy, so the sharing of our lives with others can meet many needs.

During lockdown, a keen west-country gardener wanted to help those who could only get out for their daily walk. She operated a bring-and-buy stall at the roadside outside her house, encouraging many to take healthy exercise in their own gardens while raising thousands for local cancer charities. The socially distanced conversations about plants also fed the souls of the lonely. There is more to being fed than eating bread.

As we do the work of God by believing in the one whom he has sent, our lives will reflect the quality of the Living Bread that we have shared. It is still a two-way deal as we respond to what we have received by sharing it. As Paul explained to the Ephesians, each of us has been given the gift that is right and sufficient for doing God's work. Are we engaging with the task, even as we question what it is?

- Invite people, in small groups, to discuss some or all of these questions: What do we need or want? What is essential to our day or to our lives? Do we ever tell ourselves that we could do without certain things?
- In the Lord's Prayer, we pray for 'our daily bread', which is understood to mean neither an abundance nor a lack, but just the right amount for the day – and trusting God for tomorrow. In

today's reading, Jesus uses bread as a metaphor for everything we need (i.e. not just food).

- How far do our lives reflect a desire to focus on what God gives and wants from us today? How can we relate this to a world that is always planning for tomorrow? Do we trust that God will provide enough tomorrow, so we can share what we have today with others?

**Hymn: May the mind of Christ my Saviour (StF 504)**

May the mind of Christ, my Savior,  
live in me from day to day,  
by His love and power controlling  
all I do and say.

May the word of God dwell richly  
in my heart from hour to hour,  
so that all may see I triumph  
only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father  
rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort  
sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me  
as the waters fill the sea;  
Him exalting, self-abasing:  
this is victory.

May I run the race before me,  
strong and brave to face the foe,  
looking only unto Jesus  
as I onward go.

**Intercessions:**

Lord, we come to you, the Great Provider, with all our cares and our needs, trusting that you will provide for us. So often we tell you what we *want* rather than asking for what we really need. Teach us to listen to your voice so that our wills join with yours and so that our asking becomes harmonious with what you want for us. As we lay our petitions before you,

remind us that what you give us is what we truly need even if we don't always recognise it.

Jesus, bread of life,

**help us to trust in your provision for us.**

We commend our athletes to you, Lord, as they compete in the Olympic Games. We thank you for the joy that sport brings to so many, whether watching or participating. We pray that all the athletes will be able to bring their best to their competitions. We pray for the witness of those who are Christians, that their love for you will have an impact for good on those around them.

Jesus, bread of life,

**help us to trust in your provision for us.**

Lord, we are saddened when we hear of abuse. We pray for all those who have suffered and still live with the consequences. We pray that they will be able to find peace of mind and healing of deep hurts with you. And we pray for their abusers, that they will come to a place of repentance and know your forgiveness.

Jesus, bread of life,

**help us to trust in your provision for us.**

We thank you, Lord, for this church community and the nourishment we find by spending time here with you. Fill us with your Spirit as we praise you so that we may go out from here enriched and ready to serve you in the wider world. Help us to encourage one another and build each other up, that this may be a place of affirmation, acceptance and love. We pray for our leaders, both locally and nationally, asking that you will provide them with wisdom, patience and grace.

Jesus, bread of life,

**help us to trust in your provision for us.**

Lord, we offer ourselves to you as we prepare to go forward into the coming week. We pause in the stillness now to think of the places we will go to and name some of the people we will meet. We offer any potentially difficult situations up to you, asking for your courage to face them. Teach us not to take your gifts for granted, but instead to keep our eyes fixed on you. Draw us constantly back to you to find the energy, strength and refreshment that we need for our daily living.

Jesus, bread of life,  
**help us to trust in your provision for us,**  
**Amen.**

**Hymn: Guide me O thou great Jehovah (StF 465)**

Guide me, O my great Redeemer,  
pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but you are mighty;  
hold me with your powerful hand.  
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven,  
feed me now and evermore,  
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,  
where the healing waters flow.  
Let the fire and cloudy pillar  
lead me all my journey through.  
Strong Deliverer, strong Deliverer,  
ever be my strength and shield,  
ever be my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,  
bid my anxious fears subside.  
Death of death, and hell's Destruction,  
land me safe on Canaan's side.  
Songs of praises, songs of praises  
I will ever sing to you,  
I will ever sing to you.

**Blessing:**

As we seek to do what you want, Lord,  
may we bring bread to the hungry –  
food for bodies and food for souls,  
strength for the journey, and hope for the future.  
In Jesus' name.

**Amen.**



## Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> August 2024 – 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Christine Legge*

### Call to Worship:

#### Psalm 130: 1 - 4

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;

<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive  
to my cry for mercy.

<sup>3</sup> If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,  
Lord, who could stand?

<sup>4</sup> But with you there is forgiveness,  
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

### Opening Prayer:

O Lord, our king and our Father,  
we come before you in the knowledge  
that we are always loved and welcomed.  
Your children return in joy and thanksgiving! **Amen.**

### Hymn: New every morning is the love (StF 137)

New every morning is the love  
Our wakening and uprising prove;  
Through sleep and darkness safely brought,  
Restored to life, and power, and thought.

New mercies, each returning day  
Hover around us while we pray  
New perils past, new sins forgiven,  
New thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven.

If on our daily course our mind  
Be set to hallow all we find,  
New treasures still, of countless price,  
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,  
As more of heaven in each we see;  
Some softening gleam of love and prayer

Shall dawn on every cross and care.  
The trivial round, the common task,  
Will furnish all we ought to ask;  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God.

Prepare us, Lord, in your dear love  
For perfect rest with you above;  
And help us, this and every day,  
To live more nearly as we pray.

John Keble (1792 – 1866)

### **Prayers of Adoration, Confession and Forgiveness**

#### **A Prayer of Adoration:**

Father, we adore you for your faithfulness.  
You have faith in us when our faith in you falters.  
Son, we adore you for showing us the way.  
You are the way, the truth and the life.  
Holy Spirit, we adore you for comforting and counselling us.  
You are God's gift to us.

**Amen.**

#### **A Prayer of Confession and an Assurance of Forgiveness**

##### **A Prayer of Confession:**

Father, we confess that we find love difficult and complicated, especially when it comes to our nearest and dearest.  
We often grieve the hearts of those we love the most, and, in doing so, we disappoint you, for you are love.  
We are sorry for all the times we have let our loved ones down, and fallen short of the standards you set for us.  
Help us to love with your generosity of spirit, your loving acceptance and unselfish intentions.     **Amen.**

##### **Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Forgiveness comes so easily to you, O Lord, while for us it is often difficult.  
May the knowledge of your forgiving nature be our solace, our example and our goal.     **Amen.**

## **Bible Readings: 2 Samuel 18: 5-9, 15, 31-33**

<sup>5</sup> The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

<sup>6</sup> David’s army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> There Israel’s troops were routed by David’s men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. <sup>8</sup> The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

<sup>9</sup> Now Absalom happened to meet David’s men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom’s hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

### **2 Samuel 18: 15**

<sup>15</sup> And ten of Joab’s armour-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

### **2 Samuel 18: 31-33**

<sup>31</sup> Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.”

<sup>32</sup> The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.”

<sup>33</sup> The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

## **Bible Reading: John 6: 35, 41-51**

<sup>35</sup> Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

<sup>41</sup> At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” <sup>42</sup> They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

<sup>43</sup> “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. <sup>44</sup> “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. <sup>45</sup> It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’<sup>[a]</sup> Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. <sup>46</sup> No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. <sup>47</sup> Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. <sup>48</sup> I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. <sup>50</sup> But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

## **Hymn: Immortal, invisible, God only wise (StF 55)**

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,  
Most blessèd, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,  
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,  
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest in might;  
Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring above  
Thy clouds, which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, to both great and small;  
In all life Thou livest, the true life of all;  
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
And wither and perish—but naught changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,  
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling their sight;  
But of all Thy rich graces this grace, Lord, impart  
Take the veil from our faces, the vile from our heart.

All laud we would render; O help us to see  
'Tis only the splendour of light hideth Thee,  
And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,  
Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ to the heart.

Walter Chalmers Smith (1824 – 1908)

### **Reflection:**

A writer remembers that as a child, he was desperate to own a Rubik's Cube and was thrilled to receive one as a Christmas gift. He spent a day making small changes to the cube and then 'solving' it back to its original state, where every side of the cube is a different colour. It didn't take long, however, before he changed too much! He was over-confident and spun it through too many twists and turns. However hard he tried, he couldn't get it back to its original state. He had no one to blame but himself and he was devastated. He would have loved to say "I persevered, learned how the cube works and returned it to its 'perfect' state", but the truth is it went into a cupboard where he wouldn't see it or be shamed by it anymore. He even considered unpeeling the coloured stickers and gluing them back on in the 'right' way or taking the cube apart, but ultimately he just gave up on it. David is reaping the consequences of his earlier mistakes as his children fight to succeed him. He wants things to go back to how they were – to restore his relationship with Absalom – but he can't. He asks his generals to spare Absalom but this is a fight for the kingdom, where the losing side are rarely treated mercifully. So Joab's armour bearers make certain of Absalom's defeat when they get the chance.

Some things are beyond our power but that doesn't mean hiding away from them. David's grief at his son's death is natural and without it he would not be human, but he clearly wishes he could do things over again. He can't – and now he will need to live with what has happened. We have all made mistakes in life, some of which have consequences that we are still bearing today. We can't undo what has been done. God is not punishing us. The consequence of God giving us free will is that he can't protect us from the results of our own decisions. God is, however, right there with us, in the

midst of all our grief and anger and regret. As we turn back to God we receive forgiveness, wisdom from the experience and the certain hope that God will be with us in the future, helping us as we try to follow him more closely.

### **Hymn: O love that wilt not let me go (StF 636)**

O Love that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee;  
I give thee back the life I owe,  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be.

O Light that foll'west all my way,  
I yield my flick'ring torch to thee;  
My heart restores its borrowed ray,  
That in thy sunshine's blaze its day  
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy that seekest me through pain,  
I cannot close my heart to thee;  
I trace the rainbow through the rain,  
And feel the promise is not vain,  
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross that liftest up my head,  
I dare not ask to fly from thee;  
I lay in dust life's glory dead,  
And from the ground there blossoms red  
Life that shall endless be.

### **Prayers for Others and Lord's Prayer:**

This week, as we pray for other people, let us ask God to help us see them from his perspective, rather than making assumptions.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,  
**help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.**

Lord, we lift to you our world leaders. It is so easy to be critical of them, to believe what we read in the papers or on social media rather than seeing them as people just like us with needs like ours. In an increasingly unstable

world we ask you to give them wisdom and integrity. Help them to put the needs of their country before their own desires. We pause for a moment of silence now, as we try to imagine what it must be like to walk in their shoes.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,  
**help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.**

We pray for countries at war or suffering long periods of unrest, Middle East, Ukraine and Afghanistan and the many others of conflict and unrest. It's so easy for people to take sides and fight rather than try and see the world from the perspective of others. We pray that a new desire to love and treasure others may sweep this planet, bringing in a new reign of peace.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,  
**help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.**

In our country, Lord, we thank you for the example given to us by the King and ask you to continue to uphold him and the whole Royal family in prayer. We pray for our recently elected government, as the problems of Covid-19 continue to beset us all.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,  
**help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.**

Lord, we pray for our communities and all who live and serve in them. We thank you for those who sweep our streets, empty our bins and clean our shops, workplaces and hospitals. We pray for your strength and reassurance for our over-stretched NHS and for tired teachers trying to have a summer break. We pray for the unemployed and those on zero hours contracts struggling to make ends meet. And, Lord, we pray for the 'onlys', the people overlooked by society or considered insignificant. We ask that we, as a church, may find ways to help the disadvantaged in our communities in the short-term whilst praying that our government may have the courage to find long-term solutions.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,  
**help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.**

We come before you, Lord, in sorrow that so many people in our world are abused or neglected because of their race, colour or gender. We ask your forgiveness for any part we have played in preventing your world from

being a place of harmony and stability. We lift up the millions of refugees fleeing unsafe homes. We pray for the migrants trying to cross the channel and we pray too for those who exploit them. We ask you to give strength and courage to all those fighting for justice in our world. We ask you to give us all the eyes to see everyone as made in your image with equal worth.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,  
**help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.**

Finally, Lord, we commit to you those who live around us. We picture them in our minds now as we bring them to you for blessing: our friends, our neighbours, the people who walk their dogs past our house, those we say 'hi' to in the street or at the station or on the bus but don't know their names. We pray for those who live behind closed doors that we never see, those we used to spend time with who, for whatever reason, we don't see anymore. And we pray for those whom we avoid... Lord, you know them all by name and we thank you for each of them and for the way they touch our lives. Give us the grace to be good neighbours, willing to go the extra mile for all these people who are, underneath it all, just the same as us.

All-seeing and ever-loving God,  
**help us to see others as your children, cherished by you.**

Help us to serve one another  
**because we are all made in your image.**

**Help us to bring your love to everyone we meet this week.  
Amen.**

### **Hymn: It is God who holds the nations (StF 705)**

It is God who holds the nations  
In the hollow of his hand;  
It is God whose light is shining  
In the darkness of the land;  
It is God who builds the City  
On the Rock and not on sand:  
May the living God be praised!

It is God whose purpose summons us  
To use the present hour;



Who recalls us to our senses  
When a nation's life turns sour;  
In the disciple of freedom  
We shall know God's saving power:  
May the living God be praised!

When a thankful nation, looking back  
Has cause to celebrate  
Those who win our admiration  
By their service to the state;  
When self-giving is a measure  
Of the greatness of the great:  
May the living God be praised!

God reminds us every sunrise  
That the world is ours on lease:  
For the sake of life tomorrow  
May our love for it increase;  
May all races live together,  
Share its riches, be at peace:  
May the living God be praised!

Fred Pratt Green (1903 – 2000)

**A Sending Out Prayer:**

Almighty God, we thank you for the freedom you give us. Guide us in the week to come. Through our actions, may we share your love and kindness and draw people closer to you. When we make mistakes, help us to make amends quickly so your grace is still seen. We give this week to you and ask that your will would be done. **Amen.**

**Blessing:**

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you now and with all those whom you love and cherish,  
in this world and the next, for evermore. **Amen.**

## Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2024 – 20<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap*

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.  
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

### **Call to Worship:**

God, who is wise beyond our understanding;  
Creator, whose discernment directs the paths of the universe;  
Father, whose loving guidance nurtures and protects Your family:  
we approach Your throne in all our human vulnerability, to learn and  
receive from You. **Amen.**

### **Hymn: I Sing the Almighty Power of God (StF 107)**

I sing the almighty power of God,  
That made the mountains rise,  
That spread the flowing seas abroad,  
And built the lofty skies.

I sing the wisdom that ordained  
The sun to rule the day;  
The moon shines full at His command,  
And all the stars obey.

I sing the goodness of the Lord,  
That filled the earth with food;  
He formed the creatures with His word,  
And then pronounced them good.

Lord, how Your wonders are displayed  
Where'er I turn my eye,  
If I survey the ground I tread,  
Or gaze upon the sky!

God's hand is my perpetual guard,  
He guides me with His eye,  
Why should I then forget the Lord,  
Whose love is ever nigh.

Isaac Watts (1664 – 1748)

### **Prayer of Praise:**

Lord of all,  
we praise You for the universe in all its wonder,  
for the world in all its beauty and for life itself in all its incredible variety.  
There is so much that gives us pleasure, offers fulfilment and captures our  
imagination;  
so much that challenges and inspires, speaking to us now of Your  
wonderful love and causing us to look forward with anticipation.  
Forgive us for so often abusing all You have given -  
despoiling this world, failing to appreciate it as we should,  
treating it as ours by right rather than entrusted as Your gift.  
Open our eyes to the countless blessings and numerous riches You have so  
freely given, and help us to show our appreciation by safeguarding them for  
future generations to enjoy in turn.

Loving God, You call us to distinctive discipleship,  
A way of life that sets us apart from others:  
not a self-righteous superiority based on judgmental intolerance,  
but a quality of love and a willingness to serve that shows itself in  
everything we say and do.  
Forgive us that we fall so short of that calling,  
compromising what we believe for fear of mockery. Forgive us that we go  
along with the way of the crowd rather than follow the demanding choices  
of Christ.  
In Your great wisdom, speak to us now,  
challenge our complacency, and give us wisdom to be different.  
In Christ's name. **Amen.**

### **Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:**

Gracious God,  
once more we thank You for the wonder of Your love and the amazing  
extent of your mercy.  
We have failed you in so much,  
repeatedly ignoring Your will and breaking Your commandments, yet,  
despite our betrayal,  
You not only forgive but also put our mistakes behind us.  
However often we go astray, however great our faults, and however weak  
the love we show in return,  
You are always willing to forget and move on.

Teach us the wisdom of such love.  
Touch our hearts with Your goodness,  
and so may we learn to let go of past hurts and build instead for the future.  
May we be agents of Your healing, redeeming and renewing grace,  
to the glory of Your name. **Amen.**

**You may like to join in The Lord's Prayer here ... Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen.**

### **Old Testament Reading: 1 Kings chapter 2 v. 10 – 12 and chapter 3 vs. 3-14 NIV 'SOLOMON ASKS FOR WISDOM'**

#### **Introduction:**

David's 40-year reign comes to an end, and he is succeeded by his son Solomon. The new king goes to worship at the most prominent 'high place', where God appears to him in a dream and asks him what gift he would like. Solomon chooses an 'understanding mind' to help him govern as wisely as his father. God, pleased by this request, grants him this and more.

'Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. He had reigned for forty years over Israel – seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the statues of his father, David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense in the high places.

The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

At Gibeon, the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream, and God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."

Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to Your servant, my father David, because He was faithful to You and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day.

"Now, O Lord my God, you have made Your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give Your servant a

discerning heart to govern Your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of Yours?" The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of Your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for – both riches and honour – so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." **Amen.**

### **Hymn: Be Thou my Vision (StF 545)**

Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
Be all else but nought to me, save that Thou art,  
Be Thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
Both waking and sleeping, Thy presence my Light.

Be Thou my wisdom, be Thou my true word,  
Be Thou ever with me, and I with Thee, Lord:  
Be Thou my great Father, Thy child let me be;  
Be Thou in me dwelling, and I one with Thee.

Be Thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
Be Thou my whole armour,  
Be Thou my true might;  
Be Thou my soul's shelter, be Thou my strong tower;  
O raise Thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:  
Be Thou mine inheritance now and always:  
be Thou and Thou only the first in my heart:  
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure Thou art.

High King of heaven, Thou heaven's bright Sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won;  
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
Still be Thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish 8<sup>th</sup> Century translated by Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880 – 1931)

## **Gospel Reading: John chapter 6 vs. 51- 58**

### **‘JESUS, THE BREAD OF LIFE’**

#### **Introduction:**

Jesus, addressing a large crowd, makes a very bold statement. It confuses the crowds – and it may well confuse us.

In this short passage, He talks about Himself in a way that is very difficult to understand. We need to ask God in His wisdom to help us see its relevance for us.

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live for ever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

Then the Jews began to sharply argue among themselves, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?”

Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live for ever.”

#### **Reflection: ‘CHOICES’**

Whether we realise it or not, throughout our lives, both consciously and subconsciously, we are making choices every day. When we are young, they are relatively simple; e.g. Do we want cereal or toast? Play indoors or out? Do our homework or play on our internet games, our choice of pets. As we develop, our choices become more important; college, university or apprenticeship; our choice of career; live at home or seek our independence. As we get older, choice becomes more complex still; our choice of relationships, rent or buy; choices of furnishing and decoration; where to live; bettering our prospects; how to invest savings. Later in life, some choices are made for us: provision and place of care; managing our finances. The list is endless. Then there are spiritual choices: what do we believe - what do we accept or reject; the decision to become a Christian and working out how that shapes our lives. Some choices are easy, others are more far reaching and shape the person we become. Life has always

been and will always be fashioned by choice. But how can we make the best choices? One answer comes in our reading from 1 Kings of a series of choices that would define the future of God's people; and that is wisdom.

King David had died and a successor needed to be appointed. And in his wisdom, God had chosen David's son Solomon. Chapter 2 shows us that though only a young man, he had shown great wisdom in the way he had treated those who were a threat to him. So now, Solomon has to make choices. He could have run away and sought asylum; he could have chosen to divide the Kingdom among his brothers. So what did he choose; to take his father's throne and establish his kingdom. He had formed an alliance with the Pharaoh in Egypt and married his daughter-was that a wise choice? It could have led to divided loyalties. Then, he finished building his palace and finally the Temple of God. Why? So that he could count the wealth he had amassed or offer sacrifices and worship to God, and give Israel a place where they could do the same?

God appeared to Solomon in a dream and challenged him to make another choice; was he to do as God told him, listen to God's plan for his life, or invite him to make a request? A strange choice with perhaps an obvious answer - to ask for what he wanted. Who wouldn't? But Solomon shows great wisdom in his choice. Because of God's kindness and faithfulness to his father David and himself - he asks for the one thing he knows he lacks - 'a discerning heart' - in other words the wisdom to govern the people and discern the difference between right and wrong. God is pleased with Solomon because he made the right choice. He could have asked for wealth, long life or the death of his enemies. So, at last, Solomon has realised that his choices must be replaced in searching for the wisdom of God so that he may rule justly and compassionately over God's people. He does this with great humility and submission to God's will, seeking the common good, and the result will be all the blessings that will follow.

The wisdom of God is a key factor in making good choices.

In our reading from John, we hear words of Jesus which give us more encouragement in making wise choices. It comes as the conclusion of a lengthy conversation between Jesus and the crowds where they have been asking for signs and miracles so that they may choose to believe in order to gain life. He reminds them again that He is the bread of life. The crowd would be familiar with their ancestors eating manna - 'bread' - in the

wilderness but its intention was to meet their immediate need. The bread Jesus speaks of will not just satisfy them now but will satisfy their eternal hunger. He is the living bread which He will sacrifice for the life of the world. Jesus stresses that this is an important choice to make. Verse 57 speaks of His relationship with God. The living God sent Him and He lives because of Him. A difficult concept to understand. As Jesus depends on God for His life so the person who feeds on Jesus depends on Him for their life.

So, just as ordinary bread (or its equivalent) is a vital part of our physical being, so Jesus, as the living bread, is a physical part of our spiritual being. Our choices are becoming more complex. Choose Jesus - choose eternal life. But God has given us tools to help us in our decision - making: worship, prayer, reading Scripture. They help us develop the gift of discernment - wisdom.

Attributed to theologian Reinold Niebuhr, this verse says:

*“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,  
The courage to change the things I can,  
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

*Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time,  
Accepting hardship as a pathway to peace,  
Taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it,  
Trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will,  
So that I may be reasonably happy in this life,  
And supremely happy with You forever in the next. Amen”*

### **Hymn: Break Thou the Bread of Life (StF 153)**

Break Thou the bread of life,  
O Lord to me,  
As Thou didst break the loaves  
Beside the sea.  
Beyond the sacred page  
I seek Thee Lord;  
My spirit longs for Thee,  
O Living Word.

Thou art the Bread of Life,  
O Lord, to me,  
Thy holy word the truth



That saveth me;  
Give me to eat and live  
With Thee above;  
Teach me to love Thy truth,  
For Thou art love.

O send Thy Spirit, Lord  
Now unto me,  
That He may touch my eyes,  
And make me see;  
Show me the truth concealed  
Within Thy word,  
And in Thy book revealed  
I see the Lord.

v.1 Mary Artemesia Lathbury (1841 – 1913)  
vs. 2 & 3 Alexander Groves (1842 – 1909)

### **Prayers of Love and Concern:**

Lord, we come to You asking for You to fill us and feed us today. There are so many ways in which we are empty and need Your nourishment.

Jesus, bread of life:

**feed us and nourish us with Yourself.**

We pray for those who are hungry. Those experiencing physical hunger in parts of the world where there is not enough food. For those on the brink of starvation. Particularly we pray for places which we read of and see in the news. We pray for those who have enough to feed their families until the rains fail and the crops die. We pray for all organisations seeking to give people the bread they need. We pray for people in refugee camps or homeless on our streets. We thank You for those who feed them in soup kitchens or hostels. We bring to mind our local Foodbanks and ask you to give courage to those who need them but feel ashamed to ask for help.

Jesus, bread of life:

**feed us and nourish us with Yourself.**

Lord Jesus, we know that Your heart of compassion aches for the pain of the world. So we pray for all those who need the bread of comfort in their lives. We think of those we have heard about on the news who have faced trouble and pain this week. We pray for those in our own community who

are suffering from physical or mental illness. We ask for Your comfort for those who have other difficulties: victims of abuse, those who live in unhappy homes, those who are confused and don't know where to turn. We ask You to wrap Your loving arms around all those who mourn. And, in the stillness, we bring our own troubles, worries and sorrows to You, knowing that you care about everything that bothers us however trivial it might seem.

Jesus, bread of life:

**feed us and nourish us with Yourself.**

We bring to mind those who are spiritually hungry. Those who are searching for something more beyond themselves but who have not yet found You. Give us the wisdom and the sensitivity to guide people to You. We pray for the young people of our country, so many of whom have never had the opportunity to meet with Jesus or anyone who loves Him. We pray for all those who received exam results this week. We pray for Your guidance as they seek where to go next with either their education or into the workplace. Give courage to Christians in schools, colleges, universities and workplaces that they may be a shining witness to their friends and colleagues. We pray for those Christians who are persecuted for their faith yet still remain constant, trusting that You will supply their needs.

Jesus, bread of life:

**feed us and nourish us with Yourself.**

Finally, Lord, in the stillness, we bring our own personal needs to You. Help us to rejoice that You care about every detail of our lives, even the ones we think You don't notice. We ask that You give us food for our journeys this week. And we name in the silence, places or situations that might be hard for us. Nourish us with Your presence in every situation we find ourselves, particularly those unexpected moments where we need extra help.

Jesus, bread of life:

**feed us and nourish us with Yourself.**

Breathe Your life into our lives.

Fill us with your Spirit that we may overflow with You. **Amen.**

## **Hymn: Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart (StF 520)**

Give to me, Lord, a thankful heart  
And a discerning mind;  
Give as I play the Christian's part,  
The strength to finish what I start  
And act on what I find.

When, in the rush of days, my will  
Is habit-bound and slow,  
Help me to keep in vision still  
What love and power and peace can fill  
A life that trusts in You.

By Your divine and urgent claim,  
And by Your human face,  
Kindle our sinking hearts to flame,  
And as You teach the world Your name  
Let it become Your place.

Jesus, with all Your Church I long  
To see Your Kingdom come;  
Show me Your way of righting wrong  
And turning sorrow into song  
Until You bring me home.

Thomas Caryl Micklem (1925–2003)

### **Blessing:**

King of kings, You have all the wisdom, the glory and the majesty.  
Continue to give us Your gift of wisdom each day so that we might serve  
You in all that we do. **Amen.**

Some material adapted from © 'Roots For Churches'

## Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> August 2024 – 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

*This service has been compiled by Rev'd Liz Singleton*

### **Opening Prayer:**

God of power and strength,  
you are more than enough to meet our every need,  
you want only the best for us;  
take us as we are, however we feel.  
We gather together in your presence.  
We come to learn more about your strength,  
and how we can be strong in you and for you.  
In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Amen.**

### **Hymn: Angel voices ever singing (StF 39/HP 484)**

Angel voices, ever singing  
round thy throne of light,  
angel-harps, for ever ringing,  
rest not day nor night;  
thousands only live to bless thee  
and confess thee  
Lord of might.

Thou who art beyond the farthest  
mortal eye can scan,  
can it be that thou regardest  
sinful woman, man?  
Can we know that thou art near us,  
and wilt hear us?  
Yea, we can.

Lord, we know that thou rejoicest  
o'er each work of thine;  
thou didst ears and hands and voices  
for thy praise design;  
maker's art and music's measure  
for thy pleasure  
all combine.

In thy house, great God, we offer  
of thine own to thee;  
and for thine acceptance proffer  
all unworthily  
hearts and minds and hands and voices  
in our choicest  
psalmody.

Honour, glory, might, and merit  
thine shall ever be,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
blessed Trinity.  
Of the best that thou hast given  
earth and heaven  
render thee.

### **‘Always with me’**

What are the items that travel with you? The things that are always with you? If you carry a handbag, or a ‘man bag’, or a rucksack, around with you what do you keep in it? What do you always have in the glove compartment of your car? What would you never be without?

I wonder if any of the things you’ve thought of are for reasons of security, safety or protection? In the summer I will often have a small tube of sun screen in my bag. In the winter a pair of gloves. I nearly always have lip salve in my bag as well and I have a personal alarm which I sometimes put in my bag and other times slip into my pocket.

In today’s reading we’ll be hearing about the things God gives us to help us in different situations. Things that we should keep with us at all times.

The reading comes from Ephesians and like many of the stories we read in the Bible uses imagery that would be familiar to the people of the time. Still part of the Roman Empire the first hearers would have been used to seeing Roman soldiers on the streets every day. Soldiers who had been trained to fight and who wore a uniform that signified power and strength. Paul uses this picture as he addresses the new Christians in Ephesus. He describes how God gives them powerful protection and he encourages them not to be afraid. The armour that God gives them is not for fighting against people but for standing up against the things that are wrong in the world. Paul tells them that God’s love for them makes them as strong as the

strongest person they know, and that they must use this strength to share God's message of peace. And Paul's message is all the more amazing when we recall that he is writing these words from a prison cell in Rome. We'll hear what he has to say after we've sung our next hymn.

### **Hymn: For I'm building a people of power (Mission Praise 151)**

For I'm building a people of power  
and I'm making a people of praise,  
that will move through this land by my Spirit,  
and will glorify my precious name.  
Build your Church, Lord,  
make us strong, Lord,  
join our hearts, Lord, through your Son;  
make us one, Lord, in your body,  
in the kingdom of your Son.

### **Bible Reading: Ephesians 6: 10 - 20 NLT**

A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armour so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places.

Therefore, put on every piece of God's armour so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm. Stand your ground, putting on the belt of truth and the body armour of God's righteousness. For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News so that you will be fully prepared. In addition to all of these, hold up the shield of faith to stop the fiery arrows of the devil. Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

And pray for me, too. Ask God to give me the right words so I can boldly explain God's mysterious plan that the Good News is for Jews and Gentiles alike. I am in chains now, still preaching this message as God's

ambassador. So pray that I will keep on speaking boldly for him, as I should.

**Hymn: Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart (StF 545/HP 378)**

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,  
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;  
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,  
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,  
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;  
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;  
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;  
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;  
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:  
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:  
be thou mine inheritance now and always;  
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:  
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright Sun,  
O grant me its joys after victory is won;  
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

**Reflection:**

Paul is writing to the Ephesians whilst he is under arrest and he shows great vulnerability by admitting to the situation he finds himself in. He asks for prayer that he might be the sort of Christian that he is encouraging his readers to be. So I wonder what kind of vulnerabilities do we face and what might we be praying for in order that we can be the Christians we want to be. Or rather, so that we can be the Christians God asks us to be.

One of the key teaching points in Ephesians 6 is that we aren't called to be 'stand alone' Christians but to stand together and support one another in whatever ways we can. The armour of God is for the community so there is something in Paul's words that challenges us to think about how we

might gather our individual prayers so that we become better praying communities and live out our faith in a more corporate way. We can do this by sharing together the things that concern us and pray together about them. Meeting to read the Bible together and to think and talk about what we understand about what we read and what confuses us. Or perhaps getting together over a coffee to discuss the previous Sunday's service, be that the printed service or the service in church. And I don't just mean talking about whether or not you liked the hymns!! (Although of course the words of hymns have a lot to say to us). No, I'm thinking about a conversation about the sermon content for example. Did you relate to it? What was the message the preacher was trying to convey? And there's never anything wrong with saying that actually you didn't understand it! And all these things can happen physically in person in a church building, a home, a coffee shop.....or face to face electronically on Zoom or FaceTime or other media platforms. Encouraging one another in our faith and living out our faith corporately doesn't need to be difficult – we just need to have a desire to do it.

Paul talks, as do other biblical writers, about us facing a spiritual battle that we need to be equipped to face. That imagery isn't necessarily helpful to many people, especially in our democratic society, but how about if we look at it in a slightly different way. The day-to-day 'temptations' we each face that draw us away from times of prayer or reading the Bible or going to church. Our lack of confidence in being able to talk about what we believe when people ask us. All things that God equips us to overcome through those gifts that Paul refers to as the armour of God. Gifts that grow when we spend time with God and meet and share with one another. For in this way we equip, strengthen and unite ourselves by faith for God's work.

And should you need further encouragement remember these words:

### **The Difference**

I got up early one morning  
and rushed right into the day;  
I had so much to accomplish  
that I didn't have time to pray.  
Problems just tumbled about me,  
and heavier came each task.  
“Why doesn't God help me?” I wondered.



He answered, "You didn't ask."  
I wanted to see joy and beauty,  
but the day toiled on, grey and bleak,  
I wondered why God didn't show me.  
He said, "But you didn't seek".  
I tried to come into God's presence;  
I used all my keys at the lock.  
God gently and lovingly chided,  
"My child, you didn't knock".  
I woke up early this morning,  
and paused before entering the day,  
I had so much to accomplish  
that I had to take time to pray.

**Hymn: Your words to me are life and health (StF 164)**

Your words to me are life and health;  
Pour strength into my soul;  
Enable, guide, and teach my heart  
To reach its perfect goal!

Your words to me are light and truth;  
From day to day they show  
Their wisdom, passing earthly lore  
As in their truth I grow

Your words to me are full of joy  
Of beauty, peace, and grace;  
From them I learn your blessed will  
Through them I see your face

Your words you have fulfilled on earth  
Yourself, the living Word;  
Within my heart your image print  
In clearest lines, O Lord

**Prayer:**

Loving God, we come before you with our prayers, inspired by your love  
present within us and willing to respond.

Lord, we are your children: **live in us today.**

We pray for the world in which we live, your world. May those who make decisions on our behalf do so with compassion and wisdom; may the leaders of nations look upon their people and act for their good and well-being; and may we all seek ways in which we can play our part to care for this planet and your creation.

Lord, we are your children: **live in us today.**

We pray for our churches, for all the different groups who meet in and use our buildings week by week. May we use the possibilities presented to us reach out into our communities and make your love real in the lives of those around us.

Lord, we are your children: **live in us today.**

We pray for those who have recently received their exam results. Whatever those results were may the students and their families know a sense of peace and hope and may they know that your love and ours is not dependent on achievement.

Lord, we are your children: **live in us today.**

We pray for each other, especially those among us who are sad, lonely or in pain. And we pray for those we know who are living each day wondering how they will cope; those who are anxious about loved ones or themselves; those living with terminal illness; those facing an unknown future; those grieving the death of a loved one. May we bear the burdens of them and of one another.

Lord, we are your children: **live in us today.**

These, and all our prayers, we bring in the name of the one who came to enable us to be more than we are, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ....

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Hymn: We are marching in the light of God. (StF 483)**

We are marching in the light of God,  
we are marching in the light of God.  
We are marching in the light of God,  
we are marching in the light of God.  
We are marching, we are marching, oh,  
We are marching in the light of God.

We are marching, we are marching, oh,  
We are marching in the light of God.

We are living in the love of God,  
we are living in the love of God.  
We are living in the love of God,  
we are living in the love of God.  
We are living, we are living, oh,  
We are living in the love of God.  
We are living, we are living, oh,  
We are living in the love of God.

We are moving in the power of God,  
we are moving in the power of God.  
We are moving in the power of God,  
we are moving in the power of God.  
We are moving, we are moving, oh,  
We are moving in the power of God.  
We are moving, we are moving, oh,  
We are moving in the power of God.

**Closing Prayer:**

Wonderful God,  
We praise you that not only are you our strength,  
But you enable us to be strong together.  
Thank you that you don't want us to stand alone,  
that together with you, and each other,  
we can do great things for your kingdom.  
We can be the people you created us to be.  
Thank you, Lord.  
Amen

***Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.***

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