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## Service for the 9th Sunday after Trinity, 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021

*A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today.*

### CALL TO WORSHIP

Almighty God, who sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your Church, open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in love and joy and peace; 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.

HYMN: Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts

*If you would like to sing this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,  
the fount of life, the light of men;  
from the best bliss that earth imparts  
we turn unfilled to thee again.

3 We taste thee, O thou living bread,  
and long to feast upon thee still;  
we drink of thee, the fountain-head,  
and thirst our souls from thee to fill.

2 Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;  
thou savest those that on thee call;  
to them that seek thee thou art good,  
to them that find thee, all in all.

4 Our restless spirits yearn for thee,  
where'er our changeful lot is cast,  
glad when thy gracious smile we see,  
blest when our faith can hold thee fast.

5 O Jesus, ever with us stay;  
make all our moments calm and bright;  
chase the dark night of sin away;  
shed o'er the world thy holy light.

*Charles Wesley*

### PRAYERS

*Let us pray*

In the words of St Paul, "Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ". O Lord, our heavenly Father, we come to you today with praise and thanksgiving in our hearts.

We come with thanksgiving, no matter what has happened to us in the last week. When we have had difficulties, or disappointments, or hurt, we realise that it is your strength which has supported us and enabled us to stand the test.

When we have had good times, the knowledge of your love and care for us puts an extra spring into our steps and a brighter smile on our faces.

We have so much to be thankful for, is it any wonder that we should be praising your name?  
We praise you for your wisdom, for you have shown us the way of truth and right.  
We praise you for your courage; for through Jesus, you showed us that pain and even death can be overcome.

We praise you for your love; for you have proved to us that the exercise of love can, indeed, change the hearts and minds of people for good.

We praise you for your gifts of faith and hope; the gift of Faith to keep us on the right road, even through darkness when we could easily lose our way, and the gift of Hope that lifts our spirits and helps us to strive ever harder to create a better world around us.

**Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

**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.**

SCRIPTURE READING St John 6: 24-35

<sup>24</sup> When the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they got into those boats and went to Capernaum, looking for him.

<sup>25</sup> When the people found Jesus on the other side of the lake, they said to him, "Teacher, when did you get here?"

<sup>26</sup> Jesus answered, "I am telling you the truth: you are looking for me because you ate the bread and had all you wanted, not because you understood my miracles. <sup>27</sup> Do not work for food that spoils; instead, work for the food that lasts for eternal life. This is the food which the Son of Man will give you, because God, the Father, has put his mark of approval on him."

<sup>28</sup> So they asked him, "What can we do in order to do what God wants us to do?"

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, "What God wants you to do is to believe in the one he sent."

<sup>30</sup> They replied, "What miracle will you perform so that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? <sup>31</sup> Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, just as the scripture says, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

<sup>32</sup> "I am telling you the truth," Jesus said. "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the real bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread that God gives is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

<sup>34</sup> "Sir," they asked him, "give us this bread always."

<sup>35</sup> "I am the bread of life," Jesus told them. "Those who come to me will never be hungry; those who believe in me will never be thirsty."

HYMN: Christ, from whom all blessings flow

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment*

1. Christ, from whom all blessings flow,  
perfecting the saints below,  
hear us, who thy nature share,  
who thy mystic body are.

2. Join us, in one spirit join,  
let us still receive of thine;  
still for more on thee we call,  
thou who fillest all in all.

3. Closer knit to thee, our Head,  
nourished, Lord, by thee, and fed;  
let us daily growth receive,  
more in Jesus Christ believe.

4. Never from thy service move,  
needful to each other prove;  
use the grace on each bestowed,  
tempered by the art of God.

5. Love, like death, has all destroyed,  
rendered all distinctions void;  
names and sects and parties fall;  
thou, O Christ, art all in all!

*Charles Wesley*

#### SCRIPTURE READING Ephesians 4: 1-16

4 I urge you, then—I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord: live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you. <sup>2</sup> Be always humble, gentle, and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another. <sup>3</sup> Do your best to preserve the unity which the Spirit gives by means of the peace that binds you together. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit, just as there is one hope to which God has called you. <sup>5</sup> There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism; <sup>6</sup> there is one God and Father of all people, who is Lord of all, works through all, and is in all.

<sup>7</sup> Each one of us has received a special gift in proportion to what Christ has given. <sup>8</sup> As the scripture says, “When he went up to the very heights, he took many captives with him; he gave gifts to people.”

<sup>9</sup> Now, what does “he went up” mean? It means that first he came down to the lowest depths of the earth. <sup>10</sup> So the one who came down is the same one who went up, above and beyond the heavens, to fill the whole universe with his presence. <sup>11</sup> It was he who “gave gifts to people”; he appointed some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastors and teachers. <sup>12</sup> He did this to prepare all God's people for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the body of Christ. <sup>13</sup> And so we shall all come together to that oneness in our faith and in our knowledge of the Son of God; we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's full stature. <sup>14</sup> Then we shall no longer be children, carried by the waves and blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent. <sup>15</sup> Instead, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up in every way to Christ, who is the head. <sup>16</sup> Under his control all the different parts of the body fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So when each separate part works as it should, the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.

REFLECTION: *Mr Keith Walton*

Ephesus was an important city at that time. It was one of the largest cities in the area and was a provincial capital. It was the home of one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the temple of Artemis. It was a place of many gods and great learning. In addition to the classical Greek and Roman Gods – many of their names being familiar to us – Roman Emperors were also regarded as gods. Although they had a degree of independence, the people of Ephesus would undoubtedly consider it prudent to include the emperors in their spectrum of gods.

The city's name means 'desirable' and it was, in many ways, a desirable place to live. It was also a city which meant a great deal to St Paul. The church in Ephesus was founded by Paul on his second missionary journey. The way that God takes a diverse group and combines them into a church is wonderful. There were Jews, idol worshippers, sorcerers, masters, slaves and rulers of the city; but they all came together, having heard the call of God. When Paul moved on he left Priscilla and Aquilla, two of his closest associates there, to continue the work.

On his third missionary journey, Paul spent two or three years in Ephesus. He spent his time weeding out false doctrines and pagan practices. It is not surprising that this was needed. Ephesus derived its greatness from commercial trade and religion, with much of the former being related to the latter. Worship in the temple of Artemis comprised the burning of incense and the playing of music, as a result of which people were worked up into an emotional frenzy with all sorts of immoral activities. Merchants hawking silver shrines also made it a difficult place to preach the gospel, yet Paul did – and with great success.

About a decade after the church had been started, Paul wrote a letter to the Ephesians, commending their faith and love. While some scholars argue that the letter was not just for the people of Ephesus but was to be taken and read throughout the area, because there are not the personal references we find in some of his other writing, it is clear that Paul was commending their faith. The Ephesians appeared well organised and busy. They had been growing, expanding and doing the will of God. Paul commends their sincerity. Teaching is, to Christians, what watering is to plants: necessary and strengthening. Aquilla, Priscilla and Apollos had all spent time 'watering' the Ephesian church. It should have been one of the most thoroughly instructed of all the first-century congregations. Of course, if you are familiar with the opening chapters of the book of Revelation, you will know that things did not stay that way: John, writing from exile on the Isle of Patmos, tells the Christians of Ephesus that they had lost their first love.

But let us return to a time when things were going well and when Paul writes to them. In verse 7, he writes that "Each one of us has received a special gift in proportion to what Christ has given". Each one receives a gift – not just the special people, not just the important people, not just the leaders, but each one of those to whom Paul was writing – and he was writing to us, as much as to the people of Ephesus. In the Methodist Church to which I belong, we refer to the 'priesthood of all believers', a concept common to many protestant churches: we believe that we have a relationship directly with God and do not need to go through priests to get access to him. I admit it is an idea that causes some

confusion, because it does not mean that there is nothing a minister can properly do that others in the congregation can't; but we all have our special gifts, talents or abilities. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul identifies fewer gifts than in other places; but he does refer to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers – and that covers a wide range of callings and abilities.

Paul was clearly concerned, even at that stage in the development of the church in Ephesus, about the challenges facing the people of that city; for he writes of getting away from being “blown about by every shifting wind of the teaching of deceitful people, who lead others into error by the tricks they invent”.

I'm sure that, at the moment, most of us feel blown about by the current guidance on how best to tackle the Covid pandemic. We feel confused when one government minister says one thing and then – a relatively short time later – another minister gives advice which is almost diametrically opposed to the first statement. We feel confused when the Prime Minister makes a statement and then, later in the day, makes a different statement. We feel confused listening to statements made by various experts which seem difficult to reconcile. So it's not difficult to imagine how the Christians of Ephesus might have felt as they heard a wide variety of eloquent speakers, each trying to justify the worship of different gods – and even some people of the Christian faith giving a different message to that which Paul gave.

It is quite possible that Paul, as he was writing this, thought of apostles and prophets as those who had already been given those roles, rather than these roles continuing into the future; we don't hear of people being described as apostles and prophets in later times, or even today. However, we do hear of people today being called evangelists as well as pastors and teachers. We all can, and should, be evangelists and teachers; for we can all play our part in building up the body of Christ.

Indeed, we must play our part, whatever that part might be, because that is part of our calling. We each help to prepare one another for the work of Christian service. That service may not be the same as the person sitting in front of you or behind you. We all have different talents, skills and abilities. What is true about the everyday things of life is also true of our life in Christ. When I was at school, I was always one of the last to be selected when teams were being picked to play rugby or cricket, which were the standard games options. The boys who were picked as team captains knew that I would never make a great contribution to the performance of the team: somehow, I had failed to pick up the rules and skills in my junior school time. However, I would never be turned away from the choir or orchestra for lack of ability. In the church, although I am a local preacher, I have never felt the call to become an ordained minister – that requires abilities which I feel I just don't have. Whilst I am comfortable preaching, within the local church and the wider church grouping, I feel I am more suited to some of the more administrative tasks.

The target for the Church begins with the unity of our faith. This is the body of Christian truth, rather than the act of belief. When believers are properly taught and faithfully do the work of service, unity of the faith is inevitable. We cannot create unity. God does so through his truth. Our job is not to disrupt what God has created. God's truth is not divided

against itself; so when his people are divided, it simply means that they are to that degree apart from his truth. This is not a matter of doing away with all the different denominations that exist. Each has its own particular emphasis and strength, but all acknowledge and accept that we are working for the same ends and for the same God.

PRAYERS of intercession

*Let us pray*

Lord God, hear our prayers of intercession.

In your turbulent world, there are so many situations which need our prayers, so many people who need the intervention of your love, that we here at Broadway URC can only bring a very few of them before you now.

You alone know the full extent of suffering, misery, degradation, abuse and hatred that exist around the world, yet we bring to you our own prayers and concerns, secure in the knowledge that you will listen, and do what you know is right to give help to those who need it.

We pray, O Lord, most earnestly for the strengthening of Christ's church throughout the world. Give continuing enthusiasm in those areas where your church is expanding and bring renewed faith and strength to those who work and worship in areas where your church is under threat or declining.

We pray also for those of no belief and those of other faiths. May they see that Christ's church, your church, is not a threat but a way of love and peace; so that they too may come to find your salvation and a new purpose for good in their lives.

Today, especially, we pray for those engaged in local mission in Christ's name. We know, Lord, that all of us have responsibility not just to try to live our lives in a Christian way, but also to share the good news of Christ's gospel with others in whatever way our talents lead us. For some of us, it is enough just for our beliefs to show in our everyday actions. Let the power of your love shine so brightly in our daily lives that others cannot fail to see and be changed by it.

Christ's mission was clear: he took his message and his transforming power to the sick and to the outcasts of society. So we pray for our hospital chaplains and visitors who, day in and day out, bring the soothing balm of your healing grace to those who are sick and suffering. Keep strengthening their love for you, so that they can always pass that love on to those who need it.

We pray for our prison chaplains and visitors, who labour in your name, ministering to the sinners and outcasts of our day. Remind them that there is joy in your heart when just one sinner returns to your fold, so that they may continue your work with enthusiasm.

Finally, Lord God, we pray for those we know personally who are in need of your help today...

All these things we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord and our Redeemer.

**Amen.**

HYMN: The church's one foundation

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 The church's one foundation  
is Jesus Christ, her Lord;  
she is his new creation  
by water and the Word:  
from heav'n he came and sought her  
to be his holy bride;  
with his own blood he bought her,  
and for her life he died.

2 Elect from ev'ry nation,  
yet one o'er all the earth,  
her charter of salvation  
one Lord, one faith, one birth;  
one holy name she blesses,  
partakes one holy food,  
and to one hope she presses,  
with ev'ry grace endued.

3 'Mid toil and tribulation,  
and tumult of her war,  
she waits the consummation  
of peace forevermore;  
till with the vision glorious  
her longing eyes are blest,  
and the great church victorious  
shall be the church at rest.

4 Yet she on earth hath union  
with the God the Three in One,  
and mystic sweet communion  
with those whose rest is won:  
O happy ones and holy!  
Lord, give us grace that we,  
like them, the meek and lowly,  
on high may dwell with thee.

*Samuel J Stone*

THE GRACE

*Let us pray*

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore.

**Amen.**