

East Durham Methodist Circuit

14th August 2022

Prepared by Bill Naylor

Theme: Be Prepared

Call to worship:

O come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant, Come ye O come ye to Bethlehem - not just at Christmas but today and every day. Come and learn from Jesus, who is here now and hears us now. Take a moment in silence to feel the presence of Our Lord.

Hymn:

How Great Thou Art

Stuart K Hine

StF 82

1. Oh Lord, my God when I, in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds Thy hands have made
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout the universe displayed

**Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art
Then sings my soul, my Saviour God to Thee
How great Thou art, how great Thou art**

2. And when I think that God, His Son not sparing
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing
He bled and died to take away my sin

3. When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration
And then proclaim, my God, how great Thou art

Welcome:

Good afternoon. Hope you are all well today, or as well as can be expected given the ups and downs of life we all have to contend with.

Today, the theme is 'Be Prepared'. For Christian folks it means having faith in God and remaining prepared for Jesus' eventual return, believing, trusting and waiting for Him whilst continuing to offer ourselves in His service.

Let us continue our service by saying a short prayer of dedication:

Prayer of Approach:

Dear Lord, we come before you this morning, in this moment, seeking Your guidance and looking to reset our lives to follow You, **being prepared** for Your Kingdom when you return in triumph at the end of time. We know that You accept and love us **just as we are** with all our

shortcomings, when we worship and praise You and when we thank You for giving us all You have done - and continue to do - for us. **Amen**

Our next hymn couldn't be more appropriate to the prayer we have just made and the reading that follows and as we contemplate 'Being Prepared' for God

Hymn: **Speak O Lord as we come to You** K Getty and S Townend **StF 161**

1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your Holy Word
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes for Your glory

2. Teach us Lord, full obedience
Holy reverence, true humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to
see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of power that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief

3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for
us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glor

The hymn we have just sung reflects our OT reading Genesis 15: 1-6. Here, God asks Abram not to be afraid because God will protect him. Abram trusts God - which is the right relationship to have so for us, we may infer that God's promises can be trusted. Faith is considered to be righteousness

Old Testament Reading: **Genesis 15:1-6** **The Lord's Covenant With Abram**

¹ After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."

² But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."

⁴ Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."

⁶ Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

In a moment we will join together in our prayers of thanks and confession, but before doing so here is a short poem on thanksgiving. It's called '**Enough**'

Enough

1. Let us join together in prayer
Giving thanks to the good Lord above.
Each day there is so much to thank Him for:
For His riches, His Grace and His Love.

2. We thank You Lord
For Your love all around,
For family, for friends for community.
The people we meet who smile as we pass,
Your presence that brightens us daily.

3. And thank You for those
Who through diligent work
Provide us with health and well being
Our food, NHS, radio and TV,
We thank You for them most sincerely

4. And let's not forget the wonderful folk
Who give us so much that is free
Doing whatever they can, whenever they
can
Just a little kindness - helping Your Plan
Showing Your love to me

5. And Love is not measured in loads of
things,
In possessions or mountains of stuff
It's measured in the depth of our worship
and praise
When we offer to You, Great God of
Creation
Our lives and our thanks - for enough.

and now let us join together in **Prayers of thanksgiving and confession:**

Dear Lord, You know us better than we know ourselves. How we need to be rescued by You, how so often we succumb to the pressures of everyday life which distract us from You. How desperately we need to know that You forgive our foolish ways and that if we allow You into our lives that You will reclothe us in our rightful mind with 'thy coolness and thy balm' removing from our souls the strain and stress, so that renewed, our ordered lives may confess the beauty of Thy peace as we interpret Your love to those around us.

Here us, we pray, when we say thank You for all Your good gifts to us. Take a few moments to name what you have received in your hearts now...

May we know Your love and support when illness strikes or bad things happen. Give us fortitude and strength to bear these problems as we continue to witness Your Holy name. Let's name our problems in our hearts now...

May we know and thank you for the great love that You expressed in sending Your only Son to die, redeeming us when we were unworthy. Take a moment now to meditate on Jesus' name in your hearts by breathing His name...

Dear Lord we know that Your love and care for us cannot be earned - it is a gift freely given, so as we come in prayer before You now, let us **Be Prepared** by dedicating ourselves once again to You. Help us good Lord to live lives of love and service to those around us, in our families, amongst our friends and in our communities, whenever we see need.

We dedicate ourselves again to You now and ask these prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us to say:

**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

Now we have two **New Testament Readings**. The first is Hebrews 11:1-3 & 8-16, one of the great attestations of Faith and this is followed by Luke 12:32-40 part of an extensive dialogue by Jesus as to what God offers and also what He requires from us.

New Testament Reading: Hebrews 11:1-3 & 8-16 Faith in Action

¹ Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. ¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

New Testament Reading: Luke 12:32-40

³² "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

³⁵ "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. ³⁷ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. ³⁸ It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak. ³⁹ But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."

Hymn: Jesus shall reign where'er the sun Isaac Watts

StF 328

1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run,
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more.

2 To him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head.
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice.

3 People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song,
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name.

4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
the prisoners leap to lose their chains,

the weary find eternal rest,
and all who suffer want are blest.

5 Let every creature rise and bring
the highest honours to our King,
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen.

Message:

Once upon a time back in Ancient Britain, I was briefly in the cubs and therefore a junior member of the Boy Scout movement - 'dib dib dib'...

"Give me a child until he's seven and I will show you the man" is attributed to Aristotle and the C¹⁶th Spanish priest Ignatius Loyola the founder of the Jesuits. The proof of that is that I still remember the Promise, which we said at every pack meeting - don't know if they've changed it but it still seems pretty good to me. Anyone remember it?

"I promise to Do My Best. To do my duty to God, and the Queen, To keep the Law of the Wolf Cub Pack, and to do a good turn every day."

The Scout promise which exhorts us to work hard but to spare a thought for others is a sort of metaphor for.... "sort of metaphor for"... wait till I get my teeth back in... a sort of metaphor for our Luke reading today which starts off saying that we have to keep our eyes on God by giving to the poor to store up treasure for ourselves in heaven, rather than obsessing over accumulating money, status and all the trinkets of the World, and then a little later, keeping awake for Jesus' return and not getting distracted from that task.

But we can't start looking at that before we've visited our other readings. Today's piece from Genesis, is one of several where God promises an old couple, Abraham and Sarah who are long past child-bearing age, a great family beyond counting. It is one of the great Biblical statements about Faith. It starts with God telling Abram, as he was then, not to be afraid. Why? Because to step out on any path without knowing where it's going can be very scary - it no doubt originated the expression '**A leap of Faith**' and '**To boldly go where no man has gone before**' to quote Captain Kirk's star log. Some of you will have done that I'm sure. And from our Hebrews reading, which is a great summation and affirmation on what it means to have Faith, we see Faith defined in vs 1 as **Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see** and vs 13 says that all our predecessors in Faith were **still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.**

As to how God works, here's a quote from *St Ignatius of Antioch* martyred in Rome in 110AD:

We recognize a tree by its fruit, and we ought to be able to recognise a Christian by his action. The fruit of faith should be evident in our lives, for being a Christian is more than making sound professions of faith. It should reveal itself in practical and visible ways. Indeed it is better to keep quiet about our beliefs, and live them out, than to talk eloquently about what we believe, but fail to live by it.

Anyone a fan of 'old blue eyes' Frank Sinatra? Bet you remember ***Love and Marriage, love and marriage, go together like a horse and carriage, this I tell you brother, you can't have one without the other.*** So our reading from Luke makes no sense and is no use to us at all unless we

have the Faith to Trust and Obey because ***you can't have one without the other***. Look at the Faith Abram had - that at 100 years old he and his wife would still have a child. God's promises are to be trusted. And in our Hebrews passage, the Faith of the ancestors is affirmed.

I've got an old clock back home, it's a family heirloom inherited through my great-grandfather who was a clock maker. I fancy he must have been a bit like Steve Fletcher on ***The Repair Shop***. It's a skeleton clock in a glass dome which means you can see all it's workings. I think its spring is like its Holy Spirit because unless it's kept wound, the clock won't tell the time. My life - our lives - are like my clock. It's all part of ***'Being Prepared'*** We need to keep the Holy Spirit inside us wound up by reading the Bible, worshipping and praising God in church and doing whatever we can whenever we can in our own communities to keep us ready - ticking through time the way God wants us to.

So we know that Faith comes through trust and how essential it is to Trust and Obey God. Having established that, then Luke is telling us in the opening verses not to be afraid and to give our time money and talents to those in need in order to build up everlasting treasure in Heaven, in other words we are called to serve. There are so many bible stories and teachings on this. The rich young ruler, told to give away his possessions in aid of the poor, the parable of the talents about using our gifts, the good Samaritan who cared when nobody else could be bothered... So it's not just about giving money, it's about giving our lives, our whole selves.

The narrative here tells us to ***Be Prepared***, constantly at the ready, continually looking for opportunities to serve and that the Lord rewards good and faithful servants and the passage ends with the analogy to the Lord's arrival being like that of a thief breaking in during the night, so we have to keep our concentration, not switching off and getting distracted - lest we back-slide into our old ways. Remember Luke 11:24-6 where the unclean spirit returns:

²⁴ "When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.'²⁵ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order.²⁶ Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first."

By way of an example of keeping alert and being ready to serve, permit me another short personal anecdote. About a month ago I spotted an elderly lady walking on the grass verge of a busy road. She was in no obvious distress but there was no obvious route she was on, so I drove past, turned around and found a safe place to stop to speak to her. It was immediately apparent that she had dementia and had got lost... I phoned the Police but before they arrived one of her neighbours spotted us, she too stopped and then took the lady home. Things just hadn't looked right...

A small kindness. You know we praise God as the great creator - and it's right and proper that we should. But let's not lose sight of the fact that God is also the God of small things. One warm spring day recently I absentmindedly picked a dandelion head and started pulling it apart, finding and wondering at the myriad of tiny parts inside, each one essential to the whole. Just like a single piece in a huge jigsaw, each small constituent of the dandelion head, even though small, is absolutely essential to the whole. If it were missing, the whole item might not work. In people, one solitary missing or malfunctioning chromosome causes disability.

It occurs to me that in the great scheme of things that we are pretty small too. We're big in our own eyes and in our world yes, but beyond micro-measurement the larger the backdrop we set ourselves against. Whoever our Creator is and no matter how vast His creation, it's clear that He takes His time - He's still working on us now - and He works in the finest of detail. So from that

observation of a dandelion head it's a short step to deduce that the **smallest** service that we render is closely considered and hugely valued by the God of small parts.

Are you prepared?

Amen

Now we come to our **Prayers of Intercession:**

When you read **Thy Kingdom come...** please pause and make your own prayer

Father, we bring before You in our prayers all the suffering and hurting people in the world. Help us to better understand their needs that we might support in prayer, word and deed the work of both Governments and Charities around the world to bring hope and opportunity to those living with few resources at home and overseas. Shut the mouth of injustice that seeks to devour and rob individuals and families of their human rights and what they need not just to survive but to grow and thrive. Teach us to have servants' hearts and to live in humility and gratefulness.

Thy Kingdom come...

Father, we pray for the well-being of our leaders, those who lead and occupy positions of political power, both in our own country and overseas, and that through Your Holy Spirit You will imbue in them the desire, wisdom and understanding to work tirelessly for good, aligning themselves with Your holy will. May they too have servants' hearts offering their lives in love and humility

Thy Kingdom come...

Father, we ask Your blessing upon the people we know whether they be close by or far away. For work colleagues, our friends and neighbours, for our fellow Christians, Ministers and Church Leaders. In the space that follows, we name them in our hearts...

Thy Kingdom come...

Father, we pray especially for all who are sick or dying. For the bereaved and grieving. We pray for all who are mentally traumatised, some by events many years ago, others more recent. In particular we bring before you the many people who have suffered physical, sexual and mental abuse as children in families and in institutions where they should have received love and care, carrying their unseen still-painful burdens for decades. We pray that Your love might heal them now. We pray for those who for whatever reason, are despairing and worried about their situation... homelessness... homes unfit for living... the cost of living... family breakdown...

Thy Kingdom come...

We pray for children and people, dependent through age or infirmity on others or on public services - and we pray for all those people who deliver help and support to them, workers both the paid and unpaid.

Thy Kingdom come...

Take a further moment to bring to God someone you are concerned for.....

And we pray for ourselves. That we may know how much we are valued by God and that whatever we have done, if we confess it to Him, that we are healed, forgiven and saved.

Thy Kingdom come... Thy will be done

Amen

Let's sing our final Hymn which is about learning from Jesus

Hymn: **In Christ Alone** K Getty and S Townend **StF 351**

1. In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand

2. In Christ alone who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

3. There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

4. No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

Blessing:

Go forward confident in God's Love for you, that He made you and looks on you with pride in His creation when you make the most of each day and all His wonderful gifts.

Go in peace, in the knowledge that each day is yours to spend and enjoy as you will but that you go Prepared - mindful of the need to help other people as much as you can in all your days ahead.

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore.

Amen.