

Scallop service for web

Words of hymns subject to copyright may not be reproduced instead we have referenced hymn books* and supplied links to YouTube videos.

* *MHON: Methodist Hymns Old & New; StF: Singing the Faith*

The references in italics can be copied and pasted into your browser so that you can listen or join in with the music if you wish to do so.

If you wish to join with others for the service at 10:30 on Sunday morning please contact marian.blyth@btinternet.com

This service has been prepared by Liz Little

Welcome to worship this morning. We begin with a hymn of praise which reminds us of God's love for us; across the centuries, God has cared for his people and shown endless mercy. Today we come to thank God for that care, as real for us today as it was in years gone by.

Hymn **Praise my soul the king of heaven** (MHON 629; StF 83)

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

Prayer of approach *Adapted from Prayers for all seasons 2, Nick Fawcett*

Almighty God, creator and ruler of all, all loving, all merciful,
we come to worship you.

We come to acknowledge your greatness, to celebrate your love, to thank you for your mercy and to rejoice in your unchanging purpose.

We come to focus our mind on you, not that we might turn aside from the world or forget its need, but so that we might return to our daily lives with a greater vision of your will, a deeper sense of your presence with us and a firmer resolve to serve you in the place where you have put us.

Awaken us afresh to the wonder and mystery of your presence. Inspire us with a new sense of your majesty and authority, so that we may worship you with heart and mind and soul.

Meet with us now, we ask, and help us to live each day in the light of your presence.

Please give us a constant awareness of your love and your greatness, so that whatever confronts us, whatever situation we find ourselves in, we may be equipped to meet it in your name. May our lives be ones of true discipleship, pleasing in your sight.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen

One of the readings set for today recounts an incident in the story of David.

2 Samuel chapter 11, verses 1 – 15

The Message

When that time of year came around again, the anniversary of the Ammonite aggression, David dispatched Joab and his fighting men of Israel in full force to destroy the Ammonites for good. They laid siege to Rabbah, but David stayed in Jerusalem.

One late afternoon, David got up from taking his nap and was strolling on the roof of the palace. From his vantage point on the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was stunningly beautiful. David sent to ask about her, and was told, “Isn’t this Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite?” David sent his agents to get her. After she arrived, he went to bed with her. (This occurred during the time of “purification” following her period.) Then she returned home. Before long she realized she was pregnant.

Later she sent word to David: “I’m pregnant.”

David then got in touch with Joab: “Send Uriah the Hittite to me.” Joab sent him. When he arrived, David asked him for news from the front—how things were going with Joab and the troops and with the fighting. Then he said to Uriah, “Go home. Have a refreshing bath and a good night’s rest.”

After Uriah left the palace, an informant of the king was sent after him. But Uriah didn’t go home. He slept that night at the palace entrance, along with the king’s servants.

David was told that Uriah had not gone home. He asked Uriah, “Didn’t you just come off a hard trip? So why didn’t you go home?”

Uriah replied to David, “The Chest is out there with the fighting men of Israel and Judah—in tents. My master Joab and his servants are roughing it out in the fields. So, how can I go home and eat and drink and enjoy my wife? On your life, I’ll not do it!”

“All right,” said David, “have it your way. Stay for the day and I’ll send you back tomorrow.” So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem the rest of the day.

The next day David invited him to eat and drink with him, and David got him drunk. But in the evening Uriah again went out and slept with his master’s servants. He didn’t go home.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In the letter he wrote, “Put Uriah in the front lines where the fighting is the fiercest. Then pull back and leave him exposed so that he’s sure to be killed.”

Reflection

I always find this story particularly shocking. David’s behaviour is absolutely appalling and there can be no excuses. It is bad enough that he slept with Bathsheba, a married woman. It is not clear to what extent she consented to the

relationship, but there does not seem to be evidence that she was raped by David. However, he was the one with the power and position and he was the one to make the first approach. We are all too familiar with this situation in today's society. And even if she was not raped, Bathsheba may have found it hard to reject David's advances, even if she wanted to.

Worse was that Bathsheba became pregnant; since intercourse took place after her period, the baby was clearly David's and he knew it.

David's first reaction was to try to offer her husband Uriah the opportunity to sleep with Bathsheba in the hope that the baby would then be taken as his.

When the first attempt failed, he got Uriah drunk and tried again. Unfortunately for David, Uriah was a man of honour who took his military responsibilities very seriously. He was not prepared to leave his men and his post, tempting as it must have been. What a contrast with the greedy and selfish behaviour of David!

His plot having been foiled, David resorted to desperate measures. He arranged for Uriah to be in the front line of the fighting where he was sure to be killed.

Effectively, he was having Uriah murdered.

If we read on, we see that Uriah did indeed die, but so too did a number of other soldiers, a tragedy which David had not intended. Later, David took Bathsheba as his wife, but the child she bore him died in infancy, causing David great anguish, and it was their second child, Solomon, who carried on the royal line.

How does all this square with the usual picture of David – chosen by God as a young boy to be king, defeater of Goliath, shepherd, good king who returned the Ark to Jerusalem, powerful military leader, poet and psalmist? It's a shock to know of this incident, and we are told that his behaviour displeased God. Hardly surprising! We also learn that David did repent of this terrible episode and Psalm 51 is an expression of that repentance. God forgave David and he lived to an old age, but there was much tragedy within the family. Some would suggest that this was God's punishment on David for his appalling actions. Even if we prefer not to think of God as directly vindictive, surely such an event would affect David, Bathsheba and the family relationships profoundly. Guilt, resentment, lack of trust can all lead to difficulties within families and breakdown in relationships. Our behaviour has consequences often far beyond the initial event.

So what can we learn from this story?

For me, the most important message is that nothing we do is beyond God's mercy and forgiveness. Anyone hearing of David's actions would probably say that they were unforgiveable and had he not been king, he would surely have faced criminal charges. Yet, as David genuinely repented, he was forgiven. There are many other accounts in scripture of people behaving in terrible ways, but being forgiven. Even on the cross, Jesus forgave those who had killed him.

I'm guessing that none of us here this morning have quite reached the depths of depravity to which David descended on this occasion, but we all have aspects of our lives which cause us shame, or which we know were not pleasing to God. No matter what they are, if we come before God in humility, we WILL be forgiven.

It's also encouraging to note that falling short, even in such a major way, does not mean that God cannot use us to further his kingdom. David achieved many great things after this time. Remember that Moses was a murderer, but he went on to lead God's people out of Egypt. Peter denied Jesus, but went on to be one of the great leaders of the early church. Thankfully, God works through imperfect people to achieve his perfect purposes. What an encouragement that is!

The New Testament reading set for today is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, verse 14 – 21. This passage, entitled "A prayer for the Ephesians", is a prayer that they will know the width, length, height and depth of God's love; why not look it up after the service? It is that love, revealed to us in Jesus, which granted David forgiveness and a fresh start. It is that love which is offered freely to us too – all we have to do is to ask.

As we share our next hymn, let's ask God to help us to recognise the parts of our lives which do not please him and to seek that forgiveness and renewal.

Hymn **Almighty God, we come to make confession** (MHON 31; StF 419)

There are no sung versions of this hymn available. It is sung to the tune Finlandia and organ accompaniment is available using the link below.

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=Xyjx4Sp5UnE>

*Christopher Ellis (born 1949) © 1999 Kevin Mayhew Ltd
Reproduced under CCLI License 672949 or One Licence A-730888*

Prayers for ourselves and others

Merciful God,

We pray for those who walk through life with a sense of guilt, burdened by past mistakes, troubled by feelings of shame and the knowledge of their own weakness.

Help them to understand that in you they can find true forgiveness and a new beginning.

We pray for those who commit evil with no sense of wrong-doing, no hint of remorse, no sign of scruples.

Help them to glimpse what is right and good and to be touched by the transforming grace of Christ.

We pray for those who have been wronged by others: those who have been hurt, betrayed, abused, deceived, let down.

Help them to be ready to forgive others as you have forgiven us.

We pray for one another, in our relationships with family and friends, at work or at home, in our church family and with other Christians.

Help us to recognise any divisions or grievances there may be between us and help us to work towards the healing of any rifts, forgiving and seeking forgiveness.

We bring before you our particular concerns this morning.

We pray for our minister Gill as she prepares to move to a new station and for Chris preparing to come to North Bedfordshire. We remember the family and friends of Dalwyn and the circuit staff as they continue to grieve the loss of a friend and colleague.

We pray for those affected by the terrible floods in China and Europe and for those who have the power to influence the man-made changes which are causing such extremes of weather.

We reflect on the continuing effects of the pandemic in this country and across the world, asking that individuals and leaders will make sensible decisions, balancing the complex risks and conflicting evidence.

Merciful God, in all these situations and in those which are on our own hearts today, we ask that your love, your grace and your peace will be very real.

Please help all in your world to discover the mercy which you so freely offer, and to show that mercy to others;

to be ready to put the past behind them and to begin again through your grace.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers. Amen

Partly adapted from Prayers for all seasons 2, Nick Fawcett

Hymn: There's a wideness in God's mercy (MHON 729; StF 416)

<https://youtu.be/kamADrIPEDs>

Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)

This hymn echoes Paul's words in his letter to the Ephesians. We are assured that God's love is far greater than we can ever grasp and that whatever we have done, we can be forgiven and can begin again.

There are many versions of the hymn; the words below are those used by the congregation singing on the YouTube link.

Prayer of dedication and blessing

Lord, what can we offer you which could meet, even in part, the debt we owe to you? All that we have comes from you and with grateful hearts we offer you our worship, our time and talents, our resources and our commitment. Please use us, Lord, imperfect as we are, to share your love, to work for your kingdom and to tell others the good news that they are loved and valued.

So assure us of your presence, comfort and strength in the week to come. Bless us and those we love, Lord, and bless all that we seek to do in your name.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen