

Worship at Home

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Call to Worship Psalm 86: 8-10

*Among the gods there is none like you, Lord; no deeds can compare with yours.
All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name. For you are great and do marvellous deeds; you alone are God.*

Let us pray

Lord, in this time of worship today, draw me closer to you, I pray. In the name of Jesus, through the power and presence of your Holy Spirit, and for your glory. **Amen**

StF 17: With Gladness We Worship

**With gladness we worship, rejoice as we sing,
free hearts and free voices, how blessed to bring;
the old thankful story shall scale thine abode,
thou King of all glory, most bountiful God!**

**Thy right would we give thee, true homage thy due,
and honour eternal, the universe through:
with all thy creation, earth, heaven and sea,
in one acclamation we glorify thee.**

**Renewed by thy Spirit, redeemed by thy Son,
thy children would bless thee for all thou hast done.
O Father! Returning to love and to light,
thy children are yearning to praise thee aright.**

**We join with the angels, and so there is given,
From earth alleluia, in answer to heaven.
Amen! Be thou glorious below and above,
redeeming, victorious, and infinite Love!**

George Rawson (1807-1889)

Let us pray the prayer that Jesus taught His disciples, saying, ***“Our Father....”***

***If you still feel weighed down by certain things,
spend a few moments bringing them to God now.
Then, whether you sense a change or not, conclude with the words:***

**Lord, have mercy.
Christ have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus Christ, I believe you came into the world to save sinners, and you say, my sins are forgiven. Thanks be to you, Almighty Saviour. **Amen.**

Read these words from Charles Wesley in preparation for today's Bible readings. You may prefer to use the original term 'Holy Ghost' or change it to 'Holy Spirit' as you read.

STF 155: Come Holy Ghost...

**Come Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire;
let us Thine influence prove;
source of the old prophetic fire;
fountain of life and love.**

**Come, Holy Ghost, (for moved by Thee
the prophets wrote and spoke),
unlock the truth, Thyself the key;
unseal the sacred book.**

**Expand Thy wings, Celestial Dove,
brood o'er our nature's night;
on our disordered spirits move,
and let there now be light.**

**God, through Himself, we then shall know,
if Thou within us shine;
and sound, with all Thy saints below,
the depths of love divine.**

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 43: 10-13

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13: 24-30

Message: The Parable of the Weeds

Our Gospel reading today is from the book of Matthew and is a relatively well-known parable, (a story told by Jesus with a deeper or hidden meaning). As one commentator puts it, *“It is important to note Matthew's Gospel was written when the early Christian community was at a crossroads. Would it remain within Judaism, or become a separate faith?”*

The distinctiveness of Matthew's Gospel arises from his emphasis on Jesus as Messiah and teacher, and his fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies. It is also highly critical of Jewish leaders throughout and carries a powerful call to discipleship for Jesus' followers. Another major focus is on the Kingdom of Heaven invoking the invisible and present rule of God on Earth through the saving work of the Messiah.

With so much Jewish-focused background to Matthew's Gospel, it is perhaps surprising to note that there is also an emphasis on the inclusion of Gentiles in the Messiah's saving work. These themes are important when we look at today's parable.

The weeds referred to in Jesus' story would have looked identical to the wheat growing alongside. In fact, sowing weeds into a neighbour's field was a form of sabotage and a criminal offence. It would have been impossible to successfully identify one from the other in order to remove it. I even wonder if the suggestion, *“shall we pull out the weeds?”* (v28b) was so ridiculous, it would have been heard as a joke by Jesus' listeners.

However, when it comes to harvest time, then it is possible to see the ears of wheat, as opposed to the unproductive weeds. So, it is important to wait and see which plants will produce a good harvest. This chapter in Matthew's gospel is full of these parables about growing: the farmer scattering seed in the earlier parable, the tiny mustard seed growing into a

bush large enough for birds to nest in its branches, and the way yeast ferments the flour in bread making.

Unlike many other parables, we find Jesus explaining the meaning of the wheat and weeds to his disciples a little later in Matthew (chapter 13: 36-43). He is very clear: he speaks of himself as the farmer, the field is the world, and the good seed represents the people of God's Kingdom. The enemy who planted the weed is the devil and the weeds are the people who follow evil ways. Some commentators point out that this parable has been misused in the past to suggest the field is the church (but that's another message for a different day!).

I think we must remember to be cautious about reading this parable as an 'us and them' scenario. We are warned many times in the Bible not to judge others, after all, which of us truly believes we are without sin and can therefore be identified as 'wheat' without ever sensing the existence of some 'weeds' in our lives.

We cannot pretend that evil does not exist in the world and that sometimes people choose to follow that way but, as Christians, we believe in and follow a God of mercy as well as righteousness, and the Messiah came to save sinners. As Jesus said, *"Healthy people do not need a doctor.... I have come to call those who know they are sinners, not those who think they are righteous."* (Mark 2:17).

So, let us be 'wise as serpents and harmless as doves' (Matthew 10: 16), not blinded to the reality of a world where many of us go wrong, rather loving and forgiving and spreading the Good News of Jesus with the help of the Holy Spirit, and as best we can.

Pause to reflect on these words and maybe re-read the Bible readings in the light of this message.



StF 20: Be Still...

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now,
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord,
The Holy One is here.

Be still,
for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire,
With splendor He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord,
Is shining all around.

Be still,
for the power of the Lord,
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal,
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place.

David J Evans (b. 1957)

Prayers for Others

Loving Lord, please help me to pray through the power of your Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus for those people, places and situations which you bring to my mind, and those things which are on my heart today.

Spend a few minutes speaking out, writing down, or bringing to God in silence your thoughts and concerns. Conclude each section or prayer with the words:

Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

Now take a few minutes to bring yourself and your needs to God in prayer and conclude this section with:

Lord, in your mercy, hear my prayer.

Draw all your prayers for yourself and others together as you say or sing:

StF 713: Show me how to stand...

Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,

how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead.

Teach my heart to treasure mercy,
whether given or received –
for my need has not diminished
since the day I first believed:
let me seek no satisfaction
boasting of what I have done,
but rejoice that I am pardoned
and accepted in your Son.

Gladly I embrace a lifestyle
modelled on your living word,
in humility submitting
to the truth which I have heard.
Make me conscious of your presence
every day, in all I do:
by your Spirit's gracious prompting
may I learn to walk with you.

Martin Leckebusch (b 1962)

Closing Blessing

May you know the loving presence of God's Holy Spirit and may that same Spirit help you to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly today and always. And may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your heart and mind in Christ Jesus, now and forevermore. **Amen.**

Go in peace to Love and Serve God. Amen

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