

HYMN StF 470 Lord for the years<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkkYUEcN234>

- 1 Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.
- 2 Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.
- 3 Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care ;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.
- 4 Lord, for our world ; when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain ;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.
- 5 Lord, for ourselves ; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne ;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (*b.1926*)**Prayer**

Dear God, look at all of us, gathered together here on this screen, though separated in space because we remain at home. Look on us and bless us. We know that we are not always good, that we slip from good behaviour and are sometimes mean and greedy, caring more about ourselves than about other people.

We are sorry about this. We want to do better, but rely entirely on your help. If you will take each of us by the hand and lead us, we can do better. Now in the silence, we wait for you and we want you to take our hands. Please, God, stretch out to us as we now stretch out to you.

And now, we say the prayer Jesus himself taught us.

**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and for ever.

Amen.

Junior Church

The Thwaite Debate: Thwaite considers himself as the Home Guard

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m2hoFJMa49o>

HYMN chosen by Junior Church

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_6VyAk8k94

Thank you Lord (Thank you Lord)
For this day (For this day)
For your love (For your love)
In all we do.
Thank you now (Thank you now)
For our school (For our school)
For our friends (For our friends)
All we can do.

*We want to say thank you for this day,
We want to say thank you Lord always.
We want to say thank you God, in everything,
'Cause all you give is good!*

Thank you Lord (Thank you Lord)
For our homes (For our homes)
For our food (For our food)
All that you give!
Thank you now (Thank you now)
We can laugh (We can laugh)
We can sing (We can sing)
Learn as we live.

*We want to say thank you for this day,
We want to say thank you Lord always.
We want to say thank you God, in everything,
'Cause all you give is good!*

Thank you Lord (Thank you Lord)
For this world (For this world)
All you've made (All you've made)
All that you do!
Thank you now (Thank you now)
For my life (For my life)
For your care (For your care)
All that is you.

*We want to say thank you for this day,
We want to say thank you Lord always.
We want to say thank you God, in everything,
'Cause all you give is good!*

*We want to say thank you for this day,
We want to say thank you Lord always.
We want to say thank you God, in everything,
'Cause all you give is good!
'Cause all you give is good!
'Cause all you give is good!*

Junior Church leaves with a blessing.

Prayers of Approach and Confession

O God, our true life, to know you is life, to serve you is freedom, to enjoy you is immense wealth; to worship you is our happiness. Hear us now as we come to you together in prayer.

God, you give us hope, you root us and makes us know the meaning in our lives, but give us one thing more: gratitude in our hearts for all you have done for us and created in us, gratitude today, when we meet to speak to you, but gratitude too that is spoken in all we do, gratitude that forms us and inspires all our relations with other people each and every day. May your kindness be our kindness; as you are our hope, may we give hope to others; as Jesus is our refuge, may we give refuge to those in need; as your Holy Spirit is our inspiration and protection, may we be inspired to show your light in our lives.

O God, your love for us is not in doubt; but we ask you to give us love for others; love in our thinking, love in our speaking, love in our doing, and love in the hidden places of our hearts; love of those who find it hard to bear with us, love of those with whom we work, and love of those with whom we take our ease; forgive us where we have failed in the past, and guide us in the future, that so at length we may be worthy to dwell with you, who are eternal love.

Amen

Readings (Introduction by Minister)

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” ^[37] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Psalm 118:19-25

- ¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous;
I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.
- ²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD
through which the righteous may enter.
- ²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me;
you have become my salvation.
- ²² The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
- ²³ the LORD has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes.
- ²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day;
let us rejoice today and be glad.
- ²⁵ LORD, save us!
LORD, grant us success!

HYMN StF 394 Spirit of God

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qywGaKEM2IA>

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,
gentle as is the dove,
teach us the truth and help us believe,
show us the Saviour's love.*

- 2 Without your help we fail our Lord,
we cannot live his way ;
we need your power, we need your strength,
following Christ each day.

- 1 You spoke to us long, long ago,
gave us the written word ;
we read it still, needing its truth,
through it God's voice is heard.

Margaret V. Old

Sermon

John 15:18-19

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

The episode from Acts, which we heard of a few minutes ago, involves two people who were “chosen out of the world”. The first was the apostle Philip, of whom we know mostly from the Gospel of John. Philip had been a disciple of John the Baptist, and was with Jesus throughout his ministry. After that, according to tradition, he (or perhaps someone of the same name, known as Philip the Evangelist) was a sole operator, travelling widely in Greece, Syria and what is now Asian Turkey. He is said to have been martyred and buried in the ancient city of Hieropolis. However, if you would like to visit his remains, you will now find them in Rome, in a church called Santi Dodici Apostoli (the holy twelve Apostles).

However, our concern here is not relics but a young man, energetic and fired-up, dashing about wherever the Spirit led him; and on the particular day we heard about this morning, that involved a journey to Gaza by the desert road. Gaza is by the sea, south west of Jerusalem, and there were – and are – two routes; a direct one, and a dog-leg road to the south. The direct distance is about 50 miles.

This was a chaotic, dangerous time for the Apostles. Stephen had recently been stoned to death; Saul (later St Paul) was very active in a campaign of persecution. But nevertheless, gains

were being made. Philip had been preaching in Samaria, a place often at loggerheads with the Jews, and made conversions, including a sorcerer called Simon who had impressed many by his magic. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard of these successes, they sent Peter and John to consolidate the victory.

This left Philip free, and his next errand was given shortly by the angel: set off for Gaza by the desert road. He went. Before too long, he caught sight of the other person who was about to be 'chosen out of this world': an improbably glamorous fellow-traveller, described just as an 'Ethiopian'. He was, we learn, the chancellor of the exchequer of that rich and powerful state, and he was travelling along in his chariot, reading.

Here we have an improbable conjunction. Philip is no grand personage, a foot-traveller, and he encounters this high official in his superior conveyance, a chariot. There is a big difference in status here. But Philip has been told by the Spirit, or the angel (they are interchangeable) to approach and stay close. He does.

The Ethiopian was reading aloud to himself, as people did in antiquity. Philip heard him, and knew that the reading was from Isaiah, and was the passage about the suffering servant. The stage is set for Philip to explain about Jesus.

You can imagine the scene. The greys and browns of the desert landscape, the shimmering of the heat; the unmade road winding down to Gaza; the sumptuous conveyance of the Ethiopian, and his rich persona. But this is not just a rich, powerful foreign official; it is a man with questions who has travelled to Jerusalem as a matter of pilgrimage, and is seeking to understand the wisdom of a foreign religious text. So what we can gather from this is that the Ethiopian, despite being distinguished, is not too proud to learn from Israel. He can maybe be viewed as an ambassador of the Gentile world who foreshadows all that is to come in the expansion of Jesus's sphere of influence into the lands outside Israel.

We hear about the Ethiopian's willing acceptance of the account that Philip gave, and of his prompt, spontaneous baptism in a nearby watercourse. The picture is one of confidence and optimism. But what unspoken thoughts might there have been of foreboding, of fear of what the future might hold? The Ethiopian, at the minute we meet him is secure in a position of power, and he is conspicuously rich. When he leaves the scene of his baptism, both these things are beginning to be in doubt. Once he gets home, he may find it difficult to accept conditions which he previously did not question. The grain of his life would be different, and the Queen might not have admired the qualities he bought to her service as she once had. To quote a part of Jesus's saying,

"If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you."

We will never know what happened when he returned to the court of the Queen, Kandake. What we do know is that the church in Ethiopia is very ancient, and even as early as 180AD, Irenaeus wrote that "Simon Backos" preached the good news, outlining also the theme of his preaching as being the coming in flesh of God that "was preached to you all before." (ref. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_Orthodox_Tewahedo_Church - cite_note-17) It is tempting to think that the earlier preaching was that of the Ethiopian encountered on the road.

Many of the apostles and evangelists of the earliest church came to a violent end. To become a martyr was a mark of the greatest honour, to die for one's faith. Here in the relative safety of the modern west, we don't think like that. We don't think of or desire a martyr's death. But in other parts of the world, Christians are of course still persecuted, regarded as seditious, and hated and feared for the damage they are considered to be doing to the dominant agenda of power. I'm thinking of China where the active church prefers to be underground, leaving only

a mild uncontroversial church in the public arena. I'm also thinking of the church in the lands of Islamic state, where many were slaughtered – in a true sense, martyred for their faith.

These days, the tenor of the times is to be tolerant and to respect all faiths and none, treating them as legitimate and equal partners. Whilst respect for others is always due, it is quite hard to see the message of the gospels as one that legitimises all faiths and none. Of course, people of goodwill seek to find the good in other people's faith, and to map out the overlaps so that we can say, there is only one true God, and we all worship him in our own ways. Where this is genuinely true, it is indeed a great thing. I experienced it myself when I was running a night shelter for the homeless in London. The team of volunteers we had grew and grew, and attracted people from all faiths, including some fringe operators, and it was a truly wonderful thing. We had no trouble praying together, though I confess that in leading prayer I tended to leave out references to Jesus in order to make it easier to create common ground. I remember looking round at our very varied team, and thinking, "this is a Church".

I wonder if the Ethiopian eunuch, that intelligent, competent and questioning man, back at the court of Kandake, managed to take on the role of Isaiah's suffering servant, and gather folk around him willing to serve God by becoming the servants of others and bearing their suffering.¹ Because an enlightened state, and enlightened government, exists in its willingness to help people in their suffering, despite the cost. It is on this basis that we have a National Health Service, in which we are truly blessed, and God is glorified.

Communion HYMN StF 391 O breath of life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3bsgoPjcg4>

- 1 O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
revive your Church with life and power ;
O breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
and fit your Church to meet this hour.
- 2 O wind of God, come, bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need ;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore ; for this we plead.
- 3 O breath of love, come, breathe within us,
renewing thought and will and heart ;
come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
revive your Church in every part.

Elizabeth Ann Head, (Bessie Porter Head) (1850–1936)

Communion: Introduction

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the space is thin between them.
Distance may divide, but Christ's promise unites
Those bounded by time, and those blessed by eternity.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the church above and below is one.
Peter is here, and Paul, Martha and all the Marys,
Columba and Francis, Theresa and Luther King;
The saints from far back, and those who left us not long ago.

¹ Isaiah 53

And only sight prevents us from seeing them,
One with us on the other side.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the God who made them is present.
The Lamb, glorious on the throne, sits beside us;
The Spirit of God, the Dove, makes her resting place among us.
God inhales the breath of our prayers and spreads a table for our satisfaction.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

We come as we are, because Jesus told us only to have a loving heart, and we remember his invitation and his promise:

“Come”, he said, “all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you peace. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest”

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger; and he that believes in me shall never thirst. I will not cast out the one that comes to me. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; they shall be satisfied.”

We come today in that peace, to inherit that rest.

Song: Lord of Life (v.1) StF 651 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcVaAfoie6A>

Lord of Life, we come to you
Lord of all, our Saviour be,
Come to bless and to heal
With the light of your love.

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you
And also with you

Lift up your hearts
We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God
It is right to give thanks and praise

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our pleasure to give thanks to God for his grace; for his bountiful creation, for the love which has fathered us forth, for his great gift to the world, our Lord Jesus; for his guiding ministry, for his death on the Cross, and for his presence ever with us, alive in the world, we give our heartfelt thanks and praise. Amen

Breaking

In doing this, we follow Jesus's example and command.

On the night when he was arrested, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me. Likewise, after supper, he took the cup, and said, "This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me."

Sharing *Please take bread and wine/juice as you are able*

Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

And also with you

Song: Lord of Life vv 1 & 2 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EiYa1zXs_Dk

Lord of Life, we come to you
Lord of all, our Saviour be,
Come to bless and to heal
With the light of your love.

Through the days of doubt and toil
In our joy and in our pain,
Guide our steps in your Way,
Make us one in your love.

Peace

On the evening of the first Easter Day, when the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear, Jesus came and stood among them. "Peace be with you!" he said; then he showed them his hands and his side. On seeing the Lord, the disciples were overjoyed. Jesus said again, "Peace be with you".

Joyful in the presence of our risen Lord, let us share, as we are able, signs of peace.

Prayers for Others

In the Book of Revelation, we read these words:

Here I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

Let us pray. We bring to God our prayers of thanksgiving, and prayers for others.

Lord, we thank you for when you have knocked at the door, and come in, and been with us; that you have sat with us, and travelled with us; have made our bad times bearable, and shown us light in our darkest hours.

We thank you for being our guiding hand, for showing us a route through confusion, a clear path through the tangles of our own minds.

We cannot know what the future holds; uncertainty lies in wait for us, and who knows what pain and sickness, what dilemmas, what distress and inner suffering. As your hand, O God has guided us in the past, so let it hold us, protect us and nourish us in the future, so that we may face whatever comes, and always be yours, always be secure in the knowledge that we are in your care, and that with your help, all will be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.

And as you light our way, we pray that you will also light the way of others. Bring your light, we pray, into the lives of those for whom the world is a dark place, who feel themselves to be powerless against evil, who have little cause for hope, who despair. Show them the peace of mind that comes from the knowledge of your presence, and your help.

We pray for all those who suffer. Surround them with your love, support them with your strength, console them with your comfort, and give them hope and courage beyond themselves.

And as the spirit of man is the lamp by which you show the way, may all who are unfortunate see the hands of others stretched out to them, and see cause to accept it, and become healed from the wounds of hopelessness.

And we pray today particularly for

Irene Ashworth

Alan King

Mary Baxter

Phyllis Lebbaeus

Sylvia Benham

Pam Parsons

Karin Ingolfsrud

Mary Varndell

We pray for the peace of the world. Move us by your Spirit, break down barriers

Of fear suspicion and hatred; heal the human family of its divisions, and unite it in the bonds of justice & peace.

And now we bring our prayers closer to home, and remember those whom we have loved, who are no longer with us in this life, but who rest in your protection. May they have peace.

We pray for our families, for those whom we love. Protect them at home, support them in times of difficulty, that they may grow together in mutual love and understanding, and rest content in one another.

We pray for our country. Enrich our common life, strengthen the forces of truth, goodness and justice. Teach us to share prosperity, that those whose lives are impoverished may pass from need and despair to dignity and joy.

We pray for the church in its stand with the poor and its stand for justice

In its love for the outcast and ashamed, in its service to the sick and neglected

In its proclamation of the gospel in this land, in this place. In the life of your church, your kingdom come, O Lord

Through Jesus Christ Our Lord

Amen

HYMN Lord of all being, throned afar

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fW7LTHMVS-o>

1 Lord of all being, throned afar,
thy glory flames from sun and star;
centre and soul of every sphere,
yet to each loving heart how near!

4 Lord of all life, below, above,
whose light is truth, whose warmth is love,
before thy ever-blazing throne
we ask no lustre of our own.

2 Sun of our life, thy quickening ray
sheds on our path the glow of day;
Star of our hope, thy softened light
cheers the long watches of the night.

5 Grant us thy truth to make us free,
and kindling hearts that burn for thee,
till all thy living altars claim
one holy light, one heavenly flame.

3 Our midnight is thy smile withdrawn,
our noontide is thy gracious dawn,
our rainbow arch thy mercy's sign;
all, save the clouds of sin, are thine.

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

Blessing

Bless to us, O God, the road that is before us

Bless to us, O God, the friends who are around us,

Bless to us, O God, your love which is within us,

Bless to us, O God, the light that leads us home.

Amen