

ORDER OF SERVICE

5th SUNDAY IN LENT

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, here in our home, we worship you. May this house be your house. Calm our hearts and our minds. Help us to be silent for a few moments and focus upon you (*pause for a few moments of quiet*).

Heavenly Father, may you accept this time of worship and help us through it to draw nearer to you and to all of your people. May our hearts be open to Christ's love and our lives to the power of your Spirit. Help us to see how you are at work in our lives. May we praise and honour you not just during these moments we have set aside for worship, but every moment of our lives in all we say and do, to the glory of your name. Amen.

HYMN

1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power,
hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

3 God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

4 Daily doth the Almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

SCRIPTURE READING

Matthew 11:25-30 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Jesus Thanks His Father

25 At that time Jesus said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; 26 yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 27 All things have been handed over to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

MESSAGE

There is a painting in the Tate Gallery in London by the artist George Frederick Watts, entitled '*Sic Transit*' (from the Latin *sic gloria transit mundi* 'So passes the glory of the world').

It shows a shrouded corpse lying on a bier- that movable stand upon which a corpse is placed before burial and upon which it is carried to the grave. All is silent in the chamber of death. The long horizontal lines of the picture give an impression of intense stillness. Life here is over and it is over forever. What then does it mean? What does it amount to? These are questions that we are meant to ask when we look at the painting.

Lying around the corpse are various items and artefacts that reveal the history of the dead man's life. A shield, a spear and a gauntlet denote the warrior. A rose showed that he loved and a scallop shell indicate that he travelled. There is an ermine cloak in the picture showing that the dead man had been honoured, while a musician's lute and a book- both lying on the floor- reveal that he was a man of culture. Finally, there is a golden cup proclaiming that he had drunk of the rich wine of life.

Now he is dead and all these things lie around him- useless. What then is the sum of life? What remains after all the years spent living? The artist sums it all up with these lines written upon the canvas:

‘What I spent, I had.
What I saved, I lost.
What I gave, I have’.

I'm sure that each one of us has at one time or another asked the question ‘What is the meaning of life?’ Even if only for a few seconds, I'm certain we've all pondered question such as ‘Why am I here?’ ‘Is there a philosophy of life that will best enable me to live a happy life?’ These are the sort of questions we often ask when we have lost someone we love or experienced an illness from which we almost died. We reevaluate life. We ask ourselves about the meaning of life. We consider our own mortality and how it should affect our behaviour and attitude. Perhaps this is the way you are thinking now as you try to cope with COVID-19 outbreak and all it means for your everyday life.

When we are in our 20s, life seems so long, full of promise and hope, stretching out into the future. However, in our 70s or 80s we realise how short life is because we look back on events that happened, say 50 years ago, and they seem like only yesterday.

So, life is short and circumstances in life change. Dreams fade, hopes die, we lose loved ones and we suffer illness and ill health. So we need a philosophy of life that is going to sustain us through all this. We need an outlook on life that will keep us going whatever the circumstances, that will provide us with hope and strength and fulfilment.

I believe, Christianity does all this. Having a faith in God through Christ provides this.

Jesus told us to trust him and to trust God and that when we lose loved ones we must remember that we will see them again because in the Father's house there is plenty of room (John 14:1-2). He told us not to worry about tomorrow, because it cannot add a day to our lives, but to put our trust in God instead (Matthew 6:25-27). He counselled us that if we are burdened by daily life, to turn to him and he will sustain us (Matthew 11:28-30). He assured us that he came to give us life, life in all its fullness (John 10:10).

So Christ came to give us lives that are full, happy, contented, purposeful. Many people today do not have a faith. They don't know what they are missing. They are unaware how their lives could be enriched by having a faith.

When I was a student in Aberystwyth I loved walking along the seafront and down to the marina to see the fishing and pleasure boats. Looking out to sea I would observe the floating buoys, marking where lobster pots had been left. The waves would splash around them but they would continue to float in their appointed place. The tide would rise and fall but they would still be there. Occasionally, fierce storms off the Irish Sea would batter those buoys and they would be blown around and periodically submerged by high waves. However, when calm returned I would see them still there, ultimately unmoved and unharmed, still showing the way.

If we have a faith then we are like those floating buoys. We can't avoid the storms of life. We are not shielded from dangers and difficulties. However, we can cope with them. We can stay afloat.

We are meant to have faith. We are made to worship God. As the Presbyterian Church of Wales' 'Short Confession of Faith' says: *'We believe that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever'*.

One of the greatest figures, one of the greatest thinkers in the history of the Christian Church, was Saint Augustine. He had a rather misspent youth, especially whilst an undergraduate at Carthage University. Then, he experienced a dramatic spiritual crisis and became converted to Christianity being baptised in 386AD. He found in God, as revealed in Christ, the meaning and purpose in life that he had failed to find anywhere else. This is what he wrote about God: *"You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you"*.

There is a God-shaped hole in everyone's life and this hole can only be filled by God. It cannot be filled by anything else- not by money, or power, or fame, or material things. It is a tragedy when people don't realise this; when people are searching for hope and peace and fulfilment in life, but look for it in all the wrong places.

It is like the story of the man who wanted to buy all sorts of accessories for his car, but the only way he could raise the money to do it was by selling the car itself. So he ended up with all the accessories but no car to put them on! I think that this is a metaphor for modern life. So many people have the accessories- the big car, flat screen TV, expensive phone- but they don't have the most important things, they don't have true happiness or contentment because they don't have God and they don't have faith and without God and faith, money and material things ultimately mean very little because they are fleeting things- here today and gone tomorrow.

What gives life real meaning are the things that last, things that cannot be bought, sold, lost or stolen- love, friendship, hope, kindness, faith and God.

It was the Roman philosopher and statesman, Seneca, who said: *"What men need above all is a hand let down to lift them up"*. This is what the Christian Gospel is. It's Good News that liberates us and enables us to live life in all its fullness. We don't need to do anything except let Christ into

our hearts and lives. *“I came to give life”* says Jesus, *“life in all its fullness.”*

So if we have ever asked the question ‘what is the meaning and purpose of life?’ we find the answer in our faith because it is in and through Christ we find real purpose and true fulfilment. AMEN.

PRAYER

Loving God, we thank you that in and through you we find meaning and purpose in our lives. We thank you for your constant guidance and the way you encourage, challenge and renew us. You are constantly at work in the lives of each one of us. Everyone you have created is precious in your sight.

Thank you God that we can put our hand in yours and that you encourage us to walk with you as you lead the way. We do not know what lies ahead of us during the coming days and weeks, but we do know that you will be with us through it all and this thought gives us strength and hope.

And so, Father God, we cast the burden of our worry, our fears, upon you and we seek the peace of mind that only true faith in you can bring us.

We thank you for this season of Lent, this special time when we are encouraged to pause and take stock, to reflect on the things in our lives which matter the most.

We thank you for this time of worship when we have been able to focus upon you and be reminded of your living presence within us and around us.

Loving God, draw us closer to you in the days ahead and bless us with renewed hope, strength and faith, to the glory of your name, amen.

“Our Father, who art in heaven...”

HYMN

1. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
In a believer’s ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
And drives away his fear.

2. It makes the wounded spirit whole
And calms the troubled breast;
'Tis manna to the hungry soul,
And to the weary, rest.

3. Dear Name! the Rock on which I build,
My Shield and Hiding Place,
My never-failing Treasury filled
With boundless stores of grace!

4. Jesus! my shepherd, brother, friend,
My Prophet, Priest, and King;
My Lord, my life, my way, my end,
Accept the praise I bring.

5. Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought;
But when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

6. Till then I would Thy love proclaim
With every fleeting breath,
And may the music of Thy name
Refresh my soul in death.

BLESSING

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus” (*Philippians 4:7*).

And the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. Amen.
