

***This week's worship sheet has been put together by  
The Revd Elizabeth Rundle.***

Intro: The Lord is here – His Spirit is with us wherever we are.

So let us pray:

Lord of all hopefulness, kindness and grace, we offer up our thanks and praise.

Lord of our past, our present and our future, we worship you in spirit and in truth. Amen.

Hymn: Great is Thy faithfulness:

You might like to listen to a 2007 Songs of Praise rendition on YouTube, viewed over 3 million times!

- 1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
there is no shadow of turning with thee ;  
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not ;  
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be :  
*Great is thy faithfulness ! Great is thy faithfulness !  
Morning by morning new mercies I see ;  
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.  
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*
- 2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love :
- 3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide ;  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside !

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866–1960)

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Intro to readings: and Psalm 139: 1-10

I often have to pinch myself to realise how ancient words from our Old Testament are the very words of Hebrew scripture Jesus learned. From those far distant times and culture, so little resonates with our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives, but Scripture remains our precious link with Jesus himself.

Genesis 28: 10 – 16

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said: I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth and you will

spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it.”

And selected verses from Psalm 139

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.  
You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.  
You discern my going out and my lying down;  
You are familiar with all my ways...  
Where can I go from your Spirit?  
Where can I flee from your presence?  
If I go up to the heavens, you are there.  
If I rise on the wings of the dawn,  
If I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me,  
Your right hand will hold me fast.

Reflection:

When you see certain car registration numbers, phone numbers or sign-posts does it ever make you think of favourite hymn numbers? Travelling north on the M5 towards Bristol there is a huge sign: **Bristol 66**, and in the days before Singing the Faith, number 66 in Hymns and Psalms was Great is thy Faithfulness. Passing that sign for two years on my way back to Theological College became my cue to sing that inspirational hymn. A hymn of faith whatever, whenever and wherever we find ourselves. Words that recognise the God for all seasons and all time who blesses us with pardon and peace.

Yet the author, Thomas Chisholm, experienced great upheaval, ill-health and uncertainty. Having been ordained in the Methodist church, illness forced him to leave the ministry after only one year. His future was precarious and scary. Everything changed except his faith in God, as his hymn, written decades later proved.

I’m sure you had several different plans for this year before suddenly all of us have needed to adapt to this new circumstance. However, this enforced period of lockdown has gifted me with special time for reflection. To sort long neglected slides and photos, to sift long-forgotten resources and to realise anew “through all the changing scenes of life, in trouble and in joy...’ the presence of God is constant. And, to my shame, I discover like Jacob, “God is in this place and I didn’t realise it.”

Life for a Carmelite monk in 1692 was more restricted than any of our present lives, yet Brother Lawrence’s book ‘The Practice of the Presence of God’ is still in print. In stressful times I’ve held on to one of his quotes: “One need not cry out very loudly, He is nearer to us than we think.” That is what Jacob discovered. Jacob, so apprehensive about meeting his brother, was at that moment in Gen 28, isolated from his family and full of anxiety. His mind was racing with every eventuality, his own guilt and the impending meeting with his brother, Esau. Jacob’s mind was on himself rather than God. Then, in the mystery and miracle of spiritual experience, Jacob was made aware of God’s presence. He was not alone.

The life of King David was also a catalogue of highs and extreme lows but his Psalm has spoken comfort to millions through the millennia. And isn't it truly amazing that Jesus knew both these scriptures. Now think of the very last verse in Matthew's gospel, and see how this Old Testament promise pulses with new life. The promise by Jesus: "**Lo, I am with you always...**" This is Jesus speaking into our own present situation, to anything we may experience of anxiety, regrets, isolated 'lockdown' or fears for the future – there is absolutely nowhere in this universe beyond the love of God made known to us in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

If we hold on to that promise, and prayerfully practice His divine Presence, we will take

'Strength for today

and bright hope for tomorrow.' Amen.

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Let us pray together:

Eternal God, forgive us when frustrations and critical thoughts cloud out our blessings. In these quiet moments calm our minds and renew us with courage, hope and compassion.

As Jesus wept over Jerusalem, so we weep for the plight of those suffering from hatred and violence across our world. We pray for the frightened and disposed, for the sick and bewildered and those without hope. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all those affected by Covid 19, those whose loved ones have died, those who remain in critical care and for all medical and ancillary staff and families. **Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

We pray for those facing unemployment and financial collapse. For families where relationships have broken down and tempers are frayed. We pray for the lonely and those who feel forgotten. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

As we pray for our own families, friends and neighbours we remember those who especially need our prayers and support. As we see their faces in our mind's eye, let us see Jesus standing by their side. **Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.**

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us – Lord of our lives, we pray that Christ may reign. **Amen.**

So we pray the prayer which unites Christians all over the world -

**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.**

To close our time of sharing let's reflect on John Bell's new hymn:

(you can listen to it on YouTube: We will meet by John Bell )

We will meet when the danger is over, we will we meet when the sad days are done;

We will meet sitting closely together and be glad our tomorrow has come..

We will join to give thanks and sing gladly, we will join to break bread and share wine-

And the peace that we pass to each other will be more than a casual sign.

So let's make with each other a promise, that when all we've come through is behind,

We will share what we missed, and find meaning in the things that once troubled our mind.

Until then, may we always discover Faith and Love to determine our way,

That's our Hope, and God's will and our calling, for our lives - and for every new day.

Blessing

Eternal God, may the power of your Spirit comfort us,

may the gentleness of your Spirit calm us,

and may the gifts of your Spirit strengthen us to live these uncertain days

for the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.