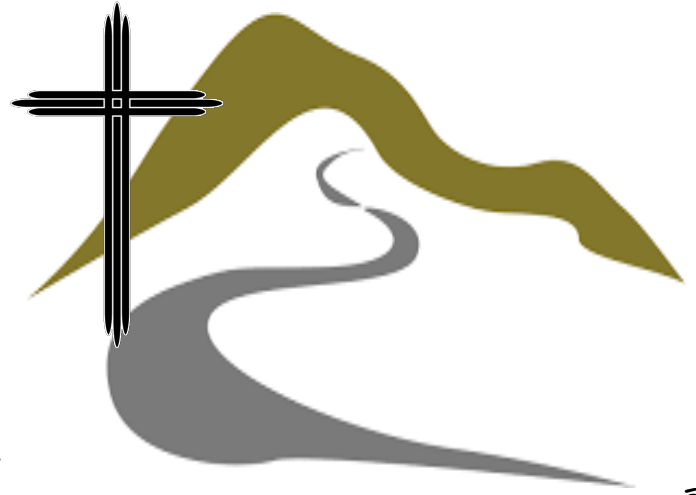


Worship At Home

10th March 2024

Psalm 103 - The love of God

"Praise the LORD, my soul!
All my being, praise his holy name!
Praise the LORD, my soul,
and do not forget how kind he is.
He forgives all my sins
and heals all my diseases.
He keeps me from the grave
and blesses me with love and mercy.
He fills my life with good things,
so that I stay young and strong like an eagle.



[Prayer comes from Vine at Home,
10th March 2024]

Let us pray.

Jesus, open my heart. Prepare yourself to hear God's word in a new way. Jesus, open my heart. Listen for God's voice, calling you to serve others and love radically. Jesus, open my heart. Hold the joys, regrets and frustrations from the week, and look ahead to the opportunities next week will bring. Jesus, open my heart. Hold the people you share your life with, and the challenges that come with relationships and friendships. Jesus, open my heart. Rest a moment in the quiet. **Amen.**

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - CH4 462 The King of Love my Shepherd is

¹ The King of Love my Shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

² Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

³ Perverse and foolish oft I strayed;
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me.

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⁴ In death's dark vale I fear no ill,
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

⁵ Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and oh, what wonder and delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

⁶ And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever!

<https://youtu.be/nWfZ-8s7L-k?si=IHUL9uEJD10aUw-e>

Let us pray,

Living God, as we continue our journey through this season of Lent, we are reminded of the steadfast love that the psalmist wrote about. A love which would endure forever, through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ. A love given not to judge, but to save, causing human sinfulness to be encountered by divine compassion. No wonder we sometimes see the placard thrust in front of television cameras with the words written large - "John 3:16". These words about the depth of your love for us are etched on our hearts and made visible through our lives. Accept our praise and thanksgiving, O God, for this priceless gift of lives lived eternally with you, a gift made possible through the sacrificial love of Jesus, your Son, our Lord, in whose name we pray.

The words of the hymn "Love that wilt not let us go" remind us with shame of the times when we have not reflected that depth of love in and through our lives.

God of steadfast love, forgive us any unloving and unlovely actions and words. God of unchanging love, as this community of faith, we confess the times when our love for the world falls short of your love for us. God of unlimited love, forgive us for too often replacing love with judgment.

Merciful and loving God, help us to empty ourselves of all that hinders your life-giving love to shine through our lives. Strengthen us with your Spirit to be credible witnesses of your love as we experience it in and through Jesus.

God, who is rich in mercy, out of great love for us - even when we were dead through our sins - made us alive together with Christ....for by grace we have been saved through faith, and this is not our own doing; it is the gift of God. (Based on Ephesians 2:4,5,8) And so I declare to you, in Jesus Christ we are loved, and we are forgiven. Thanks be to God. Amen

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn -CH4 557 Love that wilt not let us go

¹ O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee:
I give thee back the life I owe,
that in thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

³ O Joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain,
that morn shall tearless be.

² O Light that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to thee:
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

⁴ O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee:
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.

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<https://youtu.be/biHQVoAUTtU?si=hHse2B28a3NQRmgZ>

Reading: Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3: 14-21

Reflection: Open to God

Imagine you have been trapped inside a dark cellar for ages. It is pitch black in there and there is no switch or bulb hanging overhead to light up your prison. You stumble about feeling the walls, desperate to find a door, or some way out of this desolation.



Suddenly there is a flash ahead of you and soon the whole place is illuminated. You flinch at first from the glare for it dazzles you. You freeze with fear, for who might be outside? Is it someone come to rescue you, or is it your enemy? Will you trust the light or shrink back, afraid of the dark but afraid of the risk of going out into the unknown even more?

Reflect upon John's language taking us back to the opening of his Gospel: the truth and the light are paramount. At the opening of the Gospel the darkness is blamed for not understanding the light, but now the verdict is worse, for the darkness is loved by humankind, because we do evil.



And so, consider how our journey is nearly complete from Bethlehem to Jerusalem and from the manger to the cross. Jesus has been on an actual journey from village to town, he has crossed rivers and lakes, been in family homes and preached in synagogues. He has made friends with the weak and argued with the strong. It has been a journey of discovery, the discovery of his identity as the Son of God, and the

responsibility on us all to respond. And now all that is left is the final journey to the cross.

Think about the way John equates truth with the light. Light is benign, but passive. Truth, however, demands more of us. The truth forces us to come off the fence and take sides. If we know the truth but ignore it, it is as if we seek the darkness. If we refuse to choose, or choose wrongly, we will condemn ourselves - we need no judge or jury to do it for us. And by choosing the darkness, we not only exclude ourselves from the light, but also from eternal life. Where do you stand if you are being forced to decide which side you stand on?

Grumbles

Some folk are never satisfied. They live in one place for too long and complain that they get treated like slaves and they moan about it. Then someone comes along to rescue them, and they moan about the trouble he's causing. Then he leads them to freedom, and they cheer him on - well, most of them do, although some were unsettled at having to disturb themselves.

Then they get away completely and start walking towards a new future, but straightaway some of them start looking back nostalgically at 'the good old days.'

Then food becomes scarce, and water is hard to find and the complaints get more and more vocal. And God, who'd been at the head of the scheme from the start, and who'd been listening to all their ingratitude, decided it was time to teach them a lesson.

So, he sent snakes.

Poisonous snakes.

And people started to get bitten, and they realised that they'd grumbled once too often. They begged Moses to talk to God on their behalf and to send them a cure for the snakebites. And God did. But he didn't let them forget who was in charge.

The cure he sent was a copper snake on a pole.

And they were told, 'this will cure you, but because you can only be helped if you look at it, it'll also remind you not to be so ungrateful.' It worked too - for a while.

But grumbling is a very ingrained habit for some folk.

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Let us pray

Lord, the light of your love shines brightly still in the world today, shining into the darkest places and bringing your love where it is sorely needed. People use the darkness to create fear and confusion, to cause mischief and trouble.

Lord, may your light shine into their darkness and reveal its falseness.

People hide in the dark because they are afraid and because they are not safe to live in the light.

Lord, may your light shine into their darkness and bring comfort. People manipulate your light to control and gain power. Lord, may your true light shine into their darkness and reveal their true nature.

Lord, may your light shine brightly for all to see and turn to.

May we be light bearers in a world that loves darkness and be bold and brave in shining your light wherever it is needed.

We thank you for all that makes us feel safe and good in our country, and the many good things that we enjoy. We thank you for all the churches that work to shine your light.

We ask that we as your people here would be active and energised to share your light in our schools, shops, colleges, hospitals, and all places of work near us.

We remember those who have the responsibility of bringing light and hope to all people in our nation. We think of all those badly affected by the recent budget, and for those who can now be more generous in helping others. In hope we pray for our politicians and leaders who have been elected or chosen to serve all people, and we ask that they would daily put aside the darkness of temptation, greed and selfishness, and instead consider and work for all that would make our lives better and brighter.

We ask that we, as your people, would value your world and do all we can to protect land, animals, birds, rivers and the seas and work to end the darkness of pollution and destruction. We remember with sadness those who have lost their homes, their land and their work through changes in the seasons, the rising of water levels, and the increasing power of the sun's heat. As we move from one of the wettest winters on record we are aware of the damage being done to our climate, and the challenges for the future. Help us to think about all that we can do, and all that we can encourage and vote for, to protect your created world better.

We thank you that where you are there is always light and hope through your love for all people, but we recognise that for many people right now that light is hard to find.

We ask that we would be willing to speak up for those whose darkness seems overwhelming, and are in the middle of despair and conflict. We remember those normal families who are caught up in war and conflict, who have no security and safety, and who have suffered the loss of those close to them. We think of people in Haiti where unrest is developing; Gaza where millions are in despair; Ukraine, Israel, and other nations across the world. We ask that you would strengthen all those who can bring light in the darkness of this hopelessness and pain. Your light shines, your light is with us now. Help us to be people who stay in your light and share your light with those around us. Amen

Listen or sing or read the words of this hymn - MP 1151 Amazing Grace (My chains are gone)

¹ Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me;
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see.

² 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.
*My chains are gone, I've been set free, my God, my Saviour has ransomed me.
And like a flood His mercy reigns, unending love, amazing grace.*

³ The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.
My chains are gone . . .

⁴ The earth shall soon dissolve like snow, the sun forbear to shine.
But God who called me here below will be forever mine.

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<https://youtu.be/Jbe7OrulK8I?si=q3bFqcZc5R0R5-n4>

Let us go into our daily lives with God's guidance to direct us, the compassion of Jesus stirring us to action and the inspiration of the Spirit enlivening our work and witness in this hurting world.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all evermore. **Amen.**

Thank you to those who have taken the time to contact me. Take care out there this week. May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and each day.

Rev. Susan Thorburn, sthorburn@churchofscotland.org.uk

If you choose to email me, please can you tell me who you are and where you live. Thank you.