**Westfield URC 25th July 2021 Graham Mallinson**

**Call to worship**:

I was glad when they said unto me, ‘Let us go into the house of the Lord’. Serve the Lord with gladness; come before his presence with singing’.

**Hymn: MP 228 Here from the world we turn**

Here from the world we turn,

Jesus to seek;

here may His loving voice

graciously speak!

Jesus, our dearest friend,

while at Thy feet we bend,

oh, let Thy smile descend!

'tis Thee we seek.

Come, Holy Comforter,

Presence divine,

now in our longing hearts

graciously shine!

O for Thy mighty power!

O for a blessed shower,

filling this hallowed hour

with joy divine.

Saviour, Thy work revive!

Here may we see

those who are dead in sin

quickened by Thee!

Come to our hearts' delight,

make every burden light,

cheer Thou our waiting sight;

we long for Thee.

Frances vanAlstyne (1820-1915) (Fanny) Crosby) CCLI 150801

**Prayer**:

Dear Lord, we thank you for your great faithfulness, and your wonderful and constant love for us. You are our refuge and strength at all times and in all places. And we thank you for the countless blessings we have received, the many good things that surround us every moment of each day. And we thank you for everything you have given to us through Jesus Christ, for your great love, constantly reaching us, for your care and compassion that never ceases, and for your mercy that is never ending.

Forgive us, O Lord that we are so rarely content, and we fail to appreciate how fortunate we are. We so often lose sight of what we have, through dwelling on what we might have had, or being envious of others. Lord, teach us to count our blessings, to recognize all that is good around us, to be truly content in all circumstances, to realize that your love will never fail us, and your grace will sufficient o all our needs.

Gracious Lord, we thank you that, through your Holy Spirit, you are always with us, in the bad times as well as the good, in the sad as well as the happy times.

We thank you that, when we are unsure of the ways ahead, you are there to guide us. And when we have felt discouraged, you have brought a fresh inspiration into our hearts. You are indeed a Lord of all hopefulness and a Lord of all joy.

Lord, we thank you for the fellowship we share in this place. For all it offers, all it means to us, and all the ways it enriches our lives. We thank you for the experiences shared over the years, for the bonds created and the care that has been shared. We are conscious of our individual weaknesses, but we praise you that you have called us here in fellowship with you and with each other.

Finally, Lord we ask you to be with us through each day. Teach us to create space in our lives for you and for one another. and so may we conduct our lives as you would have us lead them.

All these things we bring to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

And shall we join in the Lord’s Prayer.

**Notices, Mission Prayer and Dedication of Offering**

**Hymn: MP 78 Christ the way of life posses me**

Christ the Way of life possess me

lift my heart to love and praise; '

guide and keep, sustain and bless me,

all my days, all my days.

Well of life, for ever flowing,

make my barren soul and bare

like a watered garden growing

fresh and fair, fresh and fair.

May the Tree of life in splendour

from its leafy boughs impart

grace divine and healing tender,

strength of heart, strength of heart.

Path of life before me shining,

let me come when earth is past,

sorrow, self and sin resigning,

home at last, home at last.

From the Book of Proverbs *©* Timothy Dudley-Smith CCLI 150801

**O.T. Reading**: Psalm 121

**Comment:**

Are you good at working into the early hours of the morning? Many people are, and I had to at times when I was still working. But I must confess that now, well before the early hours, my eyes begin to droop and my head begins to nod, so I have to turn in for the night.

Few of us are able to stay awake too many hours before the urge to sleep proves irresistible. I find the quickest way to ‘drop off’ is to have a meal and then switch on the TV. It’s a guaranteed method of missing the program I wanted to see.

According to the writer of Psalm 121, God is different. He is the one who never slumbers or sleeps. He is the one who, by day and night, is constantly watching over us.

That doesn’t mean that nothing unpleasant can happen to us or that we are safe from all danger. What it does mean is that God will be at our side when we need him, to give us support for any ordeal we have to face and to surround us with his love.

Because, whatever we may face however things may seem, he will be there with us, at all times. That is his wonderful promise to us all!

Prayer: Loving God, help us to remember that you are a God who never sleeps; a God on whom we can depend in every situation.

When we feel overwhelmed by trouble, help us to remember that you by our side. Help us to understand that, whatever we may face, you will guide and sustain us, and enfold us in your everlasting arms. And in that knowledge, may we meet every day with a quiet trust and glad thanksgiving, in Christ’s name. Amen.

**Hymn: MP 258 I am trusting thee, Lord Jesus**

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus,

trusting only Thee;

trusting Thee for full salvation,

great and free.

I am trusting Thee for pardon,

at Thy feet I bow;

for Thy grace and tender mercy,

trusting now.

I am trusting Thee for cleansing

in the crimson flood;

trusting Thee to make me holy

by Thy blood.

I am trusting Thee to guide me;

Thou alone shalt lead,

every day and hour supplying

all my need.

I am trusting Thee for power,

Thine can never fail;

words which Thou Thyself shalt give me

must prevail.

I am trusting Thee, Lord Jesus;

never let me fall;

I am trusting Thee for ever,

and for all.

Frances Ridly Havergal (1836-79) CCLI 150801

**N.T. Reading**: Luke 7:1–10

**Talk: The Centurion**

Lord, may everything we think and speak, this morning, be to your honor and praise. Amen.

Text: Luke: 7 verse 9. Jesus said ‘I tell you truthfully, I have not

found any faith to equal this, even in Israel.’

In the bible, it was men who took the major roll in most affairs, and certainly Jewish law spelt out the regulations that forbade women from specific duties. Even in the early days of the Christian churches, it was the men who took most of the leading rolls. So it is good to see that ladies, these days, take a more significant part in events.

The counter to this is that men are far less active in church work these days. David Watson, who before his untimely death was an Anglican clergyman in York, observed that instead of ‘Take my life and let it be’ most men appear to prefer to say ‘Take my wife and let me be’.

But in our New Testament reading from Luke we are told that it was a man who amazed Jesus Christ by his faith.

The incident took place in Capernaum, a town on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. It was a market town, but it was also a tax-collection centre and a Roman military garrison. It was where Jesus lived for a number of years after being driven out of Nazareth, the town where he had grown up.

It is assumed that the Roman Officer, in Luke’s story was a Centurion. And as a member of the occupying Roman forces, he would have between 80 and100 soldiers under his command, and, in line with his rank, we are told that he had servants.

If you had to write a story about a centurion you would probably describe him as a ruthless and demanding leader of men. You might expect him to be fairly impatient with the people in the occupied countries, and especially with their religious leaders. But I guess we have seen too many films like Ben Hur and Spartacus to write an unbiased account.

A centurion would have total responsibility for his men. For their training, there well being, and for their discipline. And strict discipline would be required during battles, and the soldiers would have to follow every order without question.

I remember doing National Service, and during the first few months you had to do ‘square bashing’ and other forms of disciplinary training. Everything was geared to following orders without question, and I didn’t find it easy! The problem was that there were some, shall I say, less than gifted individuals with a stripe on their arms, who were

not capable of organizing a children’s tea party, let alone controlling a squadron of men. I therefore feel that I would not have made a good legionnaire

William Barclay, in one of his commentaries, quotes the ancient writer Polybius on the qualifications looked for in centurions. ‘They must not be seekers after danger, he said, but men who can command, steady in action and reliable.

They had to be men of integrity and courage. He would only be able to command his men if he had iron discipline, and there would be little room for sentiment if the army was to function efficiently in the heat of battle.

Like most jobs, a centurion had good times and bad. He had authority and he had legionnaires and servants to follow his every demand. On long marches, which could cover 20 miles a day over rough terrain, he would have the benefit of riding on a horse. But during battle he would be expected to lead from the front, normally on foot, encouraging his troops onwards. And the leader would always be the target for the opposing forces, so the mortality rate tended to be very high.

But the centurion in our story was a man of unexpected qualities. The gospel writers inform us that he was on good terms with the Jewish leaders. When he wanted help from Jesus for his sick servant, Luke explains that these leaders spoke to Jesus and described the centurion as a friend of the Jews who helped them to build the local synagogue.

In David Kossoff’s ‘Book of Witnesses’, the great storyteller gives the centurion the name of Caspius, a piece of poetic license, I guess. He also suggests that he probably would have heard Jesus speaking, and he may even have heard the Sermon on the Mount, which was preached on a hillside outside Capernaum. And he would have heard of the many times that Jesus healed the sick.

And he was obviously impressed by what he saw and heard.

Matthew states that the Centurion came to Jesus on behalf of his servant. That in itself is revealing. Here was a man in charge of a number of men, with all the authority that that brings, and he was prepared to seek out Jesus for help for one of his servants. The slave may have played a key part in the centurion’s domestic life.

The Centurion said to Jesus ‘Lord, my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible pain. Jesus immediately agreed to go with him, but the centurion felt that he was not worthy enough to have Jesus under his roof. ‘I am a Gentile sinner. Just say the word, and my servant will be healed’.

Some observers feel that he was not inviting Jesus into his house, as Jewish law declared that all Gentile dwellings were unclean, and he may not have wished to cause embarrassment for Jesus.

The Centurion may also have recognized Jesus’ authority. He knew about authority, being a Centurion, and he sensed that Jesus had the authority to heal.

Jesus was amazed at the centurion’s faith. He not only believed that Jesus could heal, but that he could heal at a distance. Jesus declared that he had not yet found such faith, even in Israel. And in this context, Israel means the Jewish people.

This centurion was to be a forerunner of those Gentiles, including you and me, who would believe in Jesus and receive salvation.

In the story the normal expectations are turned upside down. He cared for his servant and used the residents of Capernaum to intercede with Jesus on his behalf. And this healer was not even famous; he wasn’t an important priest or a member of the Sanhedrin. He was just an itinerant preacher from an obscure province.

We might have expected the Roman would have summoned Jesus in a lordly fashion, as his authority would have allowed. ‘Get yourself over here Jesus, I demand your presence.’ But no, the centurion makes it clear that he recognized Jesus as a man of great spiritual power. Such faith and humility surprised Jesus, as, at the time, he was struggling to win over converts, firstly in Nazareth, and then in Capernaum.

Faith and humility don’t hit the headlines these days, nor did they do in bible times. It is perceived as a sign of weakness. In an age which is devoted to image, self- confidence is all, and it is seen as a fatal flaw to admit dependence upon anything or anyone.

But the centurion was willing to humble himself. He saw himself in relation to Jesus, and recognized his own relative insignificance.

In the eyes of the world the centurion was important, but he knew the truth. And the truth was his salvation.

At the beginning of The Lord’s Supper, in the Moravian Church, we admit our failings. Not to show that we are righteous or important, but we are there because we recognize that God loves us and wants to embrace us as honored guests at his table.

‘We do not presume to come to this your table, O Lord, trusting in our own righteousness, but in your manifold mercies. But you are the same Lord, whose property is always to have mercy’.

Faith and humility mean handing our sense of personal power or importance over to God. Recognizing Him as the one with the real power and being willing to accept his will into our lives.

And to God be all the glory and the praise. Amen

**Hymn: MP 67 Breath on me breath of God**

Breathe on me, breath of God,

fill me with life anew,

that I may love what Thou dost love,

and do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, breath of God,

until my heart is pure,

until with Thee I will one will,

to do and to endure.

Breathe on me, breath of God,

till I am wholly Thine,

until this earthly part of me

glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, breath of God,

so shall I never die,

but live with Thee the perfect life

of Thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835- 89) CCLI 150801

**Prayers of Intercession**

**Shine come in to share what they have been doing**

**Hymn: MP 624: Take my life and let it be**

Take my life, and let it be

consecrated, Lord, to Thee;

take my moments and my days,

let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move

at the impulse of Thy love;

take my feet, and let them be

swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing

always, only, for my King;

take my lips, and let them be

filled with messages from Thee.

Take my silver and my gold,

not a mite would I withhold;

take my intellect, and use

every power as Thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it Thine;

it shall be no longer mine:

take my heart, it is Thine own;

it shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love; my Lord, I pour

at Thy feet its treasure store:

take myself, and I will be

ever, only, all, for Thee.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-79) CCLI 150801

**Closing Prayer:**

Touch us, O Lord, and fill us with your light and your hope.

Give us strength and love when we are weak, courage when we are afraid, comfort when we are lonely and peace when we are in turmoil.

And may the light of this congregation here in Westfield, continue to reflect the light of Christ and give hope, love, comfort and support to all those in need. Amen.