

Order of Service August 14th 2022

The Race of Life

Welcome to you all. It is good to be with you. David is on holiday this week, so I am leading the service. Let us now prepare our hearts and minds in a time of quiet as we come to worship our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Call to Worship

This is the place, and this is the time.

Here and now God waits

To break into our experiences,

To change our minds, to change our lives,

To change our ways,

To make us see the world and the whole of life

In a new light,

To fill us with hope, joy and certainty for the future.

This is the place, as are all places.

This is the time, as are all times.

Here and now let us praise God.

And now let's join together to sing, *Come, let us join our cheerful songs.*

Hymn (BPW 6) **Come, Let us Join our Cheerful Songs**

1. Come, let us join our cheerful songs
With angels round the throne;
Ten thousand, thousand are their tongues,
But all their joys are one.
2. "Worthy the Lamb that died," they cry,
"To be exalted thus!"
"Worthy the Lamb," our hearts reply,
"For He was slain for us!"

3. Jesus is worthy to receive
Honour and power divine;
And blessings more than we can give
Be, Lord, forever Thine.
4. Let all that dwell above the sky,
And air and earth and seas,
Combine to lift Thy glories high,
And speak Thine endless praise!
5. The whole creation joins in one,
To bless the sacred name
Of Him who sits upon the throne,
And to adore the Lamb.

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession

O God, Our Creator, Your kindness has brought us the gift of this new day.
Help us to use the time to show Your love to others.

We thank You for the opportunity to praise You and worship You in the
fellowship of Your church here. We know that the whole of our lives should be
filled with praise and worship but so often it is not. Father, forgive us.

May our lives be totally focused on Your will for us, so that we run our race of
life which will be pleasing to You.

Lord, we are amazed at Your love for us, a love so great that Christ died and
rose again so that we may truly live.

May our enthusiasm and joy of living Your new life flow through us so that
others may catch Your spirit and feel Your love.

Come to us, Lord, speak to us in Your word, in prayer and in praise, so that
we may feel Your spirit of love in our hearts. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Let's be encouraged now as we sing two hymns reminding us of the strength
and guidance the love of God brings to us.

Song (WT 30) **Be Bold, Be Strong**

Be bold, be strong
for the Lord your God is with you.
Be bold, be strong
for the Lord your God is with you.

I am not afraid, I am not dismayed
because I'm walking in faith and victory,
come on and walk in faith and victory,
for the Lord your God is with you. REPEAT

Hymn (BPW 524) **Fight the Good Fight**

Fight the good fight with all your might;
Christ is thy strength and Christ your right;
Lay hold on life, and it shall be
Your joy and crown eternally.

Run the straight race through God's good grace;
Lift up your eyes and seek Christ's face;
Life with its path before us lies;
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

Cast care aside, lean on your guide;
His boundless mercy will provide;
Trust, and your trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

Faint not, nor fear: God's arms are near;
He changes not, and you are dear;
Only believe and Christ shall be
Your all-in-all eternally.

Offertory Prayer

Take these offerings we bring to you now. May they be used to show Your
love to all. Amen

Bible Readings

Psalm 119: 33 - 48

³³ Teach me, LORD, the way of your decrees,
that I may follow it to the end.

³⁴ Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law
and obey it with all my heart.

³⁵ Direct me in the path of your commands,
for there I find delight.

³⁶ Turn my heart towards your statutes
and not towards selfish gain.

³⁷ Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.

³⁸ Fulfil your promise to your servant,
so that you may be feared.

³⁹ Take away the disgrace I dread,
for your laws are good.

⁴⁰ How I long for your precepts!
In your righteousness preserve my life.

⁴¹ May your unfailing love come to me, LORD,
your salvation, according to your promise;
⁴² then I can answer anyone who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.
⁴³ Never take your word of truth from my mouth,
for I have put my hope in your laws.
⁴⁴ I will always obey your law,
for ever and ever.
⁴⁵ I will walk about in freedom,
for I have sought out your precepts.
⁴⁶ I will speak of your statutes before kings
and will not be put to shame,
⁴⁷ for I delight in your commands
because I love them.
⁴⁸ I reach out for your commands, which I love,
that I may meditate on your decrees.

1 Corinthians 9: 24 - 27

The need for self-discipline

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last for ever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I, myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Prayers of Intercession

Loving Father, we bring our prayers to you now, knowing that you will hear them and be with us and the people we pray for, but knowing that your answer to our prayers will be according to your will and in your way and your time.

We pray for our world in which there is so much war and unrest. Many people are affected by what is happening, and are displaced from their homes and families, are split up and they are in danger from explosions and bombs, uncertain what will happen to them. We pray especially for the situation in Ukraine.

We pray for our beautiful planet and that we can find ways to help stop the devastating effects of climate change and ever-increasing temperatures that we have brought about by our actions. Help us to find more sustainable ways of living and not be selfish about protecting our way of life to the detriment of other people. Help us to see what is truly important and what is not.

We lift to you our country, Lord, in the process of determining our next political leaders. Imbue them with thoughtful and empathetic ways of looking at situations, so that they consider all people when making their plans and laws. We pray that people are able to have holidays or breaks from their work or normal routine over the summer, to refresh them and give them time to enjoy doing things they don't normally have time for, and to spend time with their families and friends. Help us all to be able to spend time with those who need us and to be thoughtful of other people's needs and feelings.

We pray for all those who will be getting exam results in the next few weeks that will determine their futures. May they see a clearer way forward for themselves in their careers.

Lord, we ask you to be with all those who are ill, in pain, waiting for test results or operations. We pray that people will be able to get the treatment they need, and we thank you for all those who work in our health service. Comfort those who have been bereaved and still the hearts and minds of those who are anxious and fearful.

In the silence now, we hold in our hearts all those known to us that need our prayers.

We ask all these things, Lord, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Thank you, Anne, for those thoughtful prayers.

We now sing of the wonder of *Knowing Jesus...*

Song (WT 8) **All I Once Held Dear**

All I once held dear built my life upon,
All this world reveres and wars to own;
All I once thought gain, I have counted loss;
Spent and worthless now, compared to this.

Chorus

*Knowing you, Jesus, knowing you,
There is no greater thing:
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness;
And I love you, Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more,
To be found in you and known as yours;
To possess by faith what I could not earn –
All-surpassing gift of righteousness.

Chorus

Oh, to know the power of your risen life,
And to know you in your sufferings;
To become like you in your death, my Lord,
So with you to live and never die.

Chorus

Sermon

The Race of Life

Did you watch The Commonwealth Games? I was going to say, "Didn't Birmingham do well?" but actually really I should praise The Midlands, as less than half of the competitions were based at Birmingham.

There were so many sporting activities weren't there? - running, cycling, swimming, judo, and all the team games; all competitors the best in their field.... No one asked me??

But whatever sport they were competing in, the athletes had to be ready. None of them were chosen on the spur of the moment after a couple of weeks practice. It took years of training. Many were up early in the morning doing their training routines before starting work, not just once a week, but every day. They also needed a good coach – someone who they could copy, someone who guided and encouraged them. But they also needed self-motivation; they needed that purpose and determination to reach the goal they were aiming for.

At the time when Paul was writing there were special games at Corinth. They were called The Isthiman Games and they were as famous then as the Olympic Games are today. Paul had probably attended the games and in the passage we have heard read, Paul had many sporting metaphors —running, training, aiming to get the prize.

Paul is writing to those early Christians in Corinth, telling them that as followers of Jesus they needed to be ready to run 'The Race of Life', as God in Jesus wants them to. And that goes for us today, no matter what our age - young or old.

But we need to train.

Who is our coach? It is Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Saviour?

We need to do as He says - Love one another.

We need to watch how He lived - His compassion for all.

There is a message and a training programme for each one of us, to do our best, to be as near as we can to what God wants us to be.

God can't do things for us.

We have to have that self-motivation to follow in Christ's footsteps.

So let's start with regular training.

Everyday exercise and train. I have an exercise bike at home which I dust

regularly, but I need to get on it and practice if I want to get fit. Since I've stopped, my knees are not very happy.

How do we train our Christian faith?

Some of us have been training since childhood - with the help of our parents, our Sunday school teachers and other Christian friends. As we grow, we need to build on what we have been taught and then we will continue to gain strength in our faith.

It is very easy to think we know it all. We've read the Bible so much, perhaps we don't need it anymore.

We've heard enough sermons - perhaps we come on Sunday mornings as a matter of duty and then switch off, thinking of other things we might do in the week ahead.

We're too busy to stop and pray (but listening to David's sermon the other week we can pray at any time and in any place, still carrying on with whatever else we are doing.) So, stopping to pray does not seem the issue. But if our spiritual life is to move forward, we must continue training -reading our Bible and praying for God's guidance. Only then will we win the race of life and reach the place where God wants us to be.

So, The Race is on.

We all start in the same place because we are all equal in God's sight, rich and poor, clever and stupid, agile and handicapped. No one is privileged. We are all God's children and are all loved by Him.

Paul was quite a privileged person in the eyes of the world.

He was born of Hebrew parents, educated in Jerusalem, trained as a Pharisee and studied Judaism and the law. So, zealous in Judaism, he tried to wipe out opponents of Judaism - the followers of Christ . But all his privileges were cast aside when God spoke to him on the road to Damascus.

Sometimes there are obstacles in the way as we run 'The Race of Life'.

Some of the athletes in the Commonwealth Games had to cope with hurdles

but even if they knocked them over, they did not stop running. Stumbling blocks in our lives are a bit like hurdles – illnesses, redundancies, the loss of someone you love, but we have a Heavenly Father who is always with us, holding us up when we fall and never leaving us.

We might know people where stumbling blocks have become stepping-stones for them and for others. The bench outside our church is in memory of Sarah Hinde, one of our Girl Guides who was killed many years ago. Her parents have been a great support to many who have had problems of their own, being stepping-stones to others. The writing on our church wall saying, “Jesus changes death into life” used to be in cardboard, but the Hinde’s family paid for them to be made in plastic, as you see them now - a permanent feature, giving a message of hope to all who read them.

We need to stay focused on our goal – to become more like Christ in thought, word and deed, being the person God wants us to be. We must never quit. Many years ago, Derek and I ran in the Coventry Fun Run. We were last by a long way, much to the frustration of the stewards who were controlling the run, but we made it! Always keep on going to the end.

In the Commonwealth Games they had a baton which was handed over to various folk in each Commonwealth country. Each person who carried it was important. What is God telling us to hand over to others - the knowledge that God loves everyone of them, no matter what their colour, race or creed. Our church is part of that team handing over the baton of Christ’s love to all whom we meet.

Perhaps you, like me watched the Commonwealth Games from the comfort of your armchair, wondering whether the athletes were the same species as us. But we can’t be armchair Christians. We are called to live an on-going race of what God has called us to do - different tasks at different times of our lives, but still running towards our God of love.

We are moving in the power of God,
We are moving in the power of God.
We are moving in the power of God,
We are moving in the power of God.

We are moving, (we are moving) Oh,
We are moving in the power of God.
We are moving, (we are moving) Oh,
We are moving in the power of God.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

Be with us now as we go from here. May we feel Your presence with us as we continue to run the race of life with You as our guide and protector. Amen

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ;
And the love of God;
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, evermore.
Amen

Sung Blessing

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you
Wherever he may send you;
May he guide you through the wilderness;
Protect you through the storm;
May he bring you home rejoicing
At the wonders he has shown you;
May he bring you home rejoicing
Once again into our doors.