

Just Walk On In



Canonbie United & Liddesdale 18th May 2014

Order of Service

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Call to worship Here In God's House

Here the scattered may be gathered

Here the lost may come home

Here the outcast may find love

For this is God's house

Come gather in his love

Lift up your hearts and minds and souls to God

And as one let us worship

Hymn

CH4 63 All People That On Earth Do Dwell

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Him serve with mirth, His praise forth tell
Come ye before him and rejoice.

Know that the Lord is God indeed:
Without our aid He did us make
We are His folk, He doth Us feed
And for His sheep He doth us take

O enter then His gates with praise
Approach with joy his courts unto
Praise, laud, and bless His Name always
For it is seemly so to do.

For why the Lord our God is good
His mercy is for ever sure
His truth at all times firmly stood
And shall from age to age endure.

Approach

Knock

Faithful and loving God

Father to all humanity

We rejoice in your presence for you have called us here

You have welcomed us and cherished us as your children

“Knock and the door will be opened” your Son said

And through his giving of himself the doors of your Kingdom are open

“Knock and the door will be opened” your Son said

Easy as that - for what lies behind that promise is your love

Lies your grace and forgiveness

Lord we praise you for your constancy and your kindness.

“Knock and the door will be opened” your son said

Sometimes we find it hard to believe that it's that simple

Surely, we think, there are some who must be excluded

Because their sins are blacker than ours

Because they do not carry out the right rituals

Because they do not share our sacraments

Or cleave to our doctrines

Forgive our lack of faith.....

“Knock and the door will be opened” your son said

Yet sometimes we keep our own doors firmly closed

We close our eyes to the suffering of the poor and the hungry

We close our hearts to those who have offended us

We close our ears to the calls on our compassion

We lock out those who seem strange or different

Those the world tells us we should hate

Forgive our lack of humanity

“Knock and the door will be opened” your son said

Relying on that word we lay our faults before you

We seek your forgiveness

Lord open our ears to hear your word in our lives

Open our eyes to those who need us

Open our hearts to your love

That we may rejoice in it and pass it on to others

Address

The Angel At The Gate

An angel stood at the Gates of Heaven when a Priest arrived. “Who seeks to enter the Gates of Heaven?” asked the angel.

“I have been a priest in the Temple of the Lord for many years” said the Priest. “I have carried out the sacrifices and the rituals of purification. I have served God and his people”.

“Good,” said the angel. “And I’m sure you did it out of love for God and his people. It might be, though, that you just liked being the centre of attention. We’ll check that out. It won’t take long. Just take a seat.”

While he was waiting a Scribe arrived. “Who seeks to enter the Gates of Heaven?” asked the angel.

“I have studied the Scriptures all my adult life” said the Scribe. “I have sought their deepest meanings and when people have asked my guidance on the Scriptures I have interpreted them free of charge.”

“Good man” said the angel. “And I’m sure you did it out of zeal for the Lord’s word. It might be, though, that you just liked that feeling of authority it gave you. We’ll check that out. It won’t take long. Just take a seat.”

While he was waiting a Pharisee arrived. “Who seeks to enter the Gates of Heaven?” asked the angel.

“I have kept the Laws of Moses all my life” said the Pharisee. “I have kept myself pure and righteous.”

“Well done” said the angel. “I’m sure you did that out of love for God. It might be that you just enjoyed a sense of superiority over sinners. We’ll check that out. It won’t take long. Just take a seat.”

While he was waiting an Inkeeper arrived. “Who seeks to enter the Gates of Heaven?” asked the angel.

“I can’t claim to be an especially good man” said the inkeeper. “Too many temptations in my line of work. But I kept an open door. If ever a beggar came to my door, I gave him a meal and a bed for the night.”

And the angel said.....

Well, what do you think?

Address

Locked Doors

Why do some doors have locks?

What things should be locked away to protect them?

Does God need protected by locks

Then we shouldn't shut him away

We should let him out

Hymn

CH4 279 Make Way!

Make way, make way, for Christ the king
In splendour arrives
Fling wide the gates and welcome him
Into your lives
Make way, make way
For the king of kings
Make way, make way
And let his kingdom in

He comes the broken hearts to heal
The prisoners to free
The deaf shall hear, the lame shall dance
The blind shall see

And those who mourn with heavy hearts
Who weep and sigh
With laughter, joy and royal crown
He'll beautify

We call you now to worship him
As Lord of all
To have no gods before him
Their thrones must fall

Reading(s): Acts 7:55-60

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him.

Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.

1Peter 2:2-10

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation- if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner," and "A stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

John 14:1-9

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my

Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?"

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

Here to the house of God we come,
home of the people of the Way,
here to give thanks for all we have,
naming our needs for every day,
we who have roof and rent and bread,
sure of a place to rest our head.

There is a knocking at our door,
sound of the homeless of the world,
voice of the frightened refugee,
cry of the children in the cold,
asking the least that is their right,
safety and shelter for the night.

God who is shelter, who is home,
in borrowed rooms you came to live,
pleaded to save the dispossessed,
crucified, lay in borrowed grave:
these are no strangers in your eyes,
this is your family which cries.

We are all tenants of your love;
gather us round a common fire,
warm us in company with Christ,
give us the heart to feel, to share
table and lodging with free hand,
space in our living, in our land.

Intercession

The Shores Of The Kingdom

From the shores of the Kingdom

May we reach out with love

Lord we rejoice that we are citizens of your Kingdom
Our feet are planted firmly on its soil through the Cross of your Son
Your Kingdom is love, love unmeasurable, love wholeness.
Out on the waves there are those who need love
Out on the wave there are those who need wholeness
Comfort them Lord

From the shores of the Kingdom

Out on the waves there are those who are suffering
Those who are ill in mind or soul or body
Those who are broken by the way we live
Those who are lonely and cast adrift
Those who are grieving the loss of a loved one
Some we know and name now in silence....

Be with them Lord

From the shores of the Kingdom

Out on the waves there are those who are brutalised
By poverty and want in a world that knows wealth
By slavery and exploitation in a world that knows freedom
By weakness and impotence in a world that knows power
By homelessness and want in a world that knows comfort
Bring justice to the world Lord

From the shores of the Kingdom

Out on the waves there are those who are victims
Victims of hatreds that are passed down through the years
Victims of anger and abuse in their homes
Victims of cultures that teach them rage
Victims of crime, scared to go out
Bring peace to this world, Lord

From the shores of the Kingdom

Out on the waves - that is where we are meant to be

Like those who man lifeboats

Belonging to the security of the shore

But going out to those in need

We are your church

Bless us, strengthen us and send us

To seek those who struggle against the waves

From the shores of the Kingdom

Offering

Home In God

Lord you call us home
Home to a love that has embraced us all our days
A love that will embrace us into eternity
You call us home
To a bigger reality, to an endless life
Lived as your children
We thank you for that call
As we thank you for the baby born at Bethlehem all those years ago
Born to redirect humanity's thoughts to our eternal glory
We thank you too for the many blessings we have had at your hands
For the love we have known from friends and family
For music and laughter and togetherness at Christmas
For the things we need when we need them
We thank you and we bring these offerings
Take them, bless them, use them
And take us, bless and use us
To your purpose for humanity
And for the bringing in of your kingdom

Hymn

CH4 623 Gather Us In

Here in this place new light is streaming,
now is the darkness vanished away,
see in this space our fears and our dreamings,
brought here to you in the light of this day.

Gather us in – the lost and forsaken,
gather us in – the blind and the lame;
call to us now, and we shall awaken,
we shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young – our lives are a mystery,
we are the old who yearn for your face,
we have been sung throughout all of history,
called to be light to the whole human race.

Gather us in – the rich and the haughty,
gather us in – the proud and the strong;
give us a heart so meek and so lowly,
give us the courage to enter the song.

Here we will take the wine and the water,
here we will take the bread of new birth,
here you shall call your sons and your daughters,
call us anew to be salt for the earth.

Give us to drink the wine of compassion,
give us to eat the bread that is you;
nourish us well, and teach us to fashion
lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

Not in the dark of buildings confining,
not in some heaven, light years away,
but here in this place the new light is shining,
now is the Kingdom, now is the day.

Gather us in and hold us for ever,
gather us in and make us your own;
gather us in – all peoples together,
fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

Sermon

You Just Walk On In

In my Father's house there are many dwelling places (John 14:2)

In "The Lord Of The Rings" by J.R.R.Tolkien there's a point where a group of travellers want to enter the fabled mines of Moria. They arrive at the gate to this fabled underground kingdom of the dwarfs which is only visible by moonlight - so just as well they arrived on a moonlit night. Unfortunately this is a magic gate and it is magically sealed shut. Lit by the moon, in Dwarfish, obviously, are the words, "Speak, friend, and enter". The leader of the party - great wizard by the name of Gandalf the Grey assumes there must be some magic phrase that has to be spoken. So he tries a variety of well known incantations. He waves his hands about in all sorts of wizardly ways and wields spelly sorts of phrases while whirling his staff; all to no avail. Then one of his companions asks, "What's the Dwarfish word for friend". Gandalf replies and as soon as he speaks the word - it's "mellon", by the way, in case you ever need to use it - the gates open. All it took was asserting you were a friend. The party enter the mines, Gandalf saying ruefully that the gate was obviously built in more peaceful, more trusting times.

Or perhaps more generous-hearted times. Anyway, when the party enter the mines they enter a vast palatial complex. If you've never seen the films I do recommend them - they capture the vastness of this underground kingdom really well. Not as vast, though, as God's Heaven. "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places" says Jesus. In other words there is room to spare. This image of Heaven is of a huge place where people can be welcome. This is not the haunt of mean-spirited god who will only let a tiny number over the doorstep. This is the house of a father - a father who comes to the door, finds his son or daughter standing on the doorstep and says "Just walk on in. Your room is ready".

This is verse is an insight into a generous, open-hearted God, who keeps many rooms, many dwelling places, for his children. And why not? That's the point of the Cross. It's the point of Calvary and the tomb and the resurrection - that for anyone who needs it there is the prospect of new life in Christ. It's the point of the thief on the cross alongside Jesus who asks to be remembered and is promised Paradise. It's the point of the story of the woman taken in adultery. It's the point of any number of miracles that freed people from possession. That for

anyone who needs new life - for anyone who feels outcast or guilty; for anyone who reaches out for the love of God that Jesus embodied the vision of Stephen, of the gates of Heaven opening in welcome, is never an impossibility for God. This is a house with many dwellings and they can just walk right on in.

It can't be that simple, can it? People reach for the love of God in Christ and that's it? Their sins are forgiven and the gates of Heaven are open? The truth is that there have been times when the Church has certainly not wanted it to be that simple. For the Catholic Church the rubric remains, "ex ecclesia nulla salus" - if you're excommunicated that's your salvation down the Swanee - though to be fair most of the devout Catholics I know don't believe any such thing. And sometimes we've been little better. "You want forgiveness? Well you'll have to put on the sackcloth and sit on the penitent's stool in front of the congregation".

"In my Father's house there are many dwelling places". How constricted and cramped such views of redemption seem in the light of that verse. Not so much "Walk right on in" as "Be on your way". But it can't be that simple, can it, we seem to want to say. It can't be as simple as you reach for the love of God in Christ and the gates of Heaven are open. Truth is that the Church has often tried to suggest it isn't. We've clung to Peter's talk of being "chosen" and too often used that to exclude one another in ways that Peter would have found inconceivable. To be "properly" Christian you have to believe salvation is solely through faith. To be truly Christian you have to believe that the Bible is the literal word of God. To be truly Christian you have to sign up to all the statements of The Creed - whether that's the Apostle's Creed, or the Nicene Creed or the Athanasian Creed. So much certainty. So many closed doors. Ask yourselves, does that make sense in the light of today's passage with Thomas in his confusion and Philip in his lack of perception?

There was a time, in the Church of Scotland, when we locked the doors during church services. I'm a fire officer for my school. Imagine. There was a time when we "fenced the tables" at communion so that no one who had not received a communion token could partake of the sacrament. So much ritual. So many complexities. So many barriers. Because it can't be that simple, can it? You reach out for the love of God in Christ and the vision of Stephen is yours - the gates of Heaven are open and you just walk right on in?

But why not? "In my Father's house are many dwellings" says Jesus, employing

his favourite metaphor for God as father. Imagine. If you have been a mother or a father, imagine this. You have a son or a daughter. They went off the rails - it happens, more often than perhaps we want to believe. They haven't phoned for a long time. You haven't heard from them. Then one night there's a knock at the door. Shrivelled and trembling on your doorstep is your son, your daughter. "Mum. Dad. I'm in so much trouble. I've done some terrible things and I'm... I'm... Oh God! I'm so sorry". What's your answer? "Walk right on in - we still have your room" or "On your way!"?

I know what I believe. I believe that God is the father to every man woman and child on this planet. He is a god whose house has many dwelling many places. Enough for everyone. Enough for those who have offended the sensibilities of the church but who have embraced the love of God. Enough for those who have broken the law and done terrible things but who reach out to God for forgiveness. Enough for every son and daughter who has gone off the rails and not phoned in ages then fetched up on God's doorstep, wretched and in need of a home.

We are God's doorstep. That is what this building is meant to be. It is what we who are associated with buildings such as this are meant to be. Which God shall we tell those who fetch up on the doorstep about? A God who excludes and casts them aside unless they carry out this or that ritual, or believe this or that doctrine or creed? Or a God who rejoices that they have come home to their Father and says, "Walk right on in"?

Lord may we ever be your welcome. May we welcome without judgement. May we follow your son in proclaiming you as Father

To God be the glory, great things He has done;
So loved He the world that He gave us His Son,
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,
And opened the life gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,

Let the earth hear His voice!

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord,

Let the people rejoice!

O come to the Father,

through Jesus the Son,

And give Him the glory,

great things He has done.

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood,
To every believer the promise of God;
The vilest offender who truly believes,
That moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things He has taught us, great things He has done,
And great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
But purer, and higher, and greater will be
Our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

Benediction

The Glory Of Heaven

The glory of Heaven shines upon you
The glory of Heaven shines through you
Go now into a world that needs the light of Heaven
Go now to be the light of the world
Confident that God's love goes with you always
That is the light - share it with all you meet