**2nd July 2023**

**Call to worship**

God welcomes you.
God receives you with joy today.
Come and receive from God all that you need,
and rejoice that you are one of God’s beloved.

**A gathering prayer**

Living God,
we thank you for your kindness towards us.
Give us grateful hearts,
and direct us in ways we can share your kindness
with one another and with your world.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

You have called us to you, O God;
your welcome awaited long before we ever responded.
Certain of your joy at our coming,
we gather before you to worship and adore.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

God, you are the open arms of acceptance,
the warmth of a hearty welcome,
the joy of a sincere smile.
We cannot see you,
and Jesus walked the earth long before our time,
yet we know by faith
that he embodied your welcoming presence
in his dealings with your needy children.
We bow before you in worship and adoration
for all that you are.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Lord, so often our welcome lacks sincerity. The word is
cold on our lips; the smile does not reach our eyes. We are
polite; but there is little warmth in our hearts. Perhaps no
deeds accompany our words, no comfort offered, hospitality withheld.
We ask forgiveness of the One who always receives with open arms – generous, caring, meeting needs and so much more. We ask forgiveness from the One who accepts us, unconditionally, and is never too weary to care.
As we are welcomed, so may we welcome your children in
return, in your name, representing your love and generous nature.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

Thank you, O God, for welcoming us even when we do not deserve it; when we have thought, said and done things that others would find hard to forgive.
For with you, God, there is always forgiveness. You accept our flawed humanity and welcome us back to the fold again and again when we stray. Thank you for your loving forgiveness, and for the welcome that encourages us to emulate your generosity.
**Amen.**



**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

God, in your Son our Lord, you extend your welcome to all nations. You are the universal God.
Christ Jesus, you opened the kingdom of God to all, even those excluded by deed or creed from sacred rites and places.
Holy Spirit, your indwelling is a welcome that embraces us in belonging.
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one in word and deed, trinity of welcome in realms above and below, we thank and praise you for the everlasting arms outstretched to welcome us, to enfold us, to catch us when we fall; and for the heart that overflows with love and acceptance.
Help us to see others with your eyes, to love with your heart, and to welcome with your arms, in your holy name.
**Amen.**

**A time of quiet reflection on the presence of God.**

* Use these words to introduce the activity: ‘Whoever welcomes you, welcomes me.’ A cup of cold water is a sign of welcome in a hot and dry climate; in the UK we tend to offer cups of tea! If we have a guest, we might show them into a room, turning on the lights and making the space inviting. How might we welcome God?
* Play some gentle music (instrumental is better, as words may distract). Light one or more candles at a suitable focus point. After a short time, invite people to close their eyes and pray/say silently ‘Welcome’ to God. After another short silence, invite them to acknowledge or recognise God’s presence with them (e.g. by silently saying, ‘Thank you for being here with me/us’).

**A cup of kindness**

Place a jug of water and some cups on a table by the entrance. Ask those who welcome people as they arrive to offer them a cup of water.

As people settle into their places, invite them to share with each other stories of kindness they have received in the past week or so. Gathering everyone together, ask if anyone is willing to share a particularly interesting, unusual or unique story with all present.

**Chain reactions**

**A craft activity to aid reflection on acts of kindness.**

**You will need:** plenty of strips of paper (for making paper chains), pens, glue, staples or sticky tape.

* Ask people to recall the acts of kindness they shared at the beginning of the worship. And also to consider what they could do for someone else in the coming week to demonstrate God’s welcoming love – perhaps different things appropriate to the different places/groups where they will be.
* Invite everyone to write one ‘act of kindness’ idea onto a paper strip; encourage everyone to write on several strips. Everyone then makes their strips into a chain (using glue, staples or sticky tape as appropriate).
* Invite everyone to hold up their chain and say:
‘Loving God, thank you for your goodness to us.
Help us this week to show your love and kindness
to those you are sending us to.
**Amen.**’

**Matthew 10.40-42**

Jesus concludes his teaching on mission by stressing the close identification between Father God, Jesus himself, those who go in his name, and those who receive his followers in the right spirit. He sends his disciples out to preach in his name, and they are to assume that God will provide for them.

Here we get a glimpse into God’s economy, where those who give to others are rewarded by their heavenly father, even if they give just a cup of cold water to someone who needs it.

***Matthew 10:40-42***

*Having spoken generally to the crowd, Matthew now tells us that Jesus’ attention turns to the Twelve, and the tone becomes even more solemn. In many ways this is a second commissioning of this band of close followers (the first being in 10:10ff). In three proverbial sayings, Jesus outlines the call on the lives of his followers.*

*First, because they are sent by him, those who welcome them will be welcoming Jesus and the God who sent him. So, the Twelve and those who come after them are not offering their own thoughts on what life is about. Rather, they are bringing the message of their Lord; and those who welcome that message, welcome the one whom the message is about. This is similar to Jeremiah’s word to his audience.*

*Second, Jesus talks about his followers as prophets and righteous ones. We are those set apart for the task God has given us; and so as we speak his word, we are being prophetic; as we offer the way of discipleship, we are showing the way of the righteous. Quite what the reward is here is slightly obscure. Perhaps Jesus is saying that the people who receive us as God’s messengers will receive the reward of both hearing and benefitting from that message. Those who receive us fully will benefit from the life that we know through our partnership with God in Jesus.*

*Third – and possibly this is the climax of the triad of sayings – those who offer hospitality to the messengers of Jesus will be blessed. And perhaps the proverbial saying has a double edge, namely that the offering of practical mercy to any who need it will be rewarded by the God who looks with concern on the distressed and needy.*

*There is encouragement at the end of this long discourse: Jesus reminds us in verses 40-42 that some people are receptive to our message. This recalls the hospitality enjoyed by the disciples from people of good will (see vv.11-13). Such hospitality could be costly for those offering it – so, it is indication that their interest in the message goes well beyond the casual. Who are the prophets and righteous ones that Jesus refers to here? We are. We take God’s word and God’s new way of righteousness to anyone who’ll listen. Those who receive us will be rewarded by hearing what we say with understanding and faith and so starting on their journey to salvation.*

**George Muller**

George Muller was born into a wealthy family. His father was a tax collector in Prussia, northern Germany. He grew up as a wild child. Pretty naughty. At age of 15 he was drinking and gambling all night. One night he arrived home to find that his mother had died. He couldn’t care less – it had little impact on him. By the time he was 16 he was in prison for a month. He had booked himself a holiday with no money and didn’t pay his bills. He thought he was clever to get away with it all. He was thrown into prison but his father bailed him out. But that didn’t correct his ways. He even cheated his best friends. His youth was full of cheating and lying and theft. He was good trickster and lived his own way.

Despite all this his father really wanted him to become a pastor of a Lutheran church. Not that he hoped for him to live a Christian but it was just seen as a good and honourable living. If he was a pastor of a wealthy church his father may be able to retire to a nice house. George went along to university to learn about being a pastor but spent most of his time in the ale houses. He had a reputation as the life of the party, downing a beer in a minute and leading the other students astray.

One day he met an old childhood friend, Beta. He was a religious person and good moral character. Something in him told George he had to change. He couldn’t be a shepherd of the flock and living a wild life on the side. So he decided to make a friend on Beta so he could rub off on him. Unfortunately it was the other way round and Beta started to follow George to the alehouses. One day he decided not to go with George. George was sad and asked Beta where you going? Beta said you won’t want to go where I’m going. George said now that’s a challenge – where are you going and I’ll come. Beata said I’m going to a Bible study. George laughed, but he made a deal and so went along. As he walked into the house he felt inferior. When people prayed George heard that they genuinely meant what they prayed. The Scriptures were treated not as nice language but practical – helped them live out their lives. This was the first time he had met real Christians. He went back again and again. At the end of the week George Mulller was on his knees and asking God to forgive him for his previous life and to help him to start again.

Before he was the life of the party. Now his friends were revolted that George was not going along with them. Why had he become all religious? Now he wanted to be a missionary and go off to far off places. He went to his father to seek his forgiveness and say he did not want to be a pastor but a missionary. But his father was angry ‘I have not paid for education that you become dishonourable as a missionary and that you would throw away my comfortable retirement. His final words were ‘get out of my sight’.

George realised that he couldn’t ask his father for money anymore. He was still at university and there was fees and rents to be paid. So, he got on his knees and prayed to God: ‘I’ve cut ties with my earthly father so I’m trusting you my heavenly father to provide for me’. This was the first occasion when he reached out in faith. About an hour later there was a knock on his door. One of the tutors came in and said two American professors were visiting the university but couldn’t speak German. Now George Muller could speak English and German and so he found himself with a job of translating and interpreting and teaching German. These professors paid him handsomely and enough to cover all his bills and also there was a room in the orphanage over the road and they offered it to Muller. At this moment Muller saw the Lord provide when he trusted.

He got to know the person who ran the orphanage andgot opportunities to preach at church in the countryside. Muller spent hours crafting the sermon and tried to practice it. He delivered it word perfect. On his way out as he shook hands one man said ‘im sure it was a very good sermon sir but I couldn’t understand a word of it’. Muller was shocked at this. What is the point if these uneducated people not understand a word of my sermon. After lunch he excused himself as he was going to preach again in the evening. He ripped up his sermon . I need to know how to communicate. So he asked God for help. Many were helped that evening.

He got in touch with other Christians about being a missionary. They wanted him to go to London to share the gospel in the Jewish ghettos there. Muller went to London, studied Hebrew and in six months could speak and read Hebrew. He had worked so hard that he burst a blood vessel in his stomach. Doctors said you need to rest up and go to the countryside to get fresh air. So on the brink of being a missionary he was sent to the seaside town of Teignmouth. Here he rested but met a man called Henry Craig. He was serving in this town. And he introduced George to a man who had gone to Persia. So reignited the desire to be a foreign missionary. Henry taught him to read the bible and not books about the bible. He would read the bible through about four times every year.

When he returned to London he thought why wait to be a missionary - why not get out onto the streets and handout tracts. He realised everyone needed to hear about Jesus. He wanted to share the gospel to everybody. He decided not to continue with the mission society and the mission field was not specific for him. Henry Craig encouraged him to return at Teignmouth and he became a pastor at a chapel. Fishermen attended the chapel all were uneducated. But the chapel grew.

He met a lady called Mary the sister of Mr Grove who was a Missionary. They fell in love and married in 1830. They both shared the idea of living as an example to their community. Mary brought with her tea sets and ornaments from her home but when George looked around he said they had to get rid of it and live simply. Mary gathered it all and sold the stuff and they used the money to help the poor.

In those days the tradition was for pew renting. And this bothered George. Any pastor would rent pews to different families. The richer you were the nearer to the front you would sit. Everyone did it. George didn’t like the idea though, it smacked of favouritism and the poor people couldn’t hear because excluded and at the back. Spoke to Mary and said he wanted to get rid of our salary. Didn’t want income through pew renting. How we going to survive she said?. The Lord will provide. Instead, they put a box at the back which said free will donations. This outraged the wealthy people because they were not getting special treatment.

George and Mary found themselves dirt poor because now people had the choice whether to give or not and so they didn’t give. But George knew that his decision was right and the Lord would provide and guide them. Sometimes they would sit down at their dinner table with nothing. George would say grace and thank God for provision. Then there would be a knock at the door and someone would say would you like some ham or that they couldn’t sit down and eat because the Lord said they had to come and give them some bread.

Henry Craig moved to Bristol and wanted George to come along with him and be co-workers in chapels there. This was a hard move for Mary. The Industrial revolution had begun making Bristol dirty and busy and Mary was a country girl. Also there was an outbreak of cholera when they first moved there. No cures in those days. Hugely dangerous work for George and Henry as they were called to peoples homes to pray for them and also do funerals. They were exposed. Mary was also pregnant with their first child at this point and scared. More and more people coming to chapels because death staring them in the face. Disease could easily spread. But they couldn’t ask people to go away. They could only pray for protection. After several months they realised only one person in those congregations died.

Lydia was their first child born and she survived.

While walking through Bristol one day a little hand tapped George on the elbow in Bristol. There a child carrying an infant on her back. Both were grubby and dishevelled.

The girl said ‘please sir have you a shilling’. He said ‘where are your parents?’ and she said ‘my mother died of cholera and my father has left us all alone’. Just then it was as if the Lord had tapped George on the elbow and had showed him his mission field. Then and there he knew from that tiny encounter that his life would not be in Persia or China but right under his nose in Bristol. He realised how many orphans there was due to the cholera and if the mother had died the father had taken off because they couldn’t care for the children. There were so many kids roaming the street begging for food. So, he saw the mission field was right there.

He asked Mary to make huge batches of porridge. He invited all the children to come for breakfast. There would be water outside for them to wash their faces and then they would pile in and sit on apple crates around the kitchen table and then Mary would dish out the oatmeal porridge and the tea. George would tell them Bible stories and act them out. Soon the parents were coming to the breakfast clubs but George realised this was nothing. It was only providing one small meal.

He wanted to do more. He started the scripture knowledge institute. A school for the day and also a Sunday school and an adult school. He bought in bibles to distribute to them. But he didn’t have a penny to his name. it seemed ridiculous. In his frustration he fell to his knees. He said to God ‘you need to show me whether this is just from me or whether this is from you. Send me £20 right away to buy bibles and start giving them away’.

 When he got up from his knees there was a knock at the door. A lady was standing there with an envelope. ‘I just think you might need this’, she said. George muller thanked the Lord.it was an immediate answer to his prayer. He didn’t need to look. But to make sure, he asked the lady is there anything specific you want me to use this for. She said ‘well I wasn’t sure, you may use it for anything, but I was wondering whether you might bibles for the poor families’. Muller realised the Lord was behind this plan, it wasn’t just his own idea. It was from heaven itself. And the Lord would provide.

Sometimes it was just a few pencils or a chair, some people donated money, 3 shillings or three pounds. He recorded it all in his book as a gift from God. At the same time the family were struck down with grief. Their second child Elijah died at the age of two. His wife lost her father in the same week. After that George became sick and told he needed to rest. He was removed for a while and left Henry Craig to do the work. But he used the time well. He read the scripture well and read biographies such as John Newtons.

He returned to Bristol and the work. About 100 children enrolled. One child had been absent. Where was he. His teachers said he had been ordered to the workhouses. The government had changed the laws and were not giving out money anymore and instead they established workhouses. They were horrible places, splitting up families and putting them to hard work. They shattered bones into fertilisers. It was a grim environment. The government made it a deterrent. Poverty was almost treated as a crime in the 1800s. This family became too poor and this boy was required to work. He realised this would happen to all his children. George thought how could he help them.

When he visited his congregation he noticed how they were living in fear of ending up in the workhouses. So George encouraged them to pray and read the scriptures. They said it’s alright for you but they were too tired when got home. ‘If you honour the Lord he will provide and care for you.’ Replied George. But they said that was all far-fetched.

George had another radical idea. He set up an orphanage. There were only ten in the whole of Britian at that time and you had to be left an inheritance to live in one. You couldn’t be diseased or a labourer or disabled. So you had to be wealthy. George Muller wanted an orphanage for the poor. He wanted them to know that God cares for the fatherless and they would pay nothing. And he waited on God to provide for them. When he announced this at his chapel everyone thought he had gone mad. Most thought he was foreign and bit strange. But George thought the Lord wanted him to do it. They asked questions – where will it be ? when start? How get furniture? He didn’t know. Except the Lord would provide.

Some were moved. Newspapers reported it as a joke. ‘Foreign pastor wants to set up an orphanage but doesn’t know where or how.’ But some saw the article and supported him. He would open his door and some would offer spare cups, handkerchiefs, pennies. Everything he was given he felt was from the Lord. One day he was sent £100. About two years wages. It was from a widow whose father had died and this was her inheritance. She gave everything. He went to her house and said I can’t take this. The widow said ‘the Lord Jesus died for me. He gave everything for me. So I must give everything to him’. George was really touched by that. He knew his work was not for him but for everyone.

George Muller had one clear objective that orphanage was an in your face testimony that you should trust God. That God is a faithful God. His second objective was that God cares for the unloved and fatherless.

Soon there was progress. A Wilson Street terraced house came available. He rented the place and soon children came. 26 girls were crammed into this house.

More and more children came. George expanded his work. He rented another house on Wilson Street. Still not enough. But another house came for rent. Soon 81 children living on Wilson St. He needed to pay rent and food and people to work in the orphanages and fuel and clothes. All of this he committed to God’s care. But no child missed a meal. We know this because he recorded everything meticulously. He was totally transparent. If people said, please use this to buy food he would use it exactly as people had asked.

Soon there were complaints on Wilson St from other residents. 120 children now living there and playing there. Residents did not like it. Children seen a pests. Muller understood this and that it would be better if they had more space and fresh air. He wanted to buy land outside the city and something purpose built. To do that he would need tens of thousands of pounds. They prayed and prayed. ‘Give me a clear sign that this is from you lord’ prayed George. Again the Lord answered and an anonymous envelope of £1000 - a huge amount. But still not enough. Then he met someone a relative of Mary. His principal was that he would never ask anyone directly for money. He was matter of fact about his plans. This relative said he wanted to use his gift to help the Lord. He was an architect and so did it for free. This man knew it was his chance to serve God in some way.

George thought seven acres would be enough. A person was going to sell it for £200 an acre but that was too much for George. So, he brought it before the Lord. The man who wanted to sell it for £200 an acre couldn’t sleep that night. It was as though God was poking him and keeping him awake: ‘You are not selling it for £200’. In the morning he went to George Muller and said forget the £200 its £120 . Please accept that because I want a good night’s sleep’. The land he bought was called Ashley Downs.

This plot was the beginning and they soon had a building beyond expectations. It was built for three hundred. Orphans were dropped off at Ashley Down and the work expanded. Soon 300 was not enough. Eventually they catered for 2000 children in five buildings and a hundred workers who gave themselves to this work. When they ran out of bread they would take it out of their own wages to buy bread. They honoured the Lord in their work.

As happens when you are successful people look on with envy. Rumours spread that the Muller orphanage was a horrible place, infested with rats and the children were treated like slaves. Muller was said to be power hungry and used the money on himself.

This brought attention of a famous person who had done a lot to raise awareness about plight of orphans and society where the rich were so rich and the poor so poor. Charles Dickens was very angry about Muller having all these orphans under his control. He decided to travel to Ashley Downs and see in person. When George found out Charles Dickens was coming he couldn’t have been happier. He said to his workers let Dickens see anything and go anywhere he wants. Dickens, three hours later, was wide eyed and shocked that the rumours were so wrong. He saw order and cleanliness, joy and hope. Dickens wrote an article to squash those rumours.

Money was still scarce. There was a famous story of how 300 children filed in for breakfast. But their cup and bowl were empty. Muller told them ‘ you will see today that the heavenly father cares for you’. He gave thanks for the non-existent breakfast. As soon as he finished. A baker knocked at the door and said ‘I couldn’t sleep last night’ and Muller wasn’t surprised as he handed out freshly baked bread. When the baker had gone a flustered milk man came in. He said the wheel on his cart had been damaged. He needed to unload the milk to fix the cart. The orphans travelled out with cans and got the fresh milk.

Henry Craig died at age of 60, Muller had lost his co worker

Mary had never taken a day off in twenty years. But she was bed ridden with rheumatic fever. George didn’t have a word from the Lord, he knew there was never a guarantee of health for the believer. But he knew that the Lord doesn’t withhold any good thing from those who walk uprightly. He prayed to God ‘If you take Mary I know that is a good thing for her and me’. Mary did die and left George with his daughter Lydia and 2,500 orphans to mourn for her. . Muller spoke at her funeral on the verse Psalm 119 68: ‘You are good and you do good. Teach me your statues’.

George later remarried and outlasted his second wife and his daughter, dying at the age of 92.

£1.5 million passed through George Muller hands. He cared for 10,000 orphans. 20000 children were educated at his school and 10s of thousands of bibles were given out to the poor. This mans funeral was the biggest funeral that Bristol has ever seen. All 10000 orphans followed his coffin into Bristol as a debt of gratitude. People who had been touched by him lined the streets. The newspaper of the day wrote *George Muller had robbed the cruel streets of many orphans. How had he done this? By Prayer.*

In his own words:

*My dear Christian will you not try this way. will you not know for yourself the precious and happiness of this way of casting all your cares and burdens on God. This way is as open to you as it is to me. Everyone is invited and commanded to trust the lord and cast your burden on God and to call on Him in the day of trouble. I long that you may do so. I desire that you may taste of the sweetness of that state of heart in which while surrounded by difficulties you can be surrounded by peace because you know the Living God cares for you.*

**Prayers of intercession**

Holy God, we bring our prayers for others, feeling the pains and burdens of the world, with confused minds and uncertain steps but knowing that you are our God and you do hear our prayers. And so, for the world we pray:

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

The world is full of uncertainty, people’s lives are full of uncertainty, many do not know where they are from and where they belong and where they are going and who they are, may they in their uncertainty find a grounding and an anchor and a welcome through the words and the deeds of people they encounter.

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

For ordinary citizens in Ukraine and Russia who struggle to comprehend what the war between the nations is all about, where it is going, what is the truth and what is false. For those fearful for their lives, for their families, for their well-being and their future. For those who simply want to live in peace and harmony, with food enough and a home secure with friends and neighbours. For those who have no choice but to fight and those who have to decide the next actions and work out their consequences.

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who are fleeing their homes, their countries, their cultures, due to poverty, persecution, greed, war and neglect. Those who see no future for their homeland, no peace, no comfort, no welcome, no hope, no joy, no love. For those who trek and sail with no belongings or support, crossing borders and cultures in uncertainty and desperation. We pray that those peaceful folk who travel and journey may find hospitality and welcome and space to build secure and safe lives and livelihoods.

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who cannot flee their homes, who continue to live in poverty and fear with war, treachery and starvation knocking at their doors. We pray for them, hope, kindness and love when so often they are alone and bereft.

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who seek to make money, wealth and fortune at the hands of others, dragging them into despair and pain. For those who sell addictive and illegal drugs with little or no thought of the damage and harm and devastation they will cause. We pray for those who are addicted, whose lives have been damaged, often beyond repair, who are on a perpetual cycle of need and dependence driving them into violence, poverty and violence.

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for governments and leaders worldwide who share the responsibility for the climate and its changes, its health and its future, its wellbeing and its survival. For areas where deforestation is happening at an alarming rate against all sensible advice. For those nations dealing with flood and drought and consequent poverty and need.

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

We pray for those we meet day by day, at home, at school, at work, when shopping, when walking, when talking, friends, family neighbours. May they all see and know in us the presence of a loving God, the welcome that as Christians we are called to give, a smile, a listening ear, a hand to guide, a touch of comfort, a word of prayer.

Holy, Holy, Holy God we pray.
**Hear our prayer.**

And all the prayers of our hears, spoken and unspoken.
**Amen.**

**A prayer for all ages together**

Father God, you have promised
to give us the things that we need.
Help us to be generous to everyone we meet,
so people will know of your kindness.
**Amen.**

**A sending out prayer**

Loving God,
as we hold this chain of acts of kindness between us,
send us all out to show people what you are like.
Be with us as we share your love and kindness
each day this week