**PRINTED WORSHIP MATERIAL for SUNDAY 29th AUGUST 2021Text

Description automatically generated**

**compiled by Mrs Barbara Spencer**

**Call to Worship:** As we reflect, we offer our praise and sincere thanks to God for all that he has given to us and to discern how we interact with his people and the world, remembering that we are part of his family.

**Hymn:** 378 StF Father of everlasting grace <https://youtu.be/EAA_hTSCb5Q>

**Prayers:** Father of everlasting grace we do indeed come to praise you for your goodness, truth, and mercy. We are overwhelmed when we consider that in all the magnificence of your creation you care for each one of us, regardless of who we are. We praise and thank you as we look around and see your love shining through in the generosity shown to those in need, sometimes by those who have little themselves. It has been particularly noticeable as we have struggled through the current pandemic. We thank you for your provision, for the people who manage the land providing food and other resources, for the medical staff and scientists who are finding ways of making life more comfortable, the diplomats trying hard to bring peace to our world. Most of all, we give you thanks and praise for Jesus, “the gift unspeakable … the Spirit of life, and power, and love”.

We are sorry for the times when we have failed you; when our words and actions have not been in harmony, and we have followed other people rather than your Holy Spirit. Forgive us and renew us with energy and wisdom to perceive your will for us and our community. Help us to recognise what *we can* do and help us to proclaim your love by our words and actions. May we be encouraged and enabled by what we learn from Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. In his name we pray. Amen.

**The Lord’s Prayer.**  *You may like to watch* <https://youtu.be/QAeTvSNmq1c> *- a different way to pray*

**Reading:** Mark 7: 1 – 23 (the Lectionary omits 9 – 13 and 16 – 20 but they provide some explanation)

**Hymn:**  250 StF Jesus calls us o’er the tumult <https://youtu.be/mL4hjmbOA_s>

**Reading:** James 1: 17 – 27

**Hymn:** 504 StF May the mind of Christ my Saviour <https://youtu.be/Mi3BHF8Njj0>

I wonder how often you have washed your hands over the past 18 months – more than usual? There have been many promptings from medical and political gurus, adverts, signs in public places, and, perhaps, people you may have been with. So you may think that the Pharisees had a point when complaining that the disciples hadn’t done so. However, we would not have approved of their idea of cleanliness. In the Torah, handwashing was a ritual for priests, but over time rabbis determined that everyone should observe the ritual. It was a way to honour God and enable the Jews to identify themselves. The washing was just a little water poured over the hands – hardly effective hygiene, but then, people did not know about viruses and bacteria then! The Pharisees were finding fault over a trivial matter in order to diminish the credibility of the disciples in the eyes of the crowd. They ignored the amazing miracles that Jesus had performed in the recent past. Jesus answered by making the comparison between God’s law and the interpretation made by priests and rabbis over the centuries. The priests were insistent that the disciples should abide by the letter of the law, even if it was not in the Torah, and sometimes used it for their own benefit (vv9 – 13 Corban was contrary to The Commandments). In case that makes us feel a bit superior, it is worth remembering that the Pharisees thought they were doing the right thing by obeying the rituals but had forgotten, or misunderstood, God’s love and purpose for his people. Jesus said that intention and actions were more important than ritual. He pointed out that there were serious contradictions between the preaching of the Pharisees and their actions. In fact, Jesus had demonstrated this on a few occasions, ostensibly breaking the religious law in order to benefit people: healing on the Sabbath being one. As I reflect on some of the actions undertaken by Christians, and in God’s name over time, I see parallels, and sometimes despair. Then I wonder what I would have done! You may recall the burning of so-called heretics, or The Crusades, or the taking of babies from unmarried mothers… How do we deal with some of these and other ethical questions? Do we take the moral high ground because of tradition or from the context of Jesus’s teaching? Do we become more concerned about the relatively trivial rather than seeing situations from God’s perspective? How often do we use the teaching of Jesus to solve difficulties?

Jesus said that uncleanliness comes from the heart and lists the evils. No amount of handwashing will put that right! Pharisees were not the only ones to use laws to justify their actions for their own good or to increase their power. Christians have sometimes exempted people from church because they have not dressed properly or have challenged tradition, locally or of the denomination, for instance. Jesus does not condemn all ritual, only that which supersedes the sacred.

The essence of the passage from James is similar to that of the Gospel. Just listening and talking without responding is inadequate, though also important. My mother used to say that actions speak louder than words. Whilst this may be true much of the time, words can be powerful and influential. Words used on social media, in the press, on the internet, in discussion, as gossip etc, can be detrimental or affirming. James says that belief expressed in words needs to be followed by meaningful action. The action may be to spread the word, of course, and so encourage others. Nevertheless, we are judged by our actions, the way we express our beliefs. Jesus said, “let your “yes” be “yes” and your “no””. Someone I knew was invited to go to a youth club with a group of teenagers. They didn’t turn up. He felt so rejected and disappointed that he wouldn’t have anything to do with church thereafter! Christians in time past have talked about God’s love but have endorsed some awful practices. No wonder people have turned away. It is no good preaching the gospel to someone who is hungry unless they are given food too! Practical ministry enables God’s love to work and be seen to work in our troubled world. There are many ways to practise God’s love, not least by prayer.

How can we, as individuals, church or circuit, continue to proclaim the gospel of God’s love for all by our words and actions? Do we look for and see new challenges? Do we have the faith to say “yes” to address the needs of others? Who would have thought that 12 disparate, untrained men and several women that we know of could have made such a massive difference 2000 or so years ago? They each responded to Jesus with a “yes, I will” and perhaps “I can”. They were given what was needed to follow Jesus and change the world. We are part of the ongoing story if we choose to be. Sometimes it is as simple as challenging bad language or behaviour, or perhaps some of the dreadful programmes on television, or putting misconceptions right, by being honest and steadfast for the truth, or being peacemakers. It may be by trying not to get hung up over traditions that have no real substance but are more comfortable. Sifting out the right and wrong actions is not always easy, but we can use the gold standard set by Jesus. Let us try to be beacons of goodness in thought, word, and deed, looking to Jesus for guidance and following him.

**Hymn:** 706 StF Longing for light <https://youtu.be/kt3Qc04ulOM> or <https://youtu.be/OXGmi3PEVQM>

**Prayers for Others:** God of compassion we bring our concerns for people we know…

We see disturbing pictures on the news and wonder what can be done to alleviate such suffering…

We pray for the people of Afghanistan and ask that the leadership will be more benevolent and democratic…, for troops facing such difficulties…, for the leaders of nations…, for justice and peace…

We give thanks for people risking their lives to rescue others and ask that they will be supported…

We pray for those providing relief and homes for the homeless and dispossessed…,

We pray for those affected by natural disasters – in Haiti, the USA, and as a consequence of floods…

We pray for your church, aware that some Christians are being tortured and discriminated against…

We pray for our church family and all whom we love that they may be kept safe and know your enfolding love. We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus, our teacher, guide, Saviour and friend. Amen

**Hymn:** 566 StF Take my life and let it be <https://youtu.be/Gf11rReeWIs>

**Benediction:** “Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, … Hold on to the good”