

Prayers at Home for Sunday 10th May 2020 5th Sunday of Easter

Hymn

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim though this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand;
Bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through;
strong Deliverer,
be thou still my Strength and Shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
bear me through the swelling current,
land me safe on Canaan's side;
songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

Introduction

On the edge of the Brecon Beacons there is a house which more than a hundred years ago was a small theological college for Welsh non-conformist ministers and preachers. Among the students in that college was one William Williams who wrote the words of that great hymn Guide me O thou great Redeemer. I remember when I saw that house of being struck by its location, of wet Welsh hillsides and all the Old Testament imagery, the journey through the barren desert to the great land of promise. It's a hymn about a journey, a journey of life, but not one which me make on our own. In the hymn we ask God to our guide.



William Williams, (1717 – 1791), is generally seen as Wales's premier hymnwriter as well as one of the great literary figures of Wales, as a writer of poetry and prose. He was among the leaders of the 18th-century Welsh Methodist revival. He had first been ordained a Deacon in the Anglican Church in Wales but as a curate became

involved in the Methodist movement and in June 1742 his disapproving parishioners reported his activities to the Archdeacon's Court in Brecon. Methodism was seen as a threat to the Anglican establishment, and in 1743, when Williams duly applied for ordination as a priest, his application was refused because of his Methodist connection and so he took on the life of a Methodist preacher.



Acts 7:55-60

NRSV

⁵⁵ But filled with the Holy Spirit, Stephen gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ⁵⁶ "Look," he said, "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸ 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. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." ⁶⁰ 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.

Psalm 31:1-5; 15-16

In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.

**Incline your ear to me;
make haste to deliver me.**

Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold;
guide me, and lead me for your name's sake.

**Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me,
for you are my strength.**

Into your hands I commend my spirit,
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.

**'My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies,
and from those who persecute me.**

'Make your face to shine upon your servant,
and save me for your mercy's sake.'

John 14:1-14

NRSV

14 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe^[a] in God, believe also in me. ²In 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?^[b] ³And 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. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going."^[c] ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you know me, you will know^[d] my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."

⁸Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." ⁹Jesus 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'? ¹⁰Do 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. ¹¹Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. ¹²Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴If in my name you ask me^[e] for anything, I will do it.

Reflection

I love the phrase 'in my Father's house there are many rooms'.

It would be easy to think of a house as we do now with bricks, windows, doors and a roof; but St John is not thinking about a building as much as he is about the Kingdom of God. His picture leads us to God as the most welcoming, hospitable and inclusive of hosts – no matter how many come to him, no matter how many believe in him, there is always room for one more.

This week for the video, we have been building a version of the hymn 'Guide me O thou great Redeemer' with people singing on their own at home and then with technology, bringing them together to build a choir. Each part is individually important to God but together they become something different. Individually and together we are part of God's Kingdom, but the loving, hospitable and inclusive God always has room for one more.

In my 'father's house there are many rooms'. I think God grants us a room, or perhaps we could say, God gives us room to build. God, I think, hopes that with Him we might play our part as Kingdom builders. So as different bricks make up a building and different voices make up a choir, so we as believers with all our differences, quirks and oddities, make up the kingdom. Part of our role is to make sure that what we have can be shared so that others can play, enjoy and experience the loving hospitality of an ever-inclusive God. A God of welcome; a God who invites us not to do nothing, but rather to invite, welcome and build others up.

And then we have the challenge of that reading from the Acts of the Apostles and the death of the very first Christian martyr – Stephen. This is the first known example in early Church where the world was forcefully saying – 'we were not going to make room for you'. And so here is one of the challenges. God makes room for us but within the human spirit there are different ways of rejecting that. In Stephen's case the rejection was expressed in violence – it still is in different places of the world today. In our culture the rejection is more often expressed by apathy or disinterest. God makes room for us – but how willing are we to accept that gift of hospitality.

The hymn writer William Williams built an enduring image of God the Redeemer who, like a father or mother, guides his children to build the kingdom today. God in Christ gives us room in which to build; Christ our Redeemer guides us so that through faith in him all might come to know the way, the truth and the life.

Prayers

We share all our worries, fears, joys and hopes with God as we pray together:

Lord, we thank you that, even in this difficult and uncertain time of being locked into our own homes, you have assured us that there is a place for each of us in your Father's kingdom.

Lord, we thank you that, despite our weakness and sinfulness, you have promised to be our Redeemer, to lead us on our pilgrimage through this life to our eternal home in heaven.

Lord, we thank you that your powerful hand is ever present to protect us amidst whatever challenges this earthly life may present to us, and to heal us from distress and unhappiness.

Lord, we thank you that you have told us all that you are "the way, the truth and the life".

Lord, we thank you for guiding us on our journey, and for giving us the opportunity to bring our anxious fears and concerns to you through prayer.

Lord, we ask you to help us to trust in you, to listen to your word, and to play our part in building the Kingdom of God in this life and in bringing the hope of salvation to others.

Lord, we give thanks for those ministering to our physical and spiritual needs during lockdown. We rejoice in the work being done every day of the pandemic by our doctors, nurses, carers and other key workers.

God of life, we thank you for being there for us always. Help us to do all that you ask of us and to love one another, so that all people may have someone to trust.

Amen.

And as Jesus taught us:

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Blessing

I hope that the journey of this week goes well for you and those you love. God is with us as friend and guide, but we need to be friends and guides to others as we play our part in building the Kingdom.

In the coming weeks we may see some relaxation in the lock down and hopefully that will mean being able to unlock our churches. In the meantime, we press on with video and audio recordings and please don't hesitate to call or email me if that might be helpful to you.

Let's pray for God's blessing.

Ever present God,
be with us in our isolation,
but close to us in our distancing
be healing in our sickness,
be light in our darkness,
be wisdom in our confusion,
be all that is familiar when all is unfamiliar,
that when the doors reopen
we may with the zeal of Pentecost
inhabit our communities
and speak of your goodness
to an emerging world.

And the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be upon you and remain with you.
Amen.