

Western Fells Methodist Circuit

**6th June 2021**

***The Specialness  
of Life***

by Rev Joyce Ellis

## Call to worship

God's grace and peace are with us  
Let our hearts be filled with joy.

SF 102

*Libera*

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,  
for the love which from our birth over and around us lies:  
*Lord of all, to you we raise this our joyful hymn of praise*

For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night,  
hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun & moon and stars of light:

For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's delight,  
for the mystic harmony linking sense to sound and sight:

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,  
friends on earth, and friends above, pleasures pure and undefiled:

For each perfect gift and sign of your love so freely given,  
graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

*Folliett Sandford Pierpoint*

## Prayer

Lord, we praise you, our mighty Creator. Every time we witness the magnificence of all that you have made, we are moved to praise you. Every mountain and fell, every field and valley, every tree and every plant, every creature small and large, every colour, shape and design moves us to offer you our worship and our praise.

We praise you for every person we meet, every conversation we share; for every laugh and smile, every tear that is wiped away and every hurt that is shared. We praise you for every experience of true friendship and every discovery of what it means to be human and what it means to be ourselves.

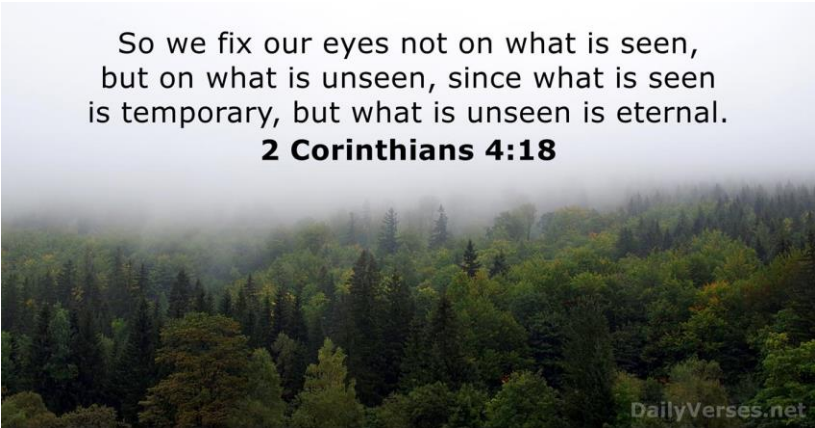
We praise you for the gift of life and for our new life in Christ. We praise you for the life of your church and the deep fellowship that is ours in Christ; for every experience that draws us closer together as he breaks down the walls that divide us and the barriers of prejudice that we can build.

We praise you for the assurance that the love, joy, worship and fellowship that we share now are only a sample of all you have in store for us in the heaven of your love. We praise you for our oneness in Christ and ask that our love for each other may be a channel of your grace for others. Amen

## Prayer of Forgiveness

Lord, into our failings, you breathe forgiveness  
Into our heartaches, you breathe your solace.  
Into our confusion, you breathe reassurance  
Into disappointments, you breathe encouragement  
Into our anxiety, you breathe courage  
Into our clutter, you breathe your priorities  
Into our loneliness, you breathe companionship  
Into our living, you breathe your life. Amen

**Reading**      2 Corinthians 4 : 5 - 18



So we fix our eyes not on what is seen,  
but on what is unseen, since what is seen  
is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.  
**2 Corinthians 4:18**

We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness', who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. <sup>8</sup> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the

life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. <sup>11</sup> For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us, but life in you.

<sup>13</sup> But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—'I believed, and so I spoke'—we also believe, and so we speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. <sup>15</sup> Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, <sup>18</sup> because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

## *The Specialness of Life*

### **Text**

**2 Cor 4 : 14**

We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will also raise us up with Jesus, and take us, together with you, into his presence.

### **Gift of Memory**

What a wonderful gift we have been given! The gift of memory. The picture book we have in our heads that we can call to mind at will. In particular the pictures we have of people. Pictures of shared times and events, with their attendant emotions of joy and laughter. Times of sorrow or pain. Pictures of occasions of excitement and hope, or disappointment. All those pictures, especially for us, that help us remember the life of a person. A life that **we** have been privileged to be a part of.

### **Privilege of Ministry**

I hold it one of the greatest privileges of being a minister - the number of 'lives' that I have come to know, and sharing memory pictures with people. We very few of us know another's life in its entirety - until we hear of it as it is spoken of in a funeral service, or we read of it in an obituary.

## Reverence for a Whole Life

But over the last 35 years or so I have come to have a very deep respect for the ‘specialness’ of each individual life. Of your life - for your loved one’s life, of my own life.

There was a time I was so busy living my own life, that I didn’t notice how **special** a thing a whole life was, whether that life be a public and distinguished life, or indeed a very quiet and retiring life. A life, I have come to understand, is something to be revered - not to be taken for granted. It was Hans Christian Anderson who said “Everyone’s life is a fairy tale written by God’s fingers.”

### v.6 **God’s Light**

*‘The God who said “Out of darkness the light shall shine!” is the same God who made his light shine in **our** hearts, to bring **us** the knowledge of God’s glory shining in the face of Christ.’*

God has made each one of us and has made his light shine in our hearts.

In other words - God speaks to each one of us in our lives. And he gives us light for our lives, bringing them meaning and purpose. And each of us is **so** special, we are made so that we can each of us know God and be known by him.

### **Clay Pots**

Earlier in our passage Paul gives us a lovely picture of how incongruous it is that we have been made so special. He says that we are like clay pots - with special treasure inside.

There was a Sunday School Teacher who had ended her Bible story and was asking questions of her primary children. “Why do you think, does God love us all so very much?” There was a momentary silence as the children wrinkled their brows and ‘thought hard’ for the proper answer. “Why does God love us - so very much?” Suddenly little Kirsten’s hand shot up. “Because he only has one of each of us.” **Because he only has one of each of us!**

### **Confidence**

When we understand that we **are** special - and our specialness comes from God, this gives us enormous confidence. In those wonderful words of Paul, that we have so often identified with, perhaps especially over the last year: “We are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend; and though badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed.”

## **Into God's Presence**

But Paul then reminds us that God's purpose for each one of us goes further than our life here on earth; that we were not made simply for our life here. No matter how special or how precious that life is or has been, to ourselves, and of course to those whom we have loved and have loved us in return. Goethe observed: "Life is the childhood of immortality."

Our reading tells us that the final fulfilment of our life, comes when "God, who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will also raise us up with Jesus and take us, into his presence."

## **Good News**

The Good News of the Gospel is, of course, that the special life which is ours we can live in all its fullness **now** through Jesus Christ. Eternal life is not something on offer when we die. **But** when we do die we shall come, with Jesus, into the presence of God himself. And Jesus has shown us that, through him, we have nothing to fear. To be taken to the Father is to be taken home. To come face to face with our creator.

I have no doubt at all that this will be a time we experience as judgement, as are all our encounters with God. But our deepest experience of God is that he is the one who loves, forgives and restores us. And brings us to the glory he has designed for us.

## **Conclusion**

And so we give thanks also to God for the very gift of life with all its specialness, and look forward with confidence to the glory that awaits us all through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **StF 728**

O God you search me and you know me  
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.  
When I walk or lie down you are before me:  
Ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising.  
You discern my purpose from afar.  
And with love everlasting you besiege me:  
In ev'ry moment of life and death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord,  
You have known its meaning through and through.  
You are with me, beyond my understanding:  
God of my present, my past and future too.

Although your Spirit is upon me,  
Still I search for shelter from your light.  
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you:  
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me,  
Gave me life within my mother's womb.  
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you:  
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

*Bernadette Farrell*



### **Prayers of Thanksgiving & Intercession** - from Christian Aid

For the health workers tending the seriously ill; for the scientists working on a vaccination; for the researchers analysing data and identifying trends; for the media outlets working to communicate reality; for the supermarket workers, hygiene and sanitation providers; for the good news stories of recoveries and effective planning; for the recognition that isolation doesn't need to mean loneliness; for the notes through letterboxes offering help and support; for the internet and telephones and technology that connects; for the awakened appreciation of what is truly important, Thanks be to God.

For those who are unwell and concerned for loved ones; for those who were already very anxious; for those immune suppressed or compromised; for those vulnerable because of underlying conditions;

for those in the 'most at risk to coronavirus' categories; for those watching their entire income stream dry up; for those who have no choice but to go out to work; for those who are afraid to be at home for those who are more lonely than they've ever been; for those who are bereaved and grieving.

God be their healer, comfort and protection, be their strength, shield,  
and provision be their security, safety and close companion.

And raise up your Church to be your well-washed hands and faithful feet to be  
present to the pain, to respond with love in action if even from a safe distance.

### **A minute's Silence**

In the silence, let us hold before God those people, places and situations that  
concern us at this time.

### **Lords 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.

Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen

### **Nunc Dimittis**

*Aled Jones*

Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace  
according to thy word

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation  
which thou hast prepared before the face of all people

To be a light to lighten the gentiles  
and to be the glory of thy people Israel

understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge  
and love of God, and his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

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