

Blackburn Baptist Church - 25 February 2024

Sharing Christ's Great Banquet

Alec began by welcoming everyone, especially Tim Presswood, President of the Baptist Union this year, to lead our time of worship together. Tim shared that his Presidential Message was The Great Banquet, following on from Hayley Young, who had invited us to build a bigger table. Tim had arrived on his motorbike, and was wearing a suit and shoes - unlike when he was inducted as President when he was barefoot!

Tim issued a Call to Worship:

Gather us in, young and old, rich and poor, black and white.
Gather us in, doubtful and faithful, weak and strong, healthy and sick.
Gather us in, into your harvest, into your presence, into your church.
Gather us in, today and tomorrow, as yesterday and forever.
Gather us in. Amen.

Tim apologised if there were a number of unfamiliar songs today, one of the challenges of leading worship in different churches is you don't know what songs they know! We began with this, played by Trevor, Paul W, Kate and Judith.

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine, and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that free us:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Author: Marty Haugen CCL NO 5664

Tim shared that he was 'mad as a hatter!' and likes the congregation to work hard in worship so tends to write responsive prayers. He invited us to join in a **Prayer of Approach, with him reading the words in bold, shown on the screen.**

**Come, let us celebrate the feast
of an ordinary day, nothing special in the least.**

We rejoice today

because today is ordinary. Today is another day, gifted by God.

A day for working

A day for resting

A day for playing

A day for learning.

**Come, let us celebrate the feast
of an ordinary day, nothing special in the least.**

We rejoice today

because today is not yesterday. Today is another day,
gifted by God.

A day for forgetting

A day for forgiving

A day for completing

A day for moving on.

**Come, let us celebrate the feast
of an ordinary day, nothing special in the least.**

We rejoice today

because today is not tomorrow Today is another day,
gifted by God.

A day for hoping

A day for waiting

A day for watching

A day for anticipating.

**Come, let us celebrate the feast
of an ordinary day, nothing special in the least.**

[Pause]

Daily God,

Forgive us when we rush too quickly to get to tomorrow. Forgive us when we cling too firmly to the past.

Forgive us when we don't appreciate today for what it is

The precious gift of life.

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We all said the Lord's Prayer, before Jean read our first Bible passage for this morning:

Luke 14:15-24

When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

"Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

"Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

"Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

We sang again:

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.

All who dwell in deepest sin my hand will save.

I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?

I have heard you calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if you lead me.

I will hold your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain.

I have wept for love of them, they turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone.

I will speak my word to them, whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?...

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.

I will set a feast for them, my hand will save.

Finest bread I will provide till their hearts be satisfied.

I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord?...

Writer: Daniel Schutte Copyright ©1985 New Dawn Music, Kingsway Music CCL no 5664

Tony then came reminding us of the weekly notices, before Jane read a statement re Future Ministry, You can read it at the end of this service sheet. Tim felt it appropriate to lead a time of prayer, first in silence, following this, before inviting Jean to return and read our second Bible passage:

Reading 2 John 10:6-10

Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

Therefore Jesus said again, "Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Reflection - Tim. He first introduced himself, for those who did not know him, he has been in Baptist Ministry for 32 years, in the same church, in Openshaw, one of the most deprived areas of the country. He was called to join NWBA 10 years ago, to his surprise, working alongside Phil Jump, and is also College Manager at Northern Baptist College. The church in Manchester is now a Forest Church, worshipping God in creation, demonstrating that there are many different ways of "doing" church.

He explained that for him, poetry is an important way of communicating the Gospel, and encourages the congregation to think -today is a mad poetic ramble! This is his reflection in writing, so may lose something of the pattern and cadence of the spoken word.

Shhh! He'll hear us!

Come on, there's a gap here. Go on, don't be a chicken! Shhh! He's coming.

A gang
An old-fashioned gang
A dozen little boys
Break in
Sneak in
Steal in
To the neighbour's garden
To the neighbour's orchard
A few lonely apple trees
Stripped
Of their fruit
Weapons in an ongoing neighbourhood battle.

***9** I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.*

***10** The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*

I can't
I confess
Remember the name of the old man Whose apples we stole
Not to eat
But to throw
At each other
Across the field where we played.
I can't

I confess
Remember his name.

For his name was not important To us.
For his name was not important To us.

The thief comes to steal and destroy So we build a wall

The thief comes to steal and destroy So we build a wall

or
in this case
plant a hedge at the bottom of the garden a high hedge

a prickly hedge
a threadbare hedge

worn by generations of children's feet The thief comes to steal and destroy

so the shepherd builds a wall a sheep fold
to keep the thieves at bay
to keep the wolves at bay

The thief comes to steal and destroy

Openshaw, where I live and minister, is one of the most deprived communities in the country. Before our building was pulled down, we suffered from a number of very unpleasant incidents, not least of which was the occasion when an old lady in her eighties was sitting in the car while her son locked the building, and the car was surrounded by a gang of hooligans who started to shake the car, threatening to turn it over with her inside. Understandably, the congregation were afraid and surrounded the church with high fences and gates which were painted with anti-vandal paint and which were locked ten minutes after the Sunday service started.

Until one Sunday when a young couple who were not members of the church came to see whether they wanted to get married in our church. Finding the gates locked, and having called out to be let in, they, perhaps unwisely, decided to climb over the gate. Such keenness to get into church! Covered in sticky anti-vandal paint, they decided to get married somewhere else.

In John 10, Jesus is not a wall!

⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I am the *gate*.

I am the one through whom the sheep may come and go. I am the one through whom they may come in

Come in

I am the one through whom they may come in
and go out and find pasture.

Jesus is not the wall Jesus is the gate

It is not our President, Hayley Young, who invites us to build a bigger table. It is Jesus.

Come in

Come in

Come in through the gate

Come in through Jesus

⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.

¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Abundant life

In Luke

In Matthew:

A banquet

A great banquet

An abundant banquet

A feast of life

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly A feast of life

A banquet of life

Canapés and Cocktails

Waiters and flunkies

A hierarchy of closeness

To the host

Abundant life

A privilege to be invited

A privilege to be invited

The wine will flow

The finest juice for those of us

Who prefer

The richest foods

Prepared

By the finest hands

Delicate flavours

Melt in the mouth

Blended

With undreamed of subtlety

And all served

With a dash of theatre and humour

Some people ask why I love to climb My best friend and colleague Tim Clay Was killed in a climbing accident How can you climb? Why would you want to climb? George Mallory Lost his life on Everest When asked the same question He may (or may not) have replied Because it is there

God's gift
To humanity God's gift
Of life Eternal life Abundant life

An invitation to Christ's great banquet A privilege to be invited
A privilege to be invited
A privilege

Thrown back in the host's face

I'd rather do the gardening than spend time with you My cow's are more important than you
My own wedding feast is better than yours Ungracious

Ungrateful
Rejecting the privilege Rejecting the host
I don't like you
I don't like your kind
I don't want to sit at table With people like you
I don't want to share food With people like you
I don't want to break bread With people like you.

An invitation to Christ's great banquet A privilege to be invited
A privilege to be invited
A privilege

Thrown back in the host's face

A privilege for the outcasts Cast in
This full blown production

For me So close to death I am alive I am living Abundantly I am living Life Abundant Life

A privilege for the outcasts Now
Cast in.
Jesus

Invites us in
Jesus
The gate
Through which the outcasts are invited in.

Jesus
The gate
Who wants all to feast
Jesus
The gate
Who invites us to the great banquet

Not to wait at table
Not to do the washing up
Not, even, to be a celebrity chef Slaving
In a hot kitchen
To bring joy to the guests
And another star
On the wall.

Jesus
The gate
Invites us to dine with him
Alongside him
Not gathering up the crumbs from under the table

Jesus
The gate
Invites us to dine with him To break bread with him

Jesus the gate
Wants the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame To dine
To feast
To share in his foolish generosity.

Now
I am more than a little squeamish
About the New Testament depiction of disability. Today
We would not

Lump people together Today
We would not Generalise about

The Poor
The Crippled
The Blind
The Lame
The Epileptic The Young
The Old
The Black
The Gay
The Rich
The English
The Mentally Ill The Women
The Unemployed The
The...
Anyone?

I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

There is Of course A risk There is Of course A risk

They may come
They may accept Christ's invitation to abundant life They may come

What would our churches look like
If we went out onto the roads and country lanes
And brought in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame? And brought in the people who don't
look like us?
And brought in the people we don't understand?
What would our churches look like?

23 *"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to
come in, so that my house will be full.' **24** I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste
of my banquet."*

Jesus
The gate
Invites us to dine with him
Alongside him
Not gathering up the crumbs from under the table

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republish it, please let me know where it will be found. Please do not edit or selectively quote from the poem out of context.)

Song

Shout for joy and sing your praises to the King,
lift your voice and let your hallelujahs ring,
come before his throne to worship and adore,
enter joyfully now the presence of the Lord.
You are my Creator, you are my Deliverer,
you are my Redeemer, you are Lord, and you are my Healer.
You are my Provider, you are now my Shepherd and my Guide,
Jesus, Lord and King, I worship you.

Author: David Fellingham, CCL Song No # 229952 Copyrights@ 1988 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Integrity Music Ltd) CCL No 5664

Prayers for the World - Responsive - again Tim read the words in bold type.

I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness
We remember this morning
All who are denied a seat at Christ's Great Banquet

We pray for those forced by poverty and war
To leave their homes and seek sanctuary in this country.

[Silence]

I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness

We pray for the women who, a hundred years after Violet Hedger was ordained
Still bang their heads against the glass ceiling

[Silence]

**I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness**

We pray for those disabled
By a society which sees only limits, not possibilities

[Silence]

**I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness**

We pray for those excluded
Because of their sexuality or gender-identity

[Silence]

**I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness**

We pray for those robbed of their future
By war - in Ukraine, in Myanmar, in South Sudan, in Mali and wherever your people cry

[Silence]

**I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness**

We pray for those in our community
Who have to choose between eating and heating

[Silence]

**I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness**

We pray for those known to us
Whose lives are constrained by illness or age

[Silence]

**I am come that you might have life
Life in all its fullness**

Crucified God

In these days of trial

Forgive us, when we despair

Inspire us with your hope

And send us out from this place

Renewed in our faith

That your full life

Will always prevail

In Jesus' name

Hear Our Cry. Amen.

Tim introduced our final Song, shown on the screen, our offering song:

1. Come, all you vagabonds, come all you 'don't belongs'
Winners and losers, come, people like me.
Come all you travellers tired from the journey,
Come wait a while, stay a while, welcomed you'll be.

2. Come all you questioners looking for answers,
and searching for reasons and sense in it all;
come all you fallen, and come all you broken,
Find strength for your body and food for your soul.

Come to the feast, there is room at the table.

Come let us meet in this place. with the King of all kindness

who welcomes us in, with the wonder of love, and the power of grace.

The wonder of the love, and the power of grace.

3. Come those who worry 'bout houses and money,
and all those who don't have a care in the world;
from every station and orientation,
the helpless, the hopeless, the young and the old.

Come to the feast...

4. Come all believers and dreamers and schemers,
and come all you restless just searching for home;
movers and shakers and givers and takers,
the happy, the sad and the lost and alone.

5. Come self-sufficient with wearied ambition,
and come those who feel at the end of the road.
Fiery debaters and religion haters,
accusers, abusers, the hurt and ignored.

Come to the feast...

Authors: Stuart Townend, Mark Edwards & Phil Baggaley CCL Song No 6011150 Copyright © 2011 Thankyou Music (Adm. by CapitolCMGPublishing.com excl. UK & Europe, adm. by Integrity Music, part of the David C Cook family, songs@integritymusic.com) CCL No 5664

Tim led a closing prayer and blessing:

Loving God, we thank you, we praise you, for the wonder of your love and the power of your grace that welcomes us in. So we offer you these gifts as a token of our pledge to welcome in the stranger, the poor, the blind, the lame, all; the vagabonds of your people here on earth.

So, may the God who created sheep
seat you at the table

may the God who lies down as the gate
shepherd you in the fullness of life

and may the Spirit who knows you are more precious than sheep
keep you in the hope of eternal life Amen.

24-02-24 - Notice for Church – Future Ministry

As we approach a crucial time in the life of this church, I've been asked to speak to you as we want everyone to be fully informed and involved. As most of you will know, Alec's contract finishes at the end of October and we must consider future ministry. With the support of the deacons, Alec has made it clear that he feels sure that God is calling him to continue to serve at BBC, although possibly in a part-time way alongside another part-time worker, perhaps a student minister or someone else who feels called to work in an area such as Galligreaves and the surrounding communities. However, the church also has to discern what God is saying.

As the leadership team, we have committed ourselves to fasting and praying every Wednesday, starting last week, throughout Lent during the weeks up to Easter and we have invited the whole church to join with us, including the prayer meeting here at Bethesda at 7.30pm every Wednesday evening when everyone is welcome; if you are unable to come to church, please pray in your own homes.

In addition, the deacons are very grateful to those who have come forward to serve on a working group to look into various options for future ministry. At the group's meeting last Wednesday, it became clear that before looking at specific ministry, as a church we needed to decide what our hopes and dreams for the future are, what do we believe God wants us to become, what should be happening in this building that the Lord has so graciously given us, and how does He want us to serve one another and the community surrounding us? These are not questions a small group of people should decide but are questions for the whole fellowship. We concluded that the only way such a diverse group of believers, each with our own preferences and experiences, could do this is for each one of us individually to purposefully, intentionally, single-mindedly and expectantly to draw near to the Lord, claiming the promise: **'Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.'**

A very familiar verse from 2 Chron. 7:14: **'If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, [and can any one of us say that we are not drawn away from God by the things of the world?] then [God says] I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.'** (Heal their church, heal their community, heal their town, heal their country! But it has to start with us! As Paul writes to the Philippian church: **'Forgetting what is behind [in recent years, 20 years ago, 50 years ago?] and straining towards what is ahead ... I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me ...'**) (Phil. 3:12-14)

The apostle Paul instructs the church in Rome to **'present your bodies as living sacrifices ... this is your spiritual act of worship ... be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.'** Isn't that what we each need to do? But how do we do it? I offer a suggestion as a starting point: **'My Lordship Prayer'** leaflet (kindly brought by Gwynneth to the Ladies' Bible Study last week). If we were all to earnestly begin our prayers every day with this prayer and look intently into His word, do you not think that our Lord would hear from heaven and answer?

The time is short. Next Sunday, after the Communion Service, we will be having our monthly 'Bring and Share' Lunch (a week earlier than usual) and after that we will be having a special meeting to which we would like everyone in the fellowship to attend, if at all possible. Then we will have the opportunity to pray together and in small groups to discuss, to share our hopes and dreams and say what we believe the Lord is telling us as His body in this place. If we know Jesus as our Lord and Saviour, then, by His Holy Spirit He is able to speak to and through any one of us and corporately to reveal to us His plan for the future of BBC.

May the Lord bless each one of us richly as we come before Him this week.

MY LORDSHIP PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank you that you died for me and paid the penalty
for my sins. I confess my need of you and accept you as my Saviour,

Healer and Deliverer.

I invite you to be Lord of all my life.

Lord of my body, and my physical health,

Lord of my mind, and all my thoughts,

Lord of my emotions and all my feelings,

Lord of my will, and all my decisions,

Lord of my spirit, and my relationship with you.

I invite you to be Lord of my sexuality,

My time, my home, my family,

My possessions, my marriage,

And all my relationships.

Thank you, Jesus, that your blood was shed

That I might be set free.

CONSECRATION PRAYER

Lord Jesus,

I give my entire being to you

body, soul, and spirit.

I invite you to fill me with your

Holy Spirit,

That I may be totally yours.

I ask this in your precious name.

Amen.

JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!