

## Call to Worship

Blessed be the name of the Lord  
from this time on and for evermore.  
From the rising of the sun to its setting  
the name of the Lord is to be praised.

*(Psalm 113 .2,3)*

**Hymn:** StF 526 Lord of all hopefulness  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i6ztlI8Hlbo>

## Introduction

Back in November, on Sunday 15th, my video reflection that featured the anniversary of Pelsall Mining Disaster. During that reflection I remarked that, whereas we rightly commemorate those who've died in military service each year, we sometimes forget those who've died in other workplaces. Every year more people die at work than die in war. In that reflection I also said this:

*there is a Workers Memorial day every year - on 28th April - and I'm sure we'll return to the theme then.*

Well, here we are!

## Opening Prayer

Let us pray:

Lord God,  
your son was a carpenter and knew the hard graft of labour,  
we remember all who have died in workplaces around the world.  
We pray for those whose lives have been considered less important  
than profits to be made,  
and for those who have been knowingly placed in harm's way.  
We pray for the safety and well-being of workers,  
and with thanksgiving for workplaces  
where workers are valued and respected,  
and treated with fairness and dignity.  
This prayer we offer in the name of Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

*(adapted from a prayer by Michelle Rath)*

## The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name.  
Thy Kingdom come;  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those  
who 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

Perhaps when we think of those who've died at work we immediately think of occupations like deep sea fishing, mining or quarrying, or the construction industry. But this last year we have seen and heard about the many, many people who have lost their lives working during the pandemic. NHS employees, but not only them. Bus drivers and others who serve the public. We remember them and we pray for all who seek to make all workplaces safer for those who work in them. Not only during these times of Covid19, but at all times.

The theme of Workers Memorial Day this year is, as it is always:

*Remember the Dead and Fight for the Living*

**Hymn:** StF 702 I will speak out for those who have no voices  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZCVPKzEQ1EQ>

**Reading:** Matthew 20 1-16 The Good Employer

## Thoughts

Flicking around the TV channels the other evening I discovered a programme about the Grand Union Canal. The canal was open by 1800 except for one section. At Blisworth in Northamptonshire goods had to be taken off the boats, onto horse and cart, taken over a hill and then back to the canal again. The hill had always been a problem and, for geological reasons, and a bit like the children's rhyme 'We're going on a bear hunt' the canal builders couldn't go round it, neither could they go over it as locks would make the journey even slower. They

had to go through the hill. And doing so had by 1800, already been causing problems for seven years. There had already been two attempts. one went off course several times. The second encountered geological anomalies, including quicksand, and collapsed several times. Eventually, third time lucky, the project succeeded and in 1805 the canal was complete - a direct line from London to Birmingham. Just in time for the age of the train!

But go back to those attempts to dig the Blisworth Tunnel. In one incident involving quicksand and the tunnel collapse 14 men lost their lives. What is shocking is that no one knows their names! This was in 1800! You'd have thought someone kept records of who they were employing. But no. They were mainly Irish labourers, navigators as canal builders were known - navvies. It wasn't only the slave trade that treated people like objects without worth. Lives of labourers were cheap and deaths, or at least the names of them, went unrecorded.

The Gospel reading we just heard is about the dignity and value of every man being. On the surface it makes no economic sense at all. Who would pay someone who had worked for just one hour the same amount of pay as someone who had worked for twelve? Those who'd worked all day were rightly aggrieved. You and I would be too. But look a little deeper and the parable isn't a message about pay rates at all. It's about the worth of the workers in the vineyard - about the worth of each and every one of us. We are all valued, whether we have been part of God's community for one hour or all our lives. Each human being is created in the image of God.

History is full of practices that have devalued and abused human worth and dignity. From the slave trade to the navvies digging the canals. Lives seen by some as worthless. But how often do we stop to think about those who produce the things that we take for granted today.

As Christians we are well aware of the Fair Trade campaign. We look out for the Fair Trade logo on tea, coffee, wine and clothing. Often there's a danger that we think exclusively about workers who are abroad. But it's here too. Among many other things that the Covid19 pandemic has emphasised is that, when it comes to health issues, the poorest communities are affected disproportionately. This extends to the welfare, or lack of it, of workers. On Workers Memorial Day we need to recall that it has been those in meat packing plants and the warehouses of online retailers that have seen some of the highest highest levels of Covid transmission and, sadly, deaths too.

International Workers Memorial Day is not just a day for remembering those killed and injured in industrial accidents. It is a day for reflecting on the service rendered to each of us by millions of unseen workers who make up the workforce of our world and who support the life we lead. It's about farm labourers and police officers, paramedics and meat packers, miners and railworkers. It is also about those who strive to make workplaces safer for all - ensuring that people and their welfare come before the maximisation of profits.

As we remember the dead we fight for the living dedicating our lives to God's service, who made and values each of us beyond worth.

**Hymn:** StF 566 Take my life and let it be.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gf11rReeWIs>

## Prayers

O, Lord,  
we pray for the families and friends of workers  
who have lost their lives due to unsafe working conditions.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer**

We celebrate their lives and honour them today,  
for their strength and courage to work in such dangerous conditions,  
and for the love and dedication to their families  
for whom they risked their lives  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer**

We pray for workers who are abused as they work toward a better life  
for their families.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer**

We remember today that all humans are created equal.  
We pray for those who do not honour workers with dignity and respect.  
We ask you to change the hearts of those who abuse workers,  
that they may treat our brothers and sisters as their own.  
Lord in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer**

We ask for strength on this journey,  
as we struggle for a just world where workers can live and work  
in safety and with dignity.  
Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

## Summary

## The Blessing

Living God,  
Reach out to all for whom the future seems uncertain or unwelcome,  
and bring the assurance that even  
    in the darkest moments,  
    the greatest challenges,  
    the most worrying times,  
you are there working out your purpose;  
    able to bring light out of darkness,  
    hope out of despair,  
    joy out of sorrow,  
    and good out of evil.  
Grant the confidence that there is nothing in heaven or earth,  
in life or death, in the present or the future,  
that is able to separate us from your love.  
Amen.

**Hymn**      StF 470      Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cd14v0e1RWU>

## The Grace

**For more about International Workers Memorial Day go to:**  
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/wmd>