

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 4th July 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

Shake off the dust of tiredness: come and be refreshed.
Shake off the dust of complacency: come and be challenged.
Shake off the dust of hesitancy: come and be encouraged
to be Christ's hands and feet in our world today.

Hymn - R&S 572:

Colours of day dawn into the mind,
the day has begun, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
and let's give the message to the people we meet:
*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow,
tell the people of Jesus, let his love show.*

Go through the park, on into the town;
the sun still shines on, it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
The people of darkness are needing our friend.
So light up the fire and let the flame burn...

Open your eyes, look into the sky,
the darkness has come, the Son came to die.
The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
but Jesus is living, his Spirit is near.
So light up the fire and let the flame burn...

*Sue McClellan, John Pac, Keith Rycroft. 1974
Copyright © 1974 Kingsway's Thankyou Music.*

Approaching God in Prayer

God says, you are never too young and never too old,
to be part of my work.

Come near if you feel weak, if you feel afraid,
if you know your need of me.

Lord God, meet me where I am,
meet me in my need.

God says, I will speak with you;
I will strengthen you; I will send you.

Lord, give me ears to hear, courage to respond
and a heart to serve you, today and always.

I praise you, Lord God,
for your love beyond all telling,
for your kindness without limits and your joy without end.

I praise you, Lord God
for forgiveness beyond measure,
mystery outside of my imagining, plans too big to see.

May I never think I have got to the end of all that you are,
or believe that I can contain the wonder of your presence
for you are more than words, or imagination can comprehend and I
cannot come to the end of understanding you.

I thank you, God of all nations,
that you call me to be a partner in mission *with* you.

But, when I am rejected by those close to me because of my faith,
I ask you to keep me confident;
when I go to new places, keep me faithful;
when I am tempted to give up, keep me free from despondency.
And at all times keep me safe from the despair of failure
and the pride of success.

I lay down all my failure and the times I've felt rejected,
so that I can receive the gifts of acceptance and a new beginning.
For you, Christ, are the one who affirms me
and commissions me,
the one who calls each one of us by name - today.

But we all make mistakes.

So, Lord God, when I - when we offend others,
keep us true to our calling to ask for forgiveness.

Forgive us when we don't travel light;
when we are weighed down by fear of failure,
with wanting to be approved of,
with needing to do things the way we've always done them.

Forgive us, and free us to voice your wisdom,
embody your compassion and share your healing
and to understand the full implications of the prayer you taught us:-

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name...

Psalms 122 and 123 Reimagined

How good it is to enter the sanctuary of the Lord!

I know that God is not confined within our four walled creations,
nor is God attached to altars and brass symbols.

And yet, in the quietness of God's house,
I find God's presence very real and fulfilling.

So, I remember and notice God with me and around me now
even as I go about the matters of the day
as I make my way through the concrete of the streets.

God is behind the anonymous faces of the crowds
elbowing their way to their respective destinations.

I find God in the hearts and lives of his children
who infiltrate the masses and run errands
and fulfil God's purposes in the course of their day.

I cannot outrun or evade God

who goes before me and follows closely behind me.

God will keep me and sustain me wherever I am.

And yet I know that my heart rejoices whenever I enter his sanctuary
and mingle with those who honour God's name and seek God's
grace there, shielded from the tensions and sounds that fill my spirit
in the company of those who love one another.

And yet I will gladly open my heart to the loving mercy of God
who is with me in this sanctuary of *this* time and *this* space
that surrounds me now

Based on Psalms 122 and 123: Psalms Now – Leslie F. Brandt (altd. JA)

Hymn – R&S 576:

God's spirit is deep in my heart; he has called me and set me apart;
and this is what I have to do – what I have to do:

*He sent me to give the good news to the poor,
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no more,
tell blind people that they can see,
and set the down trodden free,
and go tell ev'ryone the news that the kingdom of God has come;
and go tell ev'ryone the news that God's kingdom has come.*

And just as the Father sent me, so I'm sending you out to be
my witness through out the world – the whole of the world:

He sent me to give the good news to the poor...

Don't carry a load in your pack; you don't need two shirts on your back;
a workman can earn his own keep – can earn his own keep:

He sent me to give the good news to the poor...

Don't worry what you have to say; don't worry, because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart will – speak in your heart:

He sent me to give the good news to the poor...

*Hubert J. Richards (1921-)**

Setting the Scene

There are some things that are easier or better or good to do in pairs - things like making a bed; folding sheets; using a ladder; putting pictures up on walls; looking for a particular house in a road; visiting someone in hospital - you will be able to think of others, I'm sure.

Jesus realised that spreading the good news about God was one of those things better done in two's than alone.

Here's a snippet from Mark's Gospel - 'listen' for God's Word

Bible Reading Mark 6: 1 - 13

The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth

6 He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, 'Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?' And they took offence at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, 'Prophets are not without honour, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.' 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.

The Mission of the Twelve

Then he went about among the villages teaching. 7 He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. 8 He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; 9 but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. 10 He said to them, 'Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. 11 If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust

that is on your feet as a testimony against them.’¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Reflections

I should think most of us know what it’s like to be aware that people have said horrible things about us. It’s worth remembering that Jesus experienced that too and it bothered him, but it didn’t stop him. Instead of sticking around where he wasn’t wanted, Jesus moved on elsewhere, somewhere new where he and his message would be more welcome.

The Gospel story you read gives us two phrases that have become well known in the English language: ‘A prophet is not without honour, except in his own country’, and ‘shake the dust off your feet’. These are two straightforward bits of Jesus’ wisdom.

As it was for Jesus, it may be that those in your own locality are not interested in the good news you have to share - however important you know it is. And Jesus says, if people really don’t want to welcome you, don’t hang about; leave them behind and go somewhere else where you can do something more worthwhile.

Jesus called ‘the twelve’ – Mark tells us that Jesus ‘went up on a mountain and called out the ones he wanted to go with him. And they came to him. Then he appointed twelve of them and called them his apostles. They were to accompany him, and he would send them out to preach, giving them authority to cast out demons. These are the twelve he chose:

Simon (whom he named Peter),
James and John (the sons of Zebedee, but Jesus nicknamed them “Sons of Thunder”),
Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of

Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the zealot), Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him)'. (Mark 3: 13-19a)

Jesus had started teaching them, but *now* he tells them, it's time for *you* to do the same - even now!

There's a simplicity in Jesus model of discipleship training. He tells and shows them what needs to be done (and, of course, that it's not easy), then sends his disciples out to practise and learn on the job - it's an apprenticeship!

Today we might raise money first, to pay for travel and accommodation, but Jesus encourages the disciples to accept hospitality and to build long-term relationships - a model that Paul went on to adopt as he travelled among the newly formed churches.

Church growing and planting today is rarely so very minimalist, nor the aim so simply stated. Jesus sets no targets to meet, and no learning outcomes to quantify.

But, the mission of the original 12 disciples was a model for all who follow Jesus - Mark's first hearers and readers and you and I. We too are called to be people for whom costly commitment, gentle openness to others and humble service are the milestones along the way. This is the prototype for Christian living - it is sacrificial and it's certainly not for the faint hearted!

Remember that Mark wrote at a time when Christians were being persecuted and his words about taking up your cross to follow Jesus (later in Mark's Gospel) would have been hugely pertinent and challenging indeed. They were, in effect, a challenge to be ready for martyrdom.

But even in these calmer times, in this country at least - though not throughout the world, by any means - Jesus summonses every

Christian to a life of service that stretches far beyond the limits of convenience or comfort.

Jesus sends his disciples out in pairs and tells them to travel light to say the least! Just a staff, sandals, one tunic, no bread for the journey, no bag, no money.

How would you go about making a journey if you had been told to 'take nothing with you'?

I wouldn't know where to start! I'd be terrified! It would seem like a fool's errand. Even Bear Grylls, renowned for his ability to survive in extremely challenging environments, takes some equipment with him. If I go away overnight, I can easily fill a bag to bursting!

But, of course, Jesus sends each of them with one vital resource - a fellow disciple - someone to share the journey, a double act partner, a companion to help those difficult conversations about faith. Someone alongside - another 'witness' to help tell the story of the real goodness of God's Kingdom.

And Mark tells us about their success! They went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

And Jesus urges us to do the same - both literally and metaphorically.

But still, Jesus knows that some things are better done in pairs, or even groups - like churches!

Of course, we need to ensure that we and others are safe, but we tend to prepare in advance for every possible eventuality. In fact, perhaps we spend so long preparing to go out and proclaim Jesus' good news that we lose enthusiasm or momentum. Or perhaps in the meantime the whole situation has moved on - just as things have now. Our context has altered and our plans need to change to keep up with the challenges of a post-covid world where mental wellbeing and coping

with grief and loss will be a huge part of the landscape in which Christ's Church is called to work.

Jesus models risk and failure for us. He risks ministry in his own town and is rather less successful than he expected. He reacts quite sharply at the offence expressed by his hearers, and he concludes that there's a connection between this and his limited success, expressing surprise.

He then moves on and continues his teaching elsewhere. And he encourages others to engage in the same process: if I am welcome, I will stay a while and probably be effective; if not, I must move on.

What, I wonder, does this passage have to say about God's calling on our church's life? What is God challenging the Church to do today?

Is God still calling your Church to the work you *are* or *were* doing, or is God calling you outwards and onwards to new adventures and new challenges?

Do we need to shake off the dust of anything superfluous, redundant, ineffective, or no longer productive? Can we walk away from anything - despite everything? And if not, what do we have to do here and now to proclaim God's Kingdom - just as those first disciples did when Jesus sent them out in pairs.

Whatever God calls us onwards and outwards to do will demand time and effort and sacrifice. It will be uncomfortable; it will demand all we have to offer; it will stretch us beyond our comfort zones in ways we thought impossible. It will be a challenge for each one of us - and for every Church. How about you and your Church?

Amen

Hymn: MP 728: Tune Fulda R&S 613

We have a gospel to proclaim, good news for all throughout the earth; the gospel of a Saviour's name, we sing His glory, tell His worth.

Tell of His birth at Bethlehem, not in a royal house or hall
but in a stable dark and dim, the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of His death at Calvary, hated by those He came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross, for all He loved His life He gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter moon, empty the tomb, for He was free.
He broke the power of death and hell that we might share His victory.

Tell of His reign at God's right hand, by all creation glorified,
He sends His Spirit on His Church, to live for Him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name Him King, Jesus is Lord of all the earth,
This gospel message we proclaim, we sing His glory, tell His worth.

Edward Joseph Burns (altd)

Holding the World in Prayer

I bring my prayers to you, Lord God, saying:
Give me your grace for the work of today,
and trust in your strength for tomorrow.

Jesus was on a mission to save people, to heal and to help them.
Loving God, help me to be on a mission too:
a mission to be compassionate, not critical;
understanding, not difficult; generous, not grudging;
welcoming, not rejecting,
so that your kingdom may come,
and your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.
Lord God, give your grace for the work of today,
and trust in your strength for tomorrow.

Gracious God, I pray for your Church throughout the world
as she seeks to share in your ministry of healing
and to proclaim your gospel of hope.
Help your Church to be inclusive, not insular; adventurous, not afraid;
decisive not defensive; wise not wordy.

I pray for those whose faith puts them in danger,
for those whose calling is costly
and I pray for myself and my Church,
as we live out our faith day by day.

I give thanks for those, who through their lives and their faith
have challenged us to take seriously *our* role in *your* mission.
Lord God, give your grace for the work of today,
and trust in your strength for tomorrow.

I pray for your gospel to become known to and practiced by those in
public life and to all who make decisions that affect the lives of many.
Lord God, give your grace for the work of today,
and trust in your strength for tomorrow.

I pray for those who feel alone and isolated
those with no one to share those things that are easier for two.
Lord God, give your grace for the work of today,
and trust in your strength for tomorrow.

I pray for strength to live as I should, as I try to follow you.
Lord, give your grace for the work of today,
and trust in your strength for tomorrow.

I pray, in a moment of quiet, for those people you have given to me to
love and care for..... And I pray for myself.....
Lord God, give your grace for the work of today,
and trust in your strength for tomorrow.

I ask all my prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour.
Amen.

Hymn - R&S 489: MP 51

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
naught be all else to me, save that thou art —
thou my best thought in the day and the night,
waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
thou ever with me and I with thee, Lord;
thou my great Father, thy child let me be,
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, and thou my strong tower;
raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Ancient Irish poem tr. Mary E. Byrne (1880-1931) and Eleanor H. Hull (1860-1935) altd.

Closing Words and Blessing

Send me into the places that I know,
bearing the good news of your risen life.
Send me out, Lord, into the less familiar places:
the unknown and less trodden paths.
Give me strength to speak your word there,
to live your truth and to make known the story
of a people and a world made new. Amen.



And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen

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