

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 26th September 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

Who is with Jesus?

I am!

Who else is with Jesus?

Everyone everywhere who gather in his name.

Is anyone else with Jesus?

Yes, all who act in his name, they are with Jesus.

So, with my sisters and brothers known and unknown,

I will worship God.

Hymn - R&S 49: MP 518:

Sing praise to the Lord! Praise him in the height;
rejoice in his word, blest angels of light;
high heavens, adore him by whom you were made,
and worship before him in brightness arrayed.

Sing praise to the Lord, all people on earth;
in tuneful accord sing praise for new birth;
praise him who has brought you his grace from above,
praise him who has taught you to sing of his love.

Sing praise to the Lord, all things that give sound;
each jubilant chord re-echo around;
loud organs, his glory forth tell in deep tone,
and, sweet harp, the story of what he has done.

Sing praise to the Lord! Thanksgiving and song
to him be outpoured all ages along;
for love in creation, for heaven restored,
for grace of salvation: sing praise to the Lord!

*H. W. Baker (1821-77) altd.**

Approaching God in Prayer

You call me to come close to you, Lord.
I come, assured of my welcome,
but do I hold others back?
Maybe they don't agree with me entirely:
I certainly don't always agree with them.
Perhaps their faces don't fit.
Yet how can I approach you when I deter others?
In raising barriers against them,
we all cut ourselves off from you.
I lay down our defences, Lord.
I set aside our defensiveness.
Welcome me in your open embrace.
Amen.

'Listen' for God's word as you read about how the disciples notice that other people, from outside of their group, are casting out demons in Jesus' name.

Gospel Reading – Part 1 - Mark 9: 38 - 41

'Jesus', said John, one of the disciples, 'We saw a man using your name to drive demons out of people. We tried to stop him because he wasn't one of our group'
'Don't stop him' Jesus said, calmly, 'let him continue, because no-one can use my name to do something good and then be against me.
Whoever isn't against us, is for us.
If someone gives you a drink because you belong to me, God sees that, and they will get their reward.

A Prayerful Reflection

'What's *he* doing here?'

'I never expected to see *her* here!'

'Fancy *them* being allowed in!'

Lord, we need all the friends and allies we can get
in spreading the good news
and sharing your love with the people we meet.

Keep us from shutting out people of good will
because they don't conform to our ideas or behave as we do.

Help us to remember that we're only special because you love us.
Help us to recognise that they are special too, because you love them.

Amen

Song (Tune: London's Burning): Sing twice

God is here, God is here.
He is blessing, he is blessing
each of us, each of us,
through each other, through each other.

Old Testament Reading – Numbers 11: 4-6, 10-16, 24-29

Quail from the Lord

⁴ The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!'

¹⁰ Moses heard the people of every family wailing at the entrance to their tents. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was

troubled. ¹¹ He asked the LORD, 'Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? ¹² Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their ancestors? ¹³ Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, "Give us meat to eat!" ¹⁴ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ If this is how you are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me right now – if I have found favour in your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin.'

²⁴ So Moses went out and told the people what the LORD had said. He brought together seventy of their elders and made them stand round the tent. ²⁵ Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke with him, and he took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders. When the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied – but did not do so again.

²⁶ However, two men, whose names were Eldad and Medad, had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders, but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them, and they prophesied in the camp. ²⁷ A young man ran and told Moses, 'Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp.'

²⁸ Joshua son of Nun, who had been Moses' assistant since youth, spoke up and said, 'Moses, my lord, stop them!'

²⁹ But Moses replied, 'Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!' ³⁰ Then Moses and the elders of Israel returned to the camp.

A Bit of Baking...

At the time of writing this I am at Longcauseway Church's 'Praybake' session when we bake in the Church kitchen for the next day's activities – and we pray!

I'm not especially good at baking, but I love mixing the ingredients when I bake a cake, turning different ingredients, which can taste different from one creation to another (and some of them are inedible on their own) into something tasty and watching the texture change and improve as it becomes a delicious oozy gloop.

All those separate ingredients mixed together improve the deliciousness of each one!

Of course, we mix cake ingredients in a bowl, because if we didn't the mixture would run and ooze everywhere.

You can't move the cake gloop to one side of the bowl and make it stay there - it's impossible! It will escape no matter how you try to control it.



A bit like trying to contain cake mix without a bowl or a cake tin, it's also impossible to stop God loving people, whoever they are, and it's also impossible to limit God and stop God working through other people whether they are Christians, followers of Jesus, or not. We can't control God or limit who God will use to fulfil his purposes. We cannot tame or control the work of God through the Holy Spirit

God uses all kinds of people, God cannot – God will not – be controlled or limited, whether we like it, or approve of it or not.

(Oh, I also love scraping the cake mixture out of the bowl afterwards!)

Prayer

I thank you Lord God that you cannot be contained
or stopped from doing your good work among us
by any barriers we make ourselves.

Thank you, that you are:

compassionate, healing, inspiring, sincere and truthful.

And when we act in your name,

we can be all these things too! Amen.

Hymn - R&S 353: MP 683:

There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in his justice which is more than liberty.

There is plentiful redemption in the blood that has been shed;
there is joy for all the members in the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands of new worlds as great as this;
there is room for fresh creations in the Lord's unfathomed bliss.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow by false limits of our own;
and we magnify his strictness with a zeal he will not own.

If our love were but more simple we should take him at his word;
and our lives would be illumined by the glory of the Lord.

*F. W. Faber (1814-63) altd.**

A Prayer of Confession for the times we have got in the way of God's work

God of all people, as your church we confess
that we have let injustice continue by doing nothing.

Forgive us.

We have prevented good from being done by being jealous.

Forgive us.

We have made it harder for others by our spoiling tactics.

Forgive us.

We have denied the satisfying of others by indulging ourselves.

Forgive us.

Help us to help each other

to be the church that stops being a stumbling block
and becomes a channel of peace.

We pray in the name and spirit of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Gospel Reading – Part 2 – Mark 9: 42 – 50

(note: v 44 & 46 are missing)

Causing to Stumble

⁴² "If anyone causes one of these little ones — those who believe in me — to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. ^[44] ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. ^[46] ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched."

⁴⁹ Everyone will be salted with fire.

⁵⁰ "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with each other."

A Prayerful Reflection

If we took these words literally, God's kingdom would contain only
handless, footless and eyeless people!

But do I take my sin seriously enough?

I'm quick to see and judge the sins of others
but find it easy to explain away
my own faults and failings.

Loving God, help me to respond to this teaching in love, not fear.
Help me to see my sin from your perspective,
to deal with it lovingly and effectively,
so that I may become more fully human
and more like Jesus.

Keep me from setting a bad example
or being a stumbling block,
so that others may also find fulfilment
in the company of Jesus. Amen

Reflection

If you find this passage from Mark's Gospel difficult, you will not be
alone! The idea of hell and God's judgement makes us uncomfortable.
Although we should remember that judgement is not necessarily
negative; it can also mean being found not guilty! But what about
Jesus' words about cutting off limbs and plucking out eyes – does he
really mean what he says? Is he encouraging self-mutilation?

The action begins with petty jealousies among the disciples. But Jesus
isn't worried about others speaking in his name; rather, he includes
them. In contrast to John (the disciple who spoke up) Jesus is open and
inclusive.

In the second part, Jesus is speaking of the very best of possible lives.
In the previous section, Jesus had used a child to make his point, and
here again there are children ('little ones') who are powerless and

unimportant. The challenge to his followers is to be careful that they do not become people who block rather than open the way to Jesus. Firstly, in the Hebrew world, sins were sometimes associated with parts of the body. Secondly, note the shift from what you do to others, to tripping yourself up. The dangers or risks in serving God are both external and (often) internal. Who we are matters, because it will shape how we live. Jesus is not threatening hell and destruction; he is inviting his followers to sidestep it, to be their best selves, as intended by God, freed and restored – so that we can see the image of God and God’s kingdom building work in ourselves and others.

The passage ends with the curious image of being ‘salted with fire’ seeming to draw upon the imagery of Temple sacrifices. It suggests that the dedication of people to God should be, like that of Jesus himself, total and for ever. This way lies our very best life, defined through our relationship with God – or, rather, starting there but then spreading out to every other relationship.

(Taken from www.rootsontheweb - 2021)

Holding the World in Prayer

Creator God, your world is full of beauty – but it’s also full of pain.
Here and now I pray for all those suffering –
in body, in mind and in spirit.

I ask for strength and for healing for them,
relief from pain, and the support of others.

I pray for all who are ill,
whether they are suffering from a short-term illness,
or a chronic, long-term illness that drains not just energy but also hope.
May I not forget them but continue to lift them before you,
and value them in how I respect and care for them.

I pray for those who are facing terminal illness –
either in themselves or in those they love.

I ask for your tender care to surround them,
for a knowledge of your presence with them
to sustain and strengthen them.

I pray in hope and faith,
knowing your compassion is so much greater than my own,
and that I cannot even begin
to measure the depths of your love for all those who suffer.
May your mercy rain down upon them,
your love be born afresh in their hearts,
and your healing be evident in their lives – and in my own.
And in the name of Jesus I continue to pray.

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

Hymn – Congregational Praise 230:

We limit not the truth of God to our poor reach of mind,
to notions of our day and sect, crude, partial and confined:
no, let a new and better hope within our hearts be stirred:
the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.

Our faithful forebears searching went the first steps of the way;
this was the dawning, yet to grow into this perfect day.
And grow it shall, our glorious sun will brighter rays afford:
the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his word.

O Father, Son, and Spirit, send us increase from above;
enlarge, expand all living souls to comprehend your love;
and make us all go on to know, with nobler powers conferred,
that you have yet more light and truth to break forth from your word.

George Rawson (1807-89)

Sending Words and Blessing

Lord God, bless me and keep me.

May I be a blessing to others in all I think and say and do.

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

A Personal Prayer

Help me to accept that you allow many to work for you, Lord.

They do not necessarily come to my church, or any church.

They may not follow you as closely as I try to.

They may not stick to the rules, as I try to.

And yet, they serve you and your world well.

Help me not to feel peeved by this,

nor to put obstacles in their way.

They are for you and your cause, just as I am,

and we need all hands on deck

in bringing the kingdom ship to shore.

Amen.

www.rootsontheweb.com

*Hymn words reproduced under the CCLI Licence numbers of the SPACE Group of Churches:
181588 - Grove URC: 178113 - The URC Heckmondwike: 177949 - Longcauseway Church:
1236906 - Norrithorpe URC: 783508 - Ravensthorpe with Hopton URC*

Image: Cake Batter - www.unsplash.com