

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 3rd October 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

Gathering Words

I make time to worship our great maker,
for I am under his care.

I make space to worship our great maker,
who knows me and loves me.

I make time to worship our great maker,
for he alone deserves my praise. Amen.

HYMN - R&S 292: MP 756:

When morning gilds the skies, my heart awaking cries
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Alike at work and prayer to him I would repair:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

When sleep her balm denies, my silent spirit sighs:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

When evil thoughts molest, with this I shield my breast
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Does sadness fill my mind? A solace here I find:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Or fades my earthly bliss? My comfort still is this:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Let earth's wide circle round in joyful notes resound:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Let air and sea and sky from depth to height reply:
May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this, while life is mine, my canticle divine:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Be this the eternal song through all the ages long:

May Jesus Christ be praised!

Anon. German hymn, early 19th cent. tr. Edward Caswell (1814-78) alt.

Approaching God in Prayer

I take a moment of quiet to consider all the things I bring with me
to this time of worship;

The things that worry me;

the things that I celebrate;

the things that lift me up and the things that bring me down.

Hold out your hands with your palms upwards.

I hold out my hands

as a symbol of offering these things to you, Lord God.

Take from me the burdens I do not need to bear,

so that, in this moment, I can focus on you alone.

Keep a Silence.....

I reach out to you, Lord,

from the pits of my faults and fallibility:

pits I have dug myself,

or pits I've been thrown into by others.

Cast down because of my gender;

stigmatised by broken relationships;

put down because of age and inexperience.

I reach out to you as a child

in need of acceptance, healing and love.

No one can stop me from coming to you, Lord,

because I am your child.

But I have to confess Lord, how complicated I find life.
I set out with dreams and ideals
and so often, they crash around me.
Help me to cope with what is, Lord,
and not what I would have it be.
Help me not to judge others
and not to condemn myself too harshly.

I confess that I am hard on those
who break the rules as I see them,
and have sometimes misused your word
to make a point; to score a point; to cause pain.
Forgive me for my human failings,
and help me to help others on this journey of life,
which takes us all to places we would not have chosen.

Help us all, Lord God
wipe away all bitterness and resentment from our hearts,
and bring us into a stronger relationship with you
and with those around us.

Help me to say...

Praise God who created us!

Let all creation praise God!

Praise God, who loves us!

Let all who Love, praise God!

Praise God, who forgives us!

Let all who praise God, forgive others!

And I bring all my prayers together as I say the prayer Jesus
taught us -

Our Father...

Psalm 8

O LORD, our Lord,
your greatness is seen in all the world!
Your praise reaches up to the heavens;
² it is sung by children and babies.
You are safe and secure from all your enemies;
you stop anyone who opposes you.
³ When I look at the sky, which you have made,
at the moon and the stars, which you set in their places
⁴ what are human beings, that you think of them;
mere mortals, that you care for them?
⁵ Yet you made them inferior only to yourself;
you crowned them with glory and honour.
⁶ You appointed them rulers over everything you made;
you placed them over all creation:
⁷ sheep and cattle, and the wild animals too;
⁸ the birds and the fish
and the creatures in the seas.
⁹ O LORD, our Lord,
your greatness is seen in all the world!

Setting the Scene

Whoever wrote these words thousands of years ago was saying WOW! Wow to God, whose handiwork he saw all around him.

I wonder 'What things make you say WOW!?'

Write them below as a Psalm...

*O Lord, our Lord,
your greatness is seen in all the world!*

When I look at.....
.....
.....

*O Lord, our Lord,
your greatness is seen in all the world!*

Old Testament Reading – Genesis 2: 18 - 24

18 The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.'

19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. **20** So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. **21** So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh. **22** Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib^(b) he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

23 The man said,
'This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called "woman",
for she was taken out of man.'

24 That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

Gospel Reading – Mark 10: 2 - 16

² Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?'

³ 'What did Moses command you?' he replied.

⁴ They said, 'Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.'

⁵ 'It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law,' Jesus replied. ⁶ 'But at the beginning of creation God "made them male and female". ⁷ "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, 'Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.'

The little children and Jesus

¹³ People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴ When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. ¹⁵ Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' ¹⁶ And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them.

HYMN – R&S 663: MP 449:

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down!
fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver, let us all thy grace receive;
suddenly return, and never, never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing, serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee without ceasing, glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation, pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee!
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place;
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.

Reflections

In Genesis Chapter 2, God expresses humankind's fundamental need for companionship and creates a 'helper' in the form of a woman. Now, the Hebrew word doesn't imply a lesser person - as we'll learn later.

'Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh' is the Bible's first love poem and it conveys a bond so strong that if broken it would be like tearing out part of one's own body.

God recognised that the man needed companionship and none of those animals that God had created were quite right! We were not made to be alone – and we've learned a bit about that these last 18 months! So, God created 'woman'.

And now you can imagine Adam heaving a sigh of relief "At last. This is what I've been looking for all my life - I've found the *one*. This is who I've been looking for all my lonely life."

Or maybe it's joyous astonishment "This is what I've been looking for! This is who I've been looking for, all my life!"

And when couples meet and decide to marry, *they* can say, with a sigh of relief. or with joyous astonishment "At last, this is who I've been looking for all my life".

Well, what's Adam found? He says, "Bone taken from my bone, and flesh from my flesh." What on earth does that mean?

Now, the whole of this story is a poetic attempt to make sense of the origins of life, as people thousands of years ago saw it. And this is a poetic way of saying something like, “As I see you, I now know who I am. I’ve found *myself* in you. I’m not just meeting A N Other; I’m meeting someone who’s helping *me* to see who *I* am.

At last, finally by discovering you, I’ve found out who *I* am.”

Adam’s saying everything else has been unsuitable - but not *this* person, this person helps me to see *myself* better; to be a better version of who *I* am.

And it’s like that for us when we manage to find the right person - the one who fits us, and suits us, the one whose love feels like a glove, not a mitten!

Remember that Adam is in paradise; Adam has a perfect relationship with God. And yet God recognises that Adam needs someone *like* him. God notices that we need human companionship, as *well* as, *not instead* of *God’s* companionship in our lives.

And the companion is referred to as *help*.

Apparently, the Hebrew word translated as ‘help’ is a military word, so it’s a strong word, help is a divine word and God uses it to refer to Eve.

So perhaps a woman brings a help that is strength, but a certain kind of strength. “I will make a helper that is *suitable* for him.”

Suitable! This is going to sound like a lesson in Ancient Hebrew - but bear with me!

Apparently, the Hebrew word literally says, “I will make a helper *like* *opposite* him.” *Like opposite?* What?! Is it ‘like’ or is it ‘opposite’? You can’t be *like and opposite*, surely. But perhaps it can mean both, if it’s a complementary thing, where one makes the other complete.

You see, two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle fit together perfectly, but not if they're identical. If they're identical, they don't fit each other or complete a picture.

On the other hand, they can't just be different in general. They have to be *rightly* different. They have to be 'like opposite'. They have to be perfectly complementary.

So, God is sending into Adam's and into Eve's life somebody very different, but complementary, one to make the other complete.

The poetic allegory tells us that into your life comes a person so similar but mysteriously and profoundly different, someone with differences that are really *almost* impossible to define.

Into your life comes a person with a radically different view of you, and of the world, a person of equal power, equal resources, but incredibly different. And, somehow, you enter into an incredibly tight, close relationship.

How close? One flesh. "A man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife and they become one flesh. God seems to be saying, "the *two* will become like *one* person," together they make a whole.

You see our closest relationships put us into the same space. You literally *occupy* the same space. You hold things in common. You are two people - very different; like you, but not you; opposite you but put together in the same tight location.

And sometimes our closest relationships can feel difficult, like we're butting heads. But what might just be happening, is that we're enriching each other over time, learning different *perspectives* on life, give and take, so that eventually, *both* people not only know what they *themselves* would do and think, how they themselves might respond, but what each other would do and think how each other would respond. And that's a healthy relationship, because when our lives are

so enriched by the 'other', when it's so instilled in us, when we're faced with problems, we will actually have choices! 'Which of these approaches - mine, or his - would probably work better?' Our 'wisdom' portfolio will become permanently diversified. We'll each become a different person and yet *both* remain ourselves.

In relationships where we are *like opposite*, we become who we're supposed to be through having a person in our life who's like us - in ways it's impossible to define - not us, opposite to us but as close as flesh is to bone.

When we find suitable companions, we become part of each other, equal to each other, enriching and complementing each other. And we are to cherish each other as our own flesh, like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle - rightly different!

And Jesus ideal for our closest relationships is no different.

Perhaps, knowing that Jesus had previously modified the Jewish law, the Pharisees hoped Jesus would either dismiss the law, or to be inconsistent by endorsing it. Perhaps they weren't even interested in the rights and wrongs of divorce, just in trapping Jesus

But Jesus confounded them by showing that marriage supports God's created order, that it supersedes the relationship of parent and child, and that when two people 'find' each other and join their lives together so closely they are as joined to each other as they are to their own body.

God made all humankind *like opposite* and interdependent, each capable of enriching the other – then, now and always.

Amen

Hymn - R&S 495: MP 132: Love Maria Willis (1824-1908) and others

Father, hear the prayer we offer; not for ease that prayer shall be, but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway may we tread rejoicingly.

Not for ever by still waters would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains from the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness, in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger, Father, be thou at our side.

Holding the World in Prayer

Lord God, I bring to you the fragments of my relationships:
the splinters shaved off in a multitude of arguments;
the great chips that have broken off and left me scarred;
and the parts of me that are shattered completely.

I pray for your healing for each one of us,
because none of our relationships are perfect;
they are all cracked to some degree.

Help me not to judge others,
but to meet them in the interdependence of your love.

Let love increase, and be shared among us.

I give thanks, and pray for the people who offer marriage support,
family counselling and therapy.

I give thanks, and pray for those who promote children's welfare,
those who help us to see the potential of the children in our
communities and in the whole of your world today.

Help me to be generous with my love and my accepting.

Lord God I lift before you the people I love and with whom I share my
life - my closest relationships.

I pray that they will know your love and your peace surrounding them
and my love upholding them.

I ask all my prayers in the name of the one who is Love made flesh and blood and bone - your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

HYMN - R&S 294: MP 89: Bianco Da Siena (d.1434) tr. R. F. Littledale

Come down, O Love Divine, seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing-

And so the yearning strong with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace, till he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

Sending Words and Blessing

Lord, give me a heart of compassion.

May my conversations be gracious, and my words chosen with care.
Open my eyes to see where I may be needed,
and may I show your love to everyone I meet.

In Jesus' name. 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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