

Worshipping Together : Apart
Sunday 10th October 2021 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

God has called us together in worship – apart yet *still* together,
to bring ourselves, burdens and all, to him
to lay everything before the gaze of God's transforming watchfulness.
I invite God to inhabit this space alongside us,
so that he will see our joys and our sadnesses
and so that, one and all, we will recognise both God's promises
and our responsibilities
through all we pray and read and sing.

Hymn - R&S 187: MP 529

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
gold of obedience and incense of lowliness,
bring and adore him; the Lord is his name.

Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness,
high on his heart he will bear it for thee,
comfort thy sorrows, and answer thy prayerfulness,
guiding thy steps as may best for thee be.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
of the poor wealth thou would'st reckon as thine;
truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness,
these are the offerings to lay on his shrine.

These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
he will accept for the name that is dear;
mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
trust for our trembling, and hope for our fear.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
bow down before him, his glory proclaim;
gold of obedience and incense of lowness,
bring and adore him: the Lord is his name.

John S. B. Monsell. 1811-1875 altd.

Approaching God in Prayer and Saying Sorry

Lord God, I come to you with thanks that you came among us
as one of us to show us a better way to live life

Thank you for not preaching down to us,
but for coming alongside us in love and compassion,
not judgement and fury.

Thank you, Lord for understanding our human failings and frailties.

Thank you, generous God, that out of your deep understanding of us
and compassion for us, we can ask you to forgive us.

So I come to you asking you to help me to set down the burden of guilt
I no longer need to carry.

You know what those burdens are, and in a quiet moment I remember
them before you

Keep a silence.....

Lord God, relieve me, forgive me, and help me to be quick to offer words
of apology when I have offended or hurt others.

Forgive me for those things that hinder my walk with you.

Forgive me for my addiction to possessions,
to creature comforts; to time-saving devices and to the latest gadgets.

Forgive me for my dependency on worldly things and worldly ways.

Help me to receive these as gifts and blessings and not as essentials.

Remind me that what I have does not define me in your sight.

Free me Lord, so that when you ask me to, I can set things aside and
travel lightly the road you call me to follow, the road you walk with me.

I pray, Lord, that it will be my work for you that will be rich and grow
healthily as I try to build your kingdom following Jesus' pattern.

Amen

And I copy the pattern of prayer that Jesus taught us

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name,,,,,,

Bible Reading: Mark 10: 17 – 31

The rich and the kingdom of God

17 As Jesus started on his way, a man ran up to him and fell on his knees before him. ‘Good teacher,’ he asked, ‘what must I do to inherit eternal life?’

18 ‘Why do you call me good?’ Jesus answered. ‘No one is good – except God alone. **19** You know the commandments: “You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, you shall not defraud, honour your father and mother.”’[¶]

20 ‘Teacher,’ he declared, ‘all these I have kept since I was a boy.’

21 Jesus looked at him and loved him. ‘One thing you lack,’ he said. ‘Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’

22 At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

23 Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!’

24 The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, ‘Children, how hard it is[¶] to enter the kingdom of God! **25** It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’

26 The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, ‘Who then can be saved?’

²⁷ Jesus looked at them and said, 'With man this is impossible, but not with God; all things are possible with God.'

²⁸ Then Peter spoke up, 'We have left everything to follow you!'

²⁹ 'Truly I tell you,' Jesus replied, 'no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields – along with persecutions – and in the age to come eternal life. ³¹ But many who are first will be last, and the last first.'

Unburden and bow down.....

Some people say there was a narrow gate in the city walls of Jerusalem, called 'the eye of the needle'. To get through it a camel would have to be unloaded before it could pass through.

Not only that, the camel would have to stoop down, getting to its knees to get through.

Now, it's unlikely that this is true, because there's no real evidence that such a gate existed.

But I quite like the idea that, to enter the kingdom of heaven we'll need to put down our load, our worldly goods and our burdens before entering... and that we'll have to enter on our knees, as if bowing before a king, as in an attitude of prayer and saying sorry to God.

I wonder, what would be the most difficult possession for you to give up to be able to get through that narrow gate to enter the kingdom of God? For me it would be my own bed. What about you?

Write it here if you like...

Lord God help me to carry only what I need.
Help me not to cling too tightly to what I own but to hold it lightly,
so that I can give whatever I need to give to serving you. Amen

Hymn – MP 352: *James Grindlay Small (1817-88)*

I've found a Friend, oh, such a friend! He loved me ere I knew Him;
He drew me with the cords of love, and thus He bound me to Him.
And round my heart still closely twine those ties which naught can sever,
for I am His, and He is mine, forever and forever.

I've found a Friend, oh, such a friend! He bled, He died to save me;
And not alone the gift of life, but His own Self He gave me!
Naught that I have mine own I call, I'll hold it for the Giver,
my heart, my strength, my life, my all are His, and His forever.

I've found a Friend, oh, such a friend! All pow'r to Him is given,
to guard me on my onward course, and bring me safe to heaven.
Th' eternal glories gleam afar, to nerve my faint endeavour;
So now to watch, to work, to war, and then to rest forever.

I've found a Friend, oh, such a friend! So kind and true and tender,
so wise a Counsellor and Guide, so mighty a Defender!
From Him who loves me now so well what pow'r my soul can sever?
Shall life or death, shall earth or hell? No! I am His forever.

Misunderstandings.....

How many times have you managed to get your words muddled or mispronounced?

Years ago, we went on holiday with friends to a little, very un-touristy, Greek Island. Nick set off early on our first morning there to get bread.

He'd been practicing saying... 'good morning' in Greek. 'kalimera... kalimera... kalimera'.

He returned looking puzzled. The lady in the shop hadn't seemed to understand him. She hadn't seemed impressed or even pleased with his cheery greeting.

'I said 'kalamari' like I'd practiced' Nick said!.

Oh dear, the word for 'good morning' is 'kalimera' not 'kalamari'.

Unfortunately, the two words sound similar, but 'kalamari' means 'squid'. No wonder the lady in the shop wasn't impressed!

Misunderstandings!

There's a theory that a word in this passage from Mark's Gospel is one that's been misheard, misunderstood, misspelled, or misinterpreted...

I wonder which one – the camel (of course)

Jesus said, "It's easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God"

Remember that the accounts of events we read in the Gospels were written several years after they occurred, about 40 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. So, for 40 years, these stories had been passed on by word of mouth.

What then if, much like the similarities between 'kalimera' and 'kalamari', some words became muddled in translation?

Now, apparently, the Aramaic word '*gamla*', meaning rope, when it's translated into Greek becomes '*kamilos*'. So, it's not too difficult to see why some scholars believe that the Greek word '*kamilos*' meaning rope had been mistaken for '*kamelos*' meaning camel!

It doesn't seem too far-fetched then to imagine Jesus saying "It's easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God". More 'in keeping' as an image.

And you see it might just be possible for a rope to go through the eye of a needle! But how?

Well, if you try to push a rope through the eye of a needle just as it is, it won't go.

But if you completely unravel it into separate *strands*, each strand fine enough to go through the needle's eye and then push the individual strands through, one by one, it will go through – eventually.

Perhaps then, a rich person who isn't bound by their wealth but is prepared to unravel themselves so to speak and share what they have, rather than keeping it tightly bound up in their own self-interests, *can* enter the Kingdom through the eye of a needle after all.



Perhaps Jesus is saying that we have to somehow 'unravel' or 'deconstruct' our natural expectations for life, if we are to grasp what He is really talking about here?

So, Jesus' call to discipleship might be an invitation to unravel the way we see things and that will often involve giving up whatever it is that seems most important to us as we begin to see the world and its people through God's eyes rather than our own.

The Scottish Theologian Ian Fraser helpfully describes the Kingdom of God as 'God's way of doing things' which are often upside down from our thinking – the first being last and the last being first.

This possibility of a mistaken word seems a plausible explanation for the bizarre use of the word 'camel', especially when we remember that Mark would have dictated his Gospel, and a scribe would have written down what he said - plenty of scope for mishearing, mistranslation, or misspelling.

It's also plausible that Mark's scribe had become well used to the outrageous nature of Jesus ideas and imagery, so that the notion of a camel – a large animal – going through the eye of a needle – a tiny aperture – would have sounded like just one more absurd illustration amongst many other absurd illustrations which stick in the mind and make the hearer think, as Jesus fully intended them to.

Jesus was a magnificent teacher and Mark was a master storyteller.

Hymn – MP 272:

I have decided to follow Jesus; (3 times)
No turning back, no turning back.

The world behind me, the cross before me; (3 times)
No turning back, no turning back.

Though none go with me, still I will follow; (3 times)
No turning back, no turning back.

Will you decide now to follow Jesus? (3 times)
No turning back, no turning back. *Anon*

Reflection

Behind this passage lies a question about the essence of true faith – is it a matter of keeping all the rules and ticking all the right boxes, or is it more than that?

According to the belief at that time, the rich man would have believed, that his wealth was a reward for his religious observance and faith and a sign of God's pleasure in him.

And people in the Western World are still prone to thinking similarly, that our wealth is a sign that God is pleased with us.

Back in Jesus' day, and before, it was considered OK to trample on the poor, because people believed God was not pleased with them. Their

poverty was self-inflicted because of their lack of faith or obedience to God and the law. And perhaps, even now, some people think the same?

It's no surprise that the rich man went away grieving. Jesus turned everything he had learned about God upside down.

And it's difficult for us to hear what Jesus had to say about wealth and what following Jesus entails, because Jesus turns every expectation about faithful living and reward right on its head.

The encounter between the rich man and Jesus, no matter how you read it, is more evidence of Jesus' challenging thinking.

This was a massive revision of what it meant to be God's people, a faithful people who followed the law of Moses.

In Jesus, a whole new world opens up! Riches can no more buy you into the Kingdom than a camel can go through the eye of a needle! So perhaps camel is the word Jesus used!

Whatever imagery you want to take away from his excerpt of Scripture, consider the idea of unloading a camel of worldly goods and burdens before entering the kingdom of God (on earth and in heaven) and entering on your knees, perhaps in repentance and prayer.

Or, perhaps think on the possibility that a rope *can* be threaded through a needle if it's unravelled, deconstructed, like our thinking about God and what's required of us must be unravelled before we can enter the kingdom and be reconstructed.

Or perhaps it really is just plain impossible to fit an actual camel through the eye of an actual needle, so entering the kingdom of God is impossible no matter what we do.

Whatever we think, despite our best efforts to make this message seem more palatable, Jesus looks intently at us and continues to affirm that life is to be had in abundance, but *not* by accumulating 'things' and wealth,

but by unburdening ourselves, living by faith and following Jesus' life pattern.

A far cry from any notion that wealth is God's reward, this text proclaims the good news, that the way to be really rich is to die to wealth.

And when this seems impossible to achieve, as it did to the disciples who had already given up home and family, they asked Jesus, "Who can be saved then? And Jesus replied, "for mortals it's impossible, but not for God: for God all things are possible". Everything that might seem impossible to the last and the least of people, the left out and poor *is* possible, because God's priorities seem upside down to us. With God the first will be last and the last will be first.

But there is hope for us if we let go of the things that charm us, because through God's grace and our faith, all things are possible.

Amen

Hymn - R&S 371: MP 624:

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836-79)

Take my life, and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days, let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet, and let them be swift and beautiful for thee.

Take my voice, and let me sing always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be filled with messages from thee.

Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use every power as thou shalt choose.

Take my will, and make it thine; it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart, it is thine own; it shall be thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour at thy feet its treasure-store;
take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee.

Holding the World in Prayer

As you pray hold in our heart, and before God, the upheavals and climate related disasters that marks so much of the world. The mass movements of people to find safety from humankind itself, as well as from the weather and the movement of the earth.

So, come to God in prayer asking God to empower *you* to grasp opportunities to demonstrate to the world the reality of God's love and power, wherever, and however such opportunities might present themselves.

Lord God, we cannot forget the rawness of the earth,
we cannot eat and forget those who are hungry.

Your world is *one* world and we are stewards of its nourishing.
So Lord, help us to put our prosperity at the service of the poor.

We cannot drink and forget those who are thirsty.

The ground itself, and the rootless people of the world cry out for justice.
So Lord, help us to put fulness at the service of the empty.

We cannot hear your words of peace, and forget the world at war
and if not at war then preparing for it.

Show us quickly Lord how to turn weapons into welcome signs
and the lust for power into a passion for peace.

We cannot call ourselves a Christian family
and forget our divisions.

We are one in the Spirit, but not in fact.

History and hurt still divide us.

Lord, heal your church in every brokenness

In a time of quiet, bring before God the situations and people that concern you, the people God has given to your care,
the things that trouble us and cause you pain.

Keep a silence.....

Lord Jesus Christ, present with me now,

in thanks for all that you have done
and all that you have promised, what have I to offer?
My hands are empty, and my heart is sometimes full of the wrong things.

But with you there is mercy and the power to change me....

Thank you Lord Amen

(based on p. 42-44 Wee Worship Book)

Hymn - R&S 217: MP 755:

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

When I survey the wondrous Cross, on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ my God;
all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

See from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down;
did e'er such love and sorrow meet, or thorns compose so rich a crown?

His dying crimson, like a robe, spreads o'er his body on the tree;
then am I dead to all the globe, and all the globe is dead to me.

Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.

Sending Words and Blessing

As I leave this time of worship, I will not take leave of God.

I will take everything that is useful to God's intended way of life for humankind.

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