

Worshipping God Together : Apart
Sunday 20th March 2022 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

The Third Sunday in Lent

A Call to Worship God

'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!...

Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,

and you will delight in the richest of fare.

Give ear and come to me; listen, so that you may live.

Phrases from Isaiah 55: 1 – 3a

Together though apart we sing:-

Hymn – R&S 412: MP 678:

There's a quiet understanding
when we're gathered in the Spirit:
it's a promise that he gives us
when we gather in his name.

There's a love we feel in Jesus,
There's a manna that he feeds us:
it's a promise that he gives us
when we gather in his name.

And we know when we're together,
sharing love and understanding,
that our brothers and our sisters
feel the oneness that he brings.
Thank you, Jesus, thank you, Jesus,
for the way you love and feed us,
for the many ways you lead us,
thank you, thank you, Lord.

*E. R. (Tedd) Smith (1927-)**

Approaching God in Prayer

God, our friend and our parent, we give you thanks that in love you gave birth to our universe and this wonderful world, with all its richness and beauty.

We give you thanks that you made us in your image, and that within us you placed a yearning to seek out that which is beyond us yet makes us whole beings – your wonderful, transforming presence in our lives.

We give you thanks that through the passage of time, through prophet, priest, ordinary people and the whole of creation, you have reached out to us and all humanity, that we might know you more.

We give you thanks for the ultimate revelation of yourself, in the coming of your Son Jesus to the world, and for his death on the cross – that ultimate picture of how much you love us. For all this we give you thanks.

Lord God - Mother and Father of us all, you are like a parent who corrects their children for the love of them, wanting them to stay out of harm's way and also teaching them not to harm others. Such love means we cannot ignore the things we do to go our *own* way instead of *your* way, the times we walk in the opposite direction from that which your love is drawing us to.

We cannot ignore the times when we forget your justice and exploit others and the whole of creation. We cannot ignore the times when we do not live in harmony and peace with our neighbour.

Loving God, I seek your forgiveness as I bring my own failings to you now.

Keep a silence as you lay your own failings at the foot of the cross....

Forgiving God,

I have laid my own confessions at the foot of your Son's cross,
forgive me and renew me, for the sake of your Son,
who died so that we might all have a new, richer and more fulfilled life,
a life rich with the things that cost nothing to us –
your love, joy, peace and hope
and rich with the determination to share these treasures with others.

I come to feed on you: Fill me and use me.

And I join my voice with a myriad others, as I say...

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

Hymn – R&S 33:

Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory
cascades through life in overflowing grace,
to tell creation's meaning in the story
of love evolving love from time and space.

Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious,
in you, deserted, scorned and crucified,
God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness,
and flawed humanity is glorified.

Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother,
embracing us in love serene and pure:
you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother,
as full-grown children, confident and sure.

Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining;
love which commands, enables and obeys:
you give yourself, in boundless joy, creating
one vast increasing harmony of praise.

We ask you now, complete your image in us;
this love of yours, our source and guide and goal.
May love in us seek love and serve love's purpose,
till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.

Alan Gaunt (1935-) Copyright © Stainer & Bell

Isaiah 55: 1 – 9

*'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.*

*² Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

*³ Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,
my faithful love promised to David.*

*⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,
a ruler and commander of the peoples.*

*⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not,
and nations you do not know will come running to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendour.'*

⁶ Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.

*⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.
Let them turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.*

*⁸ 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,' declares the LORD.*

*⁹ 'As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Gospel Reading – Luke 13: 1 – 9

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died

when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.'

⁶ Then he told this parable: 'A man had a fig-tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. ⁷ So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, "For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig-tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?"

⁸ "Sir," the man replied, "leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig round it and fertilise it. ⁹ If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down."

Hymn – MP 37: *Martin Nystrom ©1985 Restoration Music Ltd/Sovereign Music UK*

As the deer pants for the water so my soul longs after you
you alone are my heart's desire and I long to worship you

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
to you alone may my spirit yield
you alone are my heart's desire
and I long to worship you.*

I want you more than gold or silver only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy-giver and the apple of my eye
You alone are my strength, my shield...

You're my friend and you are my brother, even though you are a king.
I love you more than any other so much more than anything.
You alone are my strength, my shield...

Another Chance – Prayer Handbook 2016: Melanie Smith

As Adam and Eve ate their way out of paradise,
you gave them the chance to till and grow.

As the earth was filled with violence,
you gave Noah the chance to fill the ark.

As Sarah grieved over her barrenness,
you gave her the chance of new life

As the king of Egypt looked to stymie the Hebrew people,

you gave midwives the chance to frustrate pharaoh.
As the Hebrew people fell into dishonour and disobedience,
you gave them another chance to pick themselves up.
As Solomon asked for an understanding mind,
you gave him the chance to have great wisdom.
As Naaman demanded a miracle fitting for his status,
you gave him the chance to wash in a dirty backwater.
As Isaiah's lips burnt with fiery coals,
you gave him the chance to burn for justice.
As Peter deserted Jesus and fled the garden,
you gave him the chance to be fed on the beach.
As we fail to produce the crop you cultivate in us,
you give us, like the fig tree, another chance to flower and fruit

Reflections

When I was a child, my mum told me to eat what was put in front of me. It was rude not to! So, over the years, I chewed my way through some fairly unpalatable food - Grandma's soft, overcooked sprouts - bright green because of the bicarbonate of soda she put in (to keep them green I believe!) and 'tripe' and onions were particularly inedible!

God invites us to feed on him, be nourished by his word and presence with us. Through Isaiah, we are invited to *'turn to the Lord'*. And Jesus also calls us *all* – each and every one of us – to repent, because there's good and bad alike within each one of us. Things that seem to us like punishments for the 'wicked', punish good and bad alike and our theories about vengeance from God hold no water.

'Repent' is a little word, but it's packed full of meaning and it's a word we use quite a lot in Church. It's a word that can confuse and even frighten us. But it shouldn't.

Repentance is a life-giving, liberating word. The root meaning of the word is positive: Its Greek meaning suggests that it's about a radical changing of mind and consequently a change of behaviour, or in Hebrew it's a 'return'. Put simply it means to 'change direction', or behaviour, or

to change our minds. It's specifically about re-orienting ourselves, turning ourselves towards God and focussing on what God teaches us – God's ways (which are not always our ways).

I say simply, but it doesn't always seem simple because there are so many distractions in life, there are many reasons why it's difficult to change direction, or to change our minds - focus on and re-orient ourselves towards God. I'm reminded of words from the hymn 'O Jesus I have promised' - 'I see the sights that dazzle, the tempting sounds I hear'. Life is full of 'stuff' that claims our attention and turns our heads. The challenge of repentance is to turn *towards* and remain attentive *to* God. By turning towards God, it will be God who is in front of us, claiming our attention and directing our paths focussed towards bringing about 'the kingdom of heaven', which is very much a down-to-earth concept. God wants heaven to be on earth, as intended for the created world and as Jesus pointed out in the Lord's Prayer: 'your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'. Jesus has the 'roadmap' to show us the way.

if we respond to Christ's call to repentance, turn ourselves to face God, make sure that it's God in front of us, our lives, and the life of the world will be all the better for it.

We are to get, ready, change the way we think and live, so that all the world's people can enjoy a repentant world – a world which is re-oriented towards God and God's kingdom, the kingdom of heaven, which can be right here, right now.

Anyway, back to eating what's in front of you!

Repenting is turning towards God, re-orienting ourselves towards God and focussing on God and what God requires, what God feeds us.

Remember Isaiah's message:-

*Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.

When God is in front of you, feast on him – eat the food that will satisfy you without the need for money. Eat your fill.

Jesus has told us in word and action what feasting on God will mean in practice. Some of it might be quite unpalatable, because God's ways are not our ways and we will need to change. God's ways are contrary (like Mary, Mary quite contrary!) topsy-turvy, different from the ways we are accustomed to – in a first will be last and the last will be first sort of way.

If we eat what is in front of us, and what is in front of us is our Lord God who promises to feed us with the rich gifts of love, joy, peace and hope for all humankind, and if we are what we eat, then we will become filled with that same richness, and become what is inside us. We should be seen to be filled to satisfaction with those riches so that others will be drawn to that same source of nourishing, for God says of his people *'Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.'* (Isaiah 55: 5)

Amen

Hymn – R&S 543: MP 400: *James Edmeston (1791-1867)*

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us; all our weakness thou dost know,
thou didst tread this earth before us, thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary, through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

*In verse 2 line 3 the word 'dreary' has its older meaning, 'sad',
rather than the modern 'dismal' or 'gloomy'.*

Holdiŋ the World in Prayer

Loving Lord,
in the days when you walked in human form upon earth
life was hard and people suffered.

Your land was occupied; peace was just a dream.
You knew about trouble.

So, Lord, we bring our troubled world to you now.
You are the Lord of all, the gardener of creation.
Teach the world's leaders how they best may tend
the trees of healing and righteousness.
Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven,
restore your creation to wholeness.

We have made our world a garden of damaged trees and bitter fruit.
Lord, we pray for those places where there is hurt, anger and war,
for lands where children have never known peace,
and children new to the violence being inflicted on them
for people bombarded and brutalised, being starved into submission.
Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven,
restore your creation to wholeness.

Lord, we pray for all those who suffer pain and persecution,
especially those who suffer at the hands of others.
We pray too for those who have grown so far away from knowing you
that they cause hurt, or carry out that very persecution.
Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven,
restore your creation to wholeness.

We pray for those who are dying on street home or hospital
and those who are bereaved:
may they know you are with them on their journey.
Comfort all those who are frightened or lonely:
may their sadness give way to joy as they feel the warmth of your love.
Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven,
restore your creation to wholeness.

God of all things, we pray for the ravaged earth.
We ask your forgiveness for our carelessness with your gifts.
We ask you to show us how to be better gardeners, better stewards,
better custodians of the world around us.
Creator God, great gardener of earth and heaven,
restore your creation to wholeness. Amen.

Hymn – R&S 182: *Johann Schlegel (1721-93) tr. Catherine Winkworth (1827-78) altd.**

How brightly beams the morning star!
What sudden radiance from afar
now cheers us with its shining!
Brightness of God, that breaks our night
and fills the darkened souls with light
who once for truth were pining!
Your word, Jesus, inly feeds us,
rightly leads us, life bestowing.
Praise, O praise such love o'erflowing!

Through you alone can we be blest;
then deep be on our hearts impressed
the love that you have borne us;
so make us ready to fulfil
with burning zeal your holy will,
though some may vex or scorn us.
Saviour, let us never lose you;
for we choose you, thirst to know you;
all we are and have we owe you!

All praise to him who came to save,
who conquered death and burst the grave;
each day new praise is sounding
to him the Lamb who once was slain,
the friend whom none shall trust in vain,
whose grace is still abounding;
sing, you people, tell the story
of his glory, till his praises
flood with light earth's darkest places!

Closing Words and Blessing

Lord God, you look for growth and fruit;
help me this week to grow closer to you,
and to be patient when I have to wait –
as you are patient with me. 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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