

Worshipping God Together : Apart
Sunday 8th May 2022 at 10.30am
Church; Physically Distanced but Spiritually United
Worship Prepared by Rev. Janine Atkinson

A Call to Worship God

When my heart is full of joy, I praise the Lord Jesus.
When my heart is sad, I look to him.
When I need a friend, I rely on him.
Wherever I am, however I feel I will trust in him.
I worship my Lord Jesus in this place as his disciple today.

Hymn – R&S 274:

Percy Dearmer (1867-1936) altd*

God is love, his the care tending each, everywhere.
God is love — all is there!
Jesus came to show God, that we all might know God:
*Sing aloud, loud, loud,
Sing aloud, loud, loud,
God is good, God is truth,
God is beauty: praise him!*

Jesus came, lived and died for our sake, crucified,
rose again, glorified:
he was born to save us by the truth he gave us:
Sing aloud, loud, loud...

None can see God above; Jesus shows how to love;
thus may we Godward move,
joined as sisters, brothers, finding God in others:
Sing aloud, loud, loud...

To our Lord praise we sing — light and life, friend and King
coming down love to bring,
pattern for our duty, showing God in beauty:
Sing aloud, loud, loud...

Approaching God in Prayer

With a cloud of worship around me
Lord Jesus, I can be content;
I can be reassured; I can be confident;
I want to share your love,
and draw others to your fold –
to your praise and glory.

So, Lord Jesus, loving shepherd, be near to me.
Jesus, good shepherd, watch over me.
Jesus, caring shepherd, be gentle with me.
Jesus, consoling shepherd, walk with me.
Jesus, commissioning shepherd,
help me to watch over others;
to be gentle with others –
and to walk with them in your name.

I ask you to help me to listen to your word and reflect;
listen to others and respond;
listen to the cries of the world and react –
so that no one should cry alone,
and everyone can rejoice in your love.

I ask you to forgive me, Lord, when I turn away from those
whose tears I am afraid of;
whose grief I have not wanted to share;
whose pain I have not wanted to see.
Forgive me, and give me the courage
to be silent where there are no words;
to be supportive when there is no easy way ahead;
and to always carry the hope of Christ in my heart –
wherever my journey takes me. Amen

I say the prayer that Jesus taught us:- Our Father who art in heaven...

Setting the Scene

There are lots of situations in life that make us want to cry.

I invite you to think about someone you are weeping over, someone who is sad, or someone whose predicament makes you sad, or perhaps think of a situation you know of that makes you sad.

In a time of quiet, hold that person or that situation in prayer before God, imagine yourself cradling them in your arms.

Keep a silence.....

Psalm 56 verses 8 – 10 tell us:

⁸ Lord God, you know how troubled I am;
you have kept a record of my tears.
Aren't they listed in your book?

⁹ The day I call to you,
my enemies will be turned back.
Because I know this: God is on my side —
¹⁰ the Lord, whose promises I praise.

Lord God, just as we have held these people in prayer before you, imagined them cradled in our arms, we ask you to hold them in your cradling arms.

Your tenderness enfolds them now.
Your knowing presence has seen their struggle and counted their tears... and our tears.
You are for us - and we put our trust in you.
Amen

Keep a silence.....

Now read about how Peter - that's the disciple Simon Peter - responded to sadness and grief one day. 'Listen' for God's word...



³⁶ Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity.

³⁷ At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, 'Please come to us without delay.' ³⁹ So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him

to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, 'Tabitha, get up.' Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. ⁴¹ He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.

⁴² This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

⁴³ Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Note: The word 'saints' means Christians – just like you and me.

This hymn tells the story about another time when Peter acted in Jesus' name and worked a miracle.

Peter and John went to pray, they met a lame man on the way;
he asked for alms and held out his palms,
and this is what Peter did say;

‘Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee.
In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’

*He went walking and leaping and praising God,
walking and leaping and praising God.*

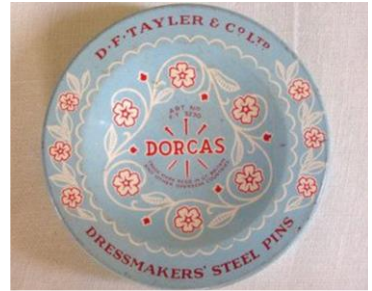
‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!’

Reflections

When I was looking for images of Dorcas on the internet, I discovered that the world of sewing is rich with Dorcas!

There was an image of a 1950’s advert for Dorcas Fabrics; Dorcas pins; Dorcas thimbles; Dorcas sewing machines and a Dorcas Society - a local group of people, usually based in a church, with a mission

of providing clothing to the poor. No prizes for guessing that Dorcas Societies are named after the Dorcas of the story told in Acts.

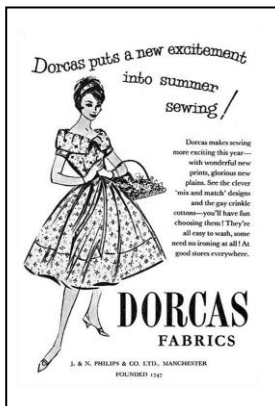


One Dorcas society was founded in the Isle of Man in 1834, as part of the community's thanksgiving for being spared from an outbreak of cholera. Other Dorcas Societies were established by missionaries in the Americas in the early 1800s. Beatrice Clugston founded the Glasgow Royal Dorcas Society in 1864.

And apparently one English Dorcas society in Sydenham met during five Tuesdays in Lent, producing 166 garments in one year.

Dorcas Societies were at their height in the 1800s, but there are still Dorcas societies around the world, providing clothing amongst other things for people in need.

Now a friend of mine used to say “we are all unequally gifted”, and he was right. Some people can pick up a pattern, and produce the item pictured on the pattern cover - Ta dah!



I am not at all gifted like Dorcas, or many people I know, in sewing or knitting - or any such handiwork. Many people have tried, but none have been able to teach me to sew, knit, or crochet. A few years ago, Janet Virr, from Heckmondwike URC took up the challenge. She told me it's impossible to get crochet wrong. Well, I tried and I did OK with the first row I crocheted - a worm! But it went downhill from there. I kept going wrong and Janet kept unravelling it, and I'd

pick it up again. For the umpteenth time, I told her I'd gone wrong again and she set out to unravel it – again – she took one look at it and said (in her best and kindest teacher voice). 'O Janine, you've invented a new stitch!' So, I can't pick up a pattern and copy it.

Now, Dorcas is one of the less-known women of the Bible - she only appears in those few verses in Acts chapter 9, but in a short, few sentences, we can get an idea of who she was. She was a Christian woman a follower of Jesus, and the only woman in the New Testament explicitly called a Disciple, who helped widows by making clothes for them.

Perhaps Dorcas was involved in the cloth trade. Perhaps she provided the new church's widows with much-needed clothing. Widows were a particularly vulnerable group in a 1st Century world in which most

women were economically dependent on men. Earlier in the book of Acts we were told that in the Jerusalem church, the neglect of Greek-speaking widows in the mixed-language community was a cause for concern (*Acts 6.1*).

Dorcas's life of 'good works and acts of charity' provides an example of pastoral care that complements Peter's own life of caring. Peter's base is in Jerusalem, but his ministry of shepherding Jesus' flock takes him to Samaria and now Judea.

He is summoned to the coastal town of Joppa, because Joppa's disciples are distressed at the death of one of their number, their beloved Dorcas (also known as Tabitha – both words mean 'Gazelle'). By the time Peter arrives in Joppa, Dorcas is ready to be buried.

His action to remove the mourners from 'the room upstairs' reminds us of Jesus in the house of Jairus – although the crowds gathered there to mourn his daughter's death were more cynical.

Peter repeats Jesus' 'get up', adding only the name of the deceased. And she sat up, and Peter showed her to be alive!

Peter did what he had seen Jesus do. But, where Jesus tried to limit publicity, Peter encouraged the good news to spread.

This brief story, told without fuss, shows Peter the shepherd feeding Jesus' flock by healing, consoling and guiding. The renewing power of the risen Jesus reaches through Peter now and extends beyond its beginnings in Galilee.

I wonder, does this kind of healing reach forward into our own day? Reports of similar occurrences invite careful scrutiny, not least because we now know that the boundary between life and death is not always clear-cut.

But some elements of this story will always be welcomed without question, particularly the timely and compassionate way that Peter

surrounds death and grief with prayer. Peter prayed, and only after he had prayed did he follow the example of Jesus, restoring Dorcas to life – just as Jesus had raised the centurion’s slave and Jairus’ daughter.

Think about Dorcas again. I imagine her as the kind of missionary who teaches poor women how to self-support and at the same time passing on the Gospel, through the life she leads, through the good things she does for them, and through telling them about Jesus.

Jesus was the ‘pattern’ for Peter’s caring and for Dorcas’s caring – as he is for us too.

It’s well known that I can’t follow a knitting, or a crocheting, or a sewing pattern, but I *am* called, as are *you*, to follow Jesus’ pattern for life – that’s what he calls us to do.

There are a number of gifts brought to bear in this story – Dorcas who does practical good works; Peter who prays and heals; Simon who offers hospitality and even two problem-solving messengers who fetch Peter.

As my friend says, we are all unequally gifted, but we are all called to use our different gifts to build people up, not to knock them down. We are called to use our gifts to build Christ’s Church, Christ’s representative body on earth – God’s people – not a building but a living and diverse group of people working for the kingdom of God – here and now.

I wonder, are we good at fostering all the gifts available or potentially available, within our Churches? Do we seek people out, as the messengers sought Peter? Do we encourage those with special gifts to use them? On the other hand, do we ever discourage the use of gifts that seem to lie outside our comfort zones, are there gifts that challenge us?

Does the story have anything to say about priorities? Is healing more important than making practical provision for the well-being of others? Are some gifts thought to be more 'spiritual', more worthy, more holy?

They are not. The Church is sustained by the exercise of many gifts in mutual support?

So, perhaps there are things to learn from this passage about working together, sharing and respecting the diverse gifts of others, whether male or female; young or old: friends or strangers?

The task for us is to use our gifts and to challenge ourselves to step out of our comfort zones so that, like Peter and Dorcas we can follow the pattern Jesus has left for us, as his Disciples?

Jesus gave us a pattern for living life that we are to follow as we use our individual gifts to walk Jesus' way today – wherever we are.

Amen

Hymn – R&S 500:

Charles Wesley (1707-88) altd.

Jesus, united by thy grace and each to each endeared,
with confidence we seek thy face, and know our prayer is heard.

Help us to help each other, Lord, each other's cross to bear,
let all their friendly aid afford and feel each other's care.

Touched by the lodestone of thy love, let all our hearts agree,
and ever toward each other move, and ever move toward thee.

To thee, inseparably joined, let all our spirits cleave;
O may we all the loving mind that was in thee, receive.

This is the bond of perfectness, thy spotless charity;
O let us, still we pray, possess the mind that was in thee.

Holdiᅡg the World in Prayer

Lord, you have called us all to be disciples.

We know that you can work through us, if we let you.

Show us what you want us to do.
Show us where you want us to be.
Teach us to listen so we hear your instructions.
May we be servants, ready to do your will.
May your will be done, Lord God.
May we do as you ask with all our hearts.

Lord, you have given each of us different tasks.
Don't allow us to be envious of each other's gifts.
Show us instead what it is that each of us can do for you.
Show us how to be useful in the way you have designed.
Teach us to listen with real humility.
Let us be servants, ready to do your will.
May your will be done, Lord God.
May we do as you ask with all our hearts.

In the power of the Spirit, and through Jesus our Saviour,
we ask you Lord God for healing and love to come to all people.

God of love, we pray for healing for your Church.
We ask for unity between all Christian people;
that our divisions may be set aside
so that we work together for the furtherance of your kingdom.
Hear our prayer, loving God.

God of love, we pray for healing for our world.
We ask for people of every, race and language to recognise that we
discover your will for us through justice, reconciliation and peace.

Especially we pray for the people of Ukraine
and for wisdom for the leaders of all those countries
offering them – and all refugees – shelter, medical care and hospitality
Hear our prayer, loving God.

God of love, we pray for healing within our community.
We ask that all the threads of our community are joined together by our

common bonds, regardless of background, culture or age so that a rich and beautiful fabric can be woven for the world.

Hear our prayer, loving God.

God of love, we pray for healing within our homes.

We ask that wherever families are divided you will mend broken relationships so that your love will be experienced by all.

Hear our prayer, loving God.

God of love, we pray for healing amongst the sick.

We ask that those who are sick, in body, mind or spirit will feel your presence and your peace, and that their lives will be transformed.

Hear our prayer, loving God.

God of love, we pray for those who are bereaved.

We ask that your grace will bring them comfort in their need and consolation in their sorrow.

And we pray for all who are grieving

For those mourning the loss of their land; their home; their identity.

For those mourning the loss of their dignity, or their independence, or their understanding or their memory.

For those mourning the loss of their health, or their mobility, or their strength.

Hear our prayer, loving God.

God of love, who restores and reconciles people, breaking the bonds of sin and death;

be with us and make us whole so that we may live in your love and peace throughout our lives.

We ask these prayers through Christ, our faithful shepherd.

Amen.

Brother, Sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey, and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you in the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, Sister, let me serve you, let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too.

Closing Words and Blessing

Go and bless those who are grieving, with hope,
those who are lonely, with friendship,
those who are fearful, with courage;
and may the risen Christ be your strength, your hope and your joy.

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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178113 – Heckmondwike URC: 177949 - Longcauseway Church: 1236906 - Norristhorpe URC:
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*Images: Dorcas: www.womenofthebible.com Dorcas Pins: www.ebay.co.uk
Dorcas Sewing Machine and Dorcas Fabrics: www.pinterest.co.uk*