

Morning Worship for 19th July 2020 at 10.30am

Good morning everyone and welcome to worship in these extraordinary times when we are the church but are not in church.

Remember that God is present with us as we gather in his name, and that wherever we are, we are the body of Christ.

Opening Prayer:-

God of the past who has fathered us and mothered us, we are here to thank you. God of the present here in the midst of us, we are here to praise you. God of the future who is always ahead of us, we are here to trust you. God of life, beyond us, within us, we rejoice in your glorious love. Amen.

Hymn STF 51 Great is thy faithfulness O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not; as thou hast been thou forever wilt be:

Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness! Morning be morning new mercies I see; All I have needed thy hand hath provided, Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest, sun, moon and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside! *Thomas O. Chisholm (1866-1960)*

Prayer: (from Roots) Mighty God, we come to you in humble adoration. You take us, such very imperfect people, and give us the chance to prove that when we place ourselves into your care we can be the people you want us to be. We bless you, Lord. We praise and adore you. Forgive us all that is past and strengthen us for all that is to come. Amen. **We say the Lord's Prayer together.....**

Bible Readings for today: Isaiah 43 v.1-7 & Romans 8 v.31-39 if you do not have a Bible to hand in these two towering passages of scripture we are powerfully reminded that God calls us by name and we belong to God and that nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus.

Reflection: Since 1996, when I first began to sense the call of God in my life to serve God as a Lay Worker with families, as a Local Preacher and then as a Minister, these two passages of scripture have been a constant support. Indeed, in my study Bible in the margins I have written several times words like "keep remembering how God saved you" and other comments obviously written in times of hardship, loss and joy in being a disciple of Christ. So, today as Fred and I lead you in worship for the final time in this Circuit, I thought it might be helpful for us to reflect on these two amazing passages of scripture.

Both passages acknowledge what we all know to be true, that believing in God and Jesus as our Saviour does not make us immune to hardships and trouble in our lives, but give us the reassurance that when troubles come, and come they have in recent days, God's love still surrounds us. I know that to be true and I suspect that most of you sharing this reflection know it to be true in your life. Looking back over the twists and turns of my days I can see God's hand has been upon me, God ahead of me, beckoning me on to new experiences. We are loved by God who is both constant and constantly interested in change. Not static and frozen in time, but vibrant, challenging – just think what God is saying to us in this experience of a pandemic about his church on earth for the future. Faithful, yes; constant yes, unconditional love, yes; but never still! God is not done with us and certainly not done with the church; but we do face enormous challenges in God's guiding.

You are God's people in your own context, carry on God's work. Ministers come and go, loved or otherwise, that is the nature of our calling, but you are the priesthood of all believers, not all priests, but all working to God's praise and glory in so many different ministries, with so many different gifts. So, keep on remembering how God saved you, called you by name, never left you alone. Keep on building up your communities of faith whatever they are going to look like in the future, keep on building each other up in love, not critical or judgemental, but as our District Chair said in his first sermon here "loving each other to death."

How apt it is that our new President and Vice President of Conference have taken as the theme of their year John Wesley's final words: - "Best of all is, God is with us." We all need to hold fast to these words. And remember that Wesley's ministry was out in the world, in marketplaces and church yards not sanctuaries. He told ordinary, working men and women that they were loved by God, forgiven, able to make a fresh start, to be cared for and educated and then in turn, in small groups, help others. God is with us when we go through the deep waters of life, in the depths of sorrow God is in the midst, when we go through the fires of doubt and fear, God is there.

We need always to remember this is not our show, it is God's. To God be the glory great things he has done, is doing, and will do again in and through us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God, wherever we are, whatever we do, whatever happens to us.... Best of all is, God is with us. Amen

Hymn: STF 661 Give me the faith which can remove and sink the mountain to a plain; give me the childlike praying love that longs to build thy house again; thy love, let it my heart o'erpower, and all my simple soul devour.

My talents, gifts and graces, Lord, into thy blessed hands receive; and let me live to preach thy word and let it to thy glory live; my every sacred moment spend in publishing the sinner's friend.

Enlarge, inflame and fill my heart with boundless charity divine: so shall I all my strength exert, and love them with a zeal like thine: and lead them to thy open side, the sheep for whom their Shepherd died. *Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

Prayers of Intercession: O Christ our Lord, as in times past, not all the sick and suffering found their own way to your side, but had to have their hands taken, or their bodies carried, or their names mentioned; So we, confident of your goodness, bring others to you. As in times past, you looked at the faith of friends and let peace and healing be known, look on our faith, even our little faith, and let your kingdom come.

We name before you those for whom pain is the greatest problem; who are remembered more for their distress than for their potential; who at night cry, 'I wish to God it were morning.' And in the morning cry, 'I wish to God it were night.' ...Lord Jesus Christ, lover of all, bring healing, bring peace.

We bring before you those whose problem is not physical; those who are haunted by the nightmares of their past or the spectres of their future, those whose minds are shackled to neuroses, depression and fears, who do not know what is wrong and do not know what to pray...Lord Jesus Christ, lover of all, bring healing, bring peace.

We name before you those in whose experience light has turned into darkness, as the end of life or the breaking of a relationship leaves them stunned in their souls and silent in their conversation, not knowing where to turn or who to turn to or whether life has a purpose any more ...Lord Jesus Christ, lover of all, bring healing, bring peace.

And others whose troubles we do not know or whose names we would not say aloud, we mention now in the silence which you understand ...Lord Jesus Christ, lover of all, bring healing, bring peace.

Lord God, you alone are skilled to know the cure for every sickness and every soul. If by our lives your grace may be known then in us, through us, and if need be, despite us, let your kingdom come.

On all who tend the sick, council the distressed, sit with the dying, or develop medical research, we ask your blessing, that in caring for your people they may meet and serve their Lord. And for those who, in this land, administer the agencies of health and welfare, we ask your guidance that in all they do human worth may be valued, and the service of human need fully resourced. This we ask in the name of him whose flesh and blood have made all God's children special. *A Prayer by John Bell – Iona Community. Taken from the SPCK book of Christian Prayer.*

Hymn STF 610 (tune All for Jesus STF 341) Best of all is God is with us, God will hold and never fail. Keep that truth when storms are raging, God remains though faith is frail.

Best of all is God is with us, hearts are challenged, strangely warmed, faith is deepened, courage strengthened, grace received and hope reformed.

Best of all is God is with us as we scale the eternal heights, love grows stronger, undiminished; earth grows dim by heaven's lights. *Andrew Pratt (b.1948)*

Blessing: The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with us now and always. Amen

Helen - Sung Blessing: We will meet when the danger is over, we will meet when the sad days are done; we will meet sitting closely together and be glad our tomorrow has come. We will join and give thanks and sing gladly, we will join to break bread and share wine; and the peace that we pass to each other will be more than a casual sign. So, let's make with each other a promise, that when all we've come through is behind, we will share what we missed and find meaning in the things that once troubled our mind. Until then may we always discover faith and love to determine our way. That's our hope and God's will and our calling for our lives and for ev'ry new day.

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This is my virtual hug and handshake.

If you have a pastoral need over the next few weeks until Revd. Ian is here with you, please contact Revd. Gareth Baron on 01677 989169.

Now, not goodbye, but until we meet again, God bless.