

Ripon and Lower Dales
Methodist Circuit
Worship @ Home

21th March 2021 Lent Week 5
A New Covenant

Greetings as we join across this Circuit and further afield for this time of worship together.

We'll start our service with this thankful Hymn of praise.

StF 102

For the beauty of the earth
 For the beauty of the skies
 For the love which from our birth
 Over and around us lies
'Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise

For the beauty of each hour
 Of the day and of the night
 Hill and vale and tree and flower
 Sun and Moon and stars of light
'Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise

For the joy of human love
 Brother, sister, parent, child
 Friends on earth and friends above
 For all gentle thoughts and mild
'Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise

For each perfect gift of thine
 To our race so freely given
 Graces, human and divine
 Flowers of earth and buds of heaven.
'Lord of all, to Thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise

Lent is traditionally a time of repentance, and in particular this 5th Sunday, when Psalm 51 is often used as a prayer. Here is a re-imagined version of this honest confessional psalm composed by Dave Hopwood.

Psalm 51 re-visited. A Prayer

Dear Lord,
 life ambushes us,
 it's the nature of things.
 This broken world side-tracks and
 distracts us,
 it is full of traps, temptations and terrors,
 and we fall at times,

frequently, daily, sometimes hour by hour.
 It's the nature of us.

We are flawed, fragile, frantic beings,
 hungry for satisfaction, for a quick fix, for an
 escape.
 Have mercy on us, O God, according to your
 extraordinary love;
 according to your kindness, compassion and
 crucified grace.
 Please deal with our wrongdoing,
 remove the stains, heal the past,
 and lift the guilt.

We offer you all that we are -
 our mistakes, our falling short, our regrets,
 our strengths and weaknesses, disasters and
 triumphs.
 Our moments of following you, and our moments
 of meandering.
 We are wayward people, but because of you, we
 are not lost,

Forgiveness is possible,
 hope is on the agenda,
 and a fresh start is offered to us,
 each minute, each hour, each day.
 Because of you, because of your love,
 and because of all you have done.
 We thank you,
 in the name of your compassionate, courageous
 son.
 Amen.
Dave Hopwood @ Engage Worship

Gospel reading

John 12 v 20-32

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

²³ Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. ²⁵ Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!"

Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."

²⁹ *The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.*

³⁰ *Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."*

Intro

Well, I've had my Jab and pleased to say didn't feel too bad. I was also pleased to find that it was the Oxford / Astra Zeneca vaccine. Let me explain. The team that developed this particular vaccine was headed up by Dr Sarah Gilbert, Professor of Vaccinology at Oxford University. A very clever woman. Her educational credentials on Wikipedia cite the University of East Anglia and the University of Hull, but what it doesn't mention is Park Road Junior School in Kettering which just happens to be the very same school that I attended as a child. So, we are understandably proud – and also feel a strange kind of "reflected glory".

More about that later.

For my last Worship at Home Service we were reflecting on The Transfiguration of Jesus, and I mentioned that from that place of mountain top Glory, Jesus turned to face a very different kind of glory. He mentions it here in today's reading from John chapter 12, *"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified"*

From the mountain top, Jesus had set his "face like flint" on the journey to Jerusalem. It is impossible for us to know what Jesus was feeling as he travelled, both literally and emotionally, to the task he had to accomplish.

He stated out loud – *"should I say "save me from this hour?"* but then continued, *"No for this is the reason that I came."*

It is for Glory that Jesus journeyed. Not his own, but his Father's Glory. But it is a paradoxical Glory.

A Glory found in humility, a glory found in shame, a glory found in the midst of sin and human failing and the humiliation of a wooden cross.

And on that cross we see an amazing transformation - the creation of a new covenant. A covenant described in our next reading by the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah 31 v 31-34

³¹ *"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel*

and with the people of Judah.

³² *It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them" declares the Lord.*

³³ *"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel*

after that time," declares the Lord.

"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,

and they will be my people.

³⁴ *No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord.*

"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."

A covenant is an agreement. God set out his covenant with Abraham, and that same covenant was renewed through the generations at various stages of Israel's history. We might think of Jacob and Moses in particular.

When we buy a mobile phone or a land line service we enter into an agreement, usually called a contract, and that contract will run for a specified length of time. When the time has expired we have a choice. We can either renew that contract or we can start a brand new one.

What Jeremiah is describing in this passage is a brand new contract or covenant. It's not a renewal as had happened before. He is looking ahead to a time when the old "Law" that the Jews observed would be fulfilled by a Law that is written on the very hearts of the people. It's not based on a set of requirements as is found in the old law, but instead it's based on a relationship with God. A relationship where God's Spirit reflects the very essence of himself and buries it deep within us.

It is through Jesus that the new covenant comes about, and in particular it is at the cross that it is birthed.

So the Glory of Christ meets the Glory of the Cross, and where these two collide a new covenant is born.

But this new birth also requires something to die. Jesus describes how, in order for a grain of wheat to grow and be fruitful, it must first die. *“Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.”*

He is, of course, speaking of himself. The analogy is clear, he must die in order for the new covenant to come into being. He must die in order that the curtain in the temple, which separated God from the people, is torn in two. He must die in order that the kingdom of heaven might come about.

But he is also speaking to his disciples – and hence to us. *“Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life”*. Just as the seed dies in the soil, so we also must die to our old selves in order to be re-born into our new selves in Christ.

I wonder when you were a child whether you ever grew a runner bean held to the side of a jam jar with some blotting paper. If kept suitably moist, it was a fascinating thing to witness, first a small bud would appear, and then a root weaving its way downwards in search of water, and then a shoot would start its upward journey, with first one pair of leaves and then another. It never fails to promote that sense of Spring and new life when each year we sow our seeds and watch them grow. Have you ever held a tree seed, say a sycamore seed or an acorn, and pondered on the fact that within that tiny seed is the potential for a huge tree. It's as if that fully grown tree is somehow locked inside the seed.

Well within each of us is the God given potential to be that person he designed us to be. What Jesus is saying here, is that we have to make a choice between loving the secular life of this world and loving him. That if we stay as we are, the potential remains locked away, but if we die to our old self, if we are prepared to put our trust fully in him and to truly love him, that potential is released.

Hymn StF 427

I'm accepted I'm forgiven
I am fathered by the true and living God.
I'm accepted, no condemnation,
I am loved by the true and living God.
There's no guilt or fear as I draw near,
To the Saviour and Creator of the world,
There is Joy and peace as I release
My worship to you, O Lord.

Reflecting Christ's Glory

At the start of this talk I spoke about reflected glory. It is part of our new nature as followers of Christ to reflect his glory, but a good reflection needs a clean and shiny surface. You don't have to go far in your car at the moment for it to be covered in a film of dust or grime, nothing that a car wash can't solve though. And the repentance and contrition found in Psalm 51 and as we expressed earlier, is our equivalent of the spiritual carwash. Confession and a resolve to walk in his way produces a cleansing that enables us to reflect Jesus into the world.

Paul says 2 Cor 3

¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

So as we move forward through Lent, we travel with Jesus through his onward journey. We remember the New Covenant of his Kingdom. We remember his image reflected in us through our walking repentantly with him. We remember the seed that dies in order to bear fruit.

Shall we join together in prayer.

Prayer

Imagine you are holding an acorn gripped in your hand. Now open your hand. It appears to be nothing to speak of, and yet within this small and apparently lifeless object lies all that it takes to make a huge and beautiful oak tree.

Heavenly Father I thank you that I am forgiven - that all my wrong deeds and thoughts are swept away, but I realise that there is more. Locked away inside of me is that person you made me to be. I should be a mighty Oak but I am still a seed, or maybe just a sapling blowing in the wind.

Help me to put my trust fully in you and to grow more like you every day.

We pray for this world.

We pray for Justice where there is injustice.
Give us the courage to stand up and speak out.

For those who's lives have been broken by violence we pray for peace, and we pray that they may find comfort in knowing you.

We pray for those whose livelihoods and businesses have been devastated by the past year's events.

Help us to appreciate the role we can play as consumers.

We pray for our Government, our Queen, and those in positions of responsibility and power.

We pray for our children and young people as they return to schools and colleges and become accustomed again to the routines of learning.

We thank you for all those who have gone the extra mile to help during the pandemic, and for those volunteering and working in the vaccination and testing centres.

Help us to do our part, in whichever way you call us.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn StF 351

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Blessing

Now may the peace of the Lord be with you,
Now and always.
May the Lord bless you and keep you;
And may God's face shine upon you always
And give you peace.

Graham Pentelow 2021