

Worship at Home – Sunday 14th June 2020

As we share together in another Worship at Home, spend a moment thinking of some of the people we would normally be sharing with in church and ask God's blessing on them.

We begin with some words from Deuteronomy:

“Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.” (Deut 7:9)

Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank you that, though we are faithful to you in so little, you are faithful in all things; we so often go our own way but your love never fails. To you be all the praise and glory, amen.

StF 58 Lord, I come before

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dH8_SKkieJg

Lord, I come before your throne of grace;
I find rest in Your presence
And fullness of joy.
In worship and wonder
I behold Your face,
Singing what a faithful God have I.

*What a faithful God have I,
What a faithful God.
What a faithful God have I,
Faithful in every way.*

Lord of mercy, You have heard my cry;
Through the storm You're the beacon,
My song in the night.
In the shelter of Your wings,
Hear my heart's reply,
Singing what a faithful God have I.

Lord all sovereign,
Granting peace from heaven,
Let me comfort those who suffer
With the comfort You have given.
I will tell of Your great love for as long as I live,
Singing what a faithful God have I.

Robert Critchley (b. 1959) & Dawn Critchley (b.1965)

Prayer:

God of all faithfulness,
you meet us in Christ in the ordinary and everyday.
You are there in the boat with us
as we are tossed about by the storms of life.
You reach out to us when we are at our lowest ebb.
You ask us to step out in faith, beyond our own limitations.

You call us to follow in Jesus' footsteps, to live a Spirit-filled life.

You pick us up when we falter and let you down.

You give us your peace when all around causes us distress.

How can we cease from singing your praises?
How can we do other than offer our adoration?
We can do no other than thank you for your goodness to us. **Amen.**

“So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins. He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding.” (Eph 1:6-8)

Pause for a moment to meditate on these words from Ephesians and give thanks.

Bible reading - 2 Chronicles 7:11-22

The LORD appears to Solomon

¹¹When Solomon had finished the temple of the LORD and the royal palace, and had succeeded in carrying out all he had in mind to do in the temple of the LORD and in his own palace,

¹²the LORD appeared to him at night and said:

‘I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a temple for sacrifices.

¹³‘When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people, ¹⁴if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land. ¹⁵Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place. ¹⁶I have chosen and consecrated this temple so that my Name may be there for ever. My eyes and my heart will always be there.

¹⁷‘As for you, if you walk before me faithfully as David your father did, and do all I command, and observe my decrees and laws, ¹⁸I will establish your royal throne, as I covenanted with David your father when I said, “You shall never fail to have a successor to rule over Israel.”

¹⁹‘But if you^[a] turn away and forsake the decrees and commands I have given you^[b]

and go off to serve other gods and worship them, ²⁰ then I will uproot Israel from my land, which I have given them, and will reject this temple which I have consecrated for my Name. I will make it a byword and an object of ridicule among all peoples. ²¹ This temple will become a heap of rubble. All who pass by will be appalled and say, "Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?" ²² People will answer, "Because they have forsaken the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, worshipping and serving them – that is why he brought all this disaster on them."

At [a] and [b] the word 'you' denotes the plural

Reflection:

During this difficult time much has been posted on social media about the application of verses 13 and 14 of this passage to our current world situation, not least because, along with the global pandemic we are seeing major droughts occurring and a huge locust swarm causing devastation in Eastern Africa.

This passage is part of the dedication of the newly-built temple, God's words a direct response to King Solomon's plea in chapter 6 for mercy on the people when they fall into sin. In it Solomon specifically refers to the conditions of the covenant agreed between God and Israel (Deut 27 & 28) and God in His grace lays out what the people will need to do to receive His mercy. And the principles set out then still hold good millennia later.

Looking at this passage it reminds me of one of the last services I took when I spoke about the conditionality of many of God's promises in the Bible, and how we often miss those conditions. We are so quick to see the encouragement or comfort God offers that we forget to see what we are required to do in order to release the promise. Take those opening words from Deuteronomy 7: we thrill at the fact that He is a faithful God who keeps His covenant of love to a thousand generations – and gloss over the fact that those generations are required to love Him and keep His commandments!

It is often the little words that give the clue to the conditions and in this passage they are 'when', 'if', 'then' and 'but'. First God says 'when', not 'if', things go wrong and disaster strikes. He doesn't promise that His followers will be immune to the problems and crises that

happen in this fallen world. In fact, Jesus assured the disciples that they will have trouble in this world (John 16:33) – not one of the promises we tend to brag about!

Next God tells us that when troubles come He will hear us 'if', not 'when', we turn to Him for help. Sadly, our first instinct is not necessarily to run to God for help; we are still suffering from the age-old yearning for independence. In the words of Pete Greig in his book Dirty Glory:

'Again and again we see that there really is a big, fat, screaming 'if' hanging over the people of God in every generation: will we, or will we not, turn to God in prayer when the inevitable troubles come?'

The requirements for mercy God sets out are that we:

- 1. come to Him humbly admitting our sin*
- 2. seek His face in prayer*
- 3. change our sinful behaviour.*

Back in March there were calls from church leaders for a national day of prayer and action in response to the Coronavirus, encouraging us to pray for ourselves and one another (read the article here <https://bit.ly/2MP3swj>). Of course prayer is vital but there didn't seem to be any reminder of the need to examine ourselves, seek God and change our behaviour; no notion that we might be at fault in any way - as individuals, as a church and as a nation. Biblical repentance is not very fashionable these days, even within the church! We are in danger of crying out for God's mercy without taking any responsibility for the state our world is in. And it is only 'if' we do this that we get the 'then' that God promised Solomon:

- He will hear our prayers – a promise of miraculous intervention*
- He will forgive our sin – a promise of salvation for the lost and sanctification for the church*
- He will heal our land – a promise of reconciliation, restoration and deep social transformation, something we sorely need after the pain of austerity and the divisions of Brexit.*

Currently the Methodist Church is in serious decline, even in danger of extinction. But perhaps if, as a body, we took God at His word and turned to Him, sincerely seeking Him in prayer, willing to change, then He would 'hear from heaven and send the rain'.

Finally, we mustn't forget the 'but'. Where there are conditions to be met there must

always be a 'but' and in not meeting them the result may not just be missing out on the promised blessing; there can be other negative consequences as Israel found to their cost. They can't say God didn't warn them!

During this time of great uncertainty and upheaval it is a big 'if' whether people inside and outside the church will turn to God. What a tragedy if, when we look back on this period, we end up saying 'if only ...'

Prayer of confession:

Lord, by your spoken word you brought the world into being. You created it perfect and entrusted it to our care. Yet we have not cared for it. We have exploited its resources and mistreated its creatures.

In your mercy forgive us.

By your word, restore your world.

Lord, through your living Word you came into our world. Christ incarnate lived among us and showed us the path of salvation. Yet we have not heeded him. We have lived for ourselves rather than following his ways.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Through your Word, restore your world.

Lord, in your written word you declare your love for the world. As we read it we discover the way to life. Yet we have not shared it. We have kept it secret from others who long to hear the promise of love and restoration.

In your mercy, forgive us.

In your word, speak love to the world. Amen.

StF 508 Purify my heart

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lvXA0yRDwY>

Purify my heart,
Let me be as gold
And precious silver.
Purify my heart,
Let me be as gold,
Pure gold.

*Refiner's fire,
My heart's one desire
Is to be holy,
Set apart for You, Lord.
I choose to be holy,
Set apart for You, my Master,
Ready to do Your will.*

Purify my heart,
Cleanse me from within
And make me holy.
Purify my heart,
Cleanse me from my sin,
Deep within.

Brian Doerkson (b. 1965)

Prayers for ourselves and others

Some suggestions for prayer:

- That God would change our complacency and self-sufficiency and teach us again to rely on him
- That we are honest about our need to repent and turn back to God
- That we are reminded of all those who die on a daily basis worldwide through poverty, disease, abortion, persecution and other threats, not just from this virus
- That God would help us to speak clearly and faithfully for Christ on everyday issues right up to matters of national importance
- Give thanks for the work of Methodist Homes for the Aged supporting and caring for those in their latter years

We draw our prayers together in the Lord's Prayer:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come;
Thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

Our final hymn is one of encouragement and inspiration, a prayer that God might remake us into a people who live for Christ alone.

StF 470 Lord for the years

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkTrFQLy6js>

Lord, for the years Your love has kept and guided,
Urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
Sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise.

(not on the recording)

*(Lord, for our land in this our generation,
Spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care:
For young and old, for commonwealth and
nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.)*

Lord, for our world where men disown and
doubt You,
Loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
Hungry and helpless, lost indeed without You:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may
reign.

Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us –
Self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
Past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

A blessing:

May the Sovereign God turn us again to himself
and open our hearts afresh to the wonder of
his presence. May we seek him and know the
joy of finding him. So may we live each day to
the glory of his name. Amen.

Rachel Duck
June 2020