

Reflections for Sunday 28th June 2020

Welcome to worship!

I hope your week has gone well for you and you enjoyed the return of summer.

I couldn't help sensing the irony in the timing of our bible passages in June. The focus is mission, a concept hard to grapple with in the midst of a pandemic. How do we undertake mission whilst keeping a social distance? We'll be reflecting on this today and no better place to start than with this prayer:

Happy are those who live by the light of God,
who walk in the way of Jesus Christ,
and who worship in spirit and in truth.
For they praise God by the good they do,
they glorify Christ by their faithfulness,
and they witness to God's spirit of love.
And we too come to worship God.

Amen.

Hymn StF 507

O for a heart to praise my God,
a heart from sin set free,
a heart that always feels thy blood
so freely shed for me.

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
my great Redeemer's throne,
where only Christ is heard to speak,
where Jesus reigns alone.

A humble, lowly, contrite, heart,
believing, true and clean,
which neither life nor death can part
from him that dwells within.

A heart in every thought renewed
and full of love divine,
perfect and right and pure and good,
a copy, Lord, of thine.

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
come quickly from above;
write thy new name upon my heart,
thy new, best name of Love

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

Our Psalm for today is part of Psalm 89 and I came across this Prayer of adoration based on it.

Those who have heard me sing will understand why I was attracted to it!

Let us pray.

I want to sing, Lord, like some great star,
any style will do,
rock and roll, ska, pop, house or classical, so long
as I can belt it out –
the deep down truth of your constant, firm and
unwavering love,
your faithfulness to all – who do, will, or have
followed you.

My song reflects your history, Lord, of loving,
loving again, loving more;
in fact, never-ending love, right from the start,
and through your agreements with David and all
who have followed in leading your people.

How do I find adequate words, Lord?
What tune fits?

I am mesmerised in wonder
with a heart bursting with song.
I am in awe,
and want to chant, rave, harmonise and duet.

Nothing is fully like you for you are so great,
beyond the limits of words.
So I sing along with your creation, in tune with
the praises they sing to you:
clouds, white, fluffy, grey or dark,
the sea, gentle, rough or furious,
trees in their magnificence:
autumn, spring, summer and winter.

I sing to you, Lord,
aware of the strength you have and the strength
you give to me.
Off key or melodious,
strengthen your song of salvation within me.
Sing through me to others
to set them alight in the song that goes on for
eternity.

Amen.

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.*

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*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,
and the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.*

Psalm 89: 1 – 4

I will sing of the LORD's great love forever;
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness
known through all generations.
² I will declare that your love stands firm forever,
that you have established your faithfulness in
heaven itself.
³ You said, "I have made a covenant with my
chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant,
⁴ 'I will establish your line forever
and make your throne firm through all
generations.'"

This Psalm was written at the time of, or shortly after the reign of King David, some 3,000 years ago. It was a time of consolidation for the nation of Israel, time when there was much to be thankful for. The Psalmist attributes this to the love of God – the love that God showed through the creation, the love that led the people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. That love had been there since the beginning of time and was reflected everywhere. The Psalmist then goes on to say that this love would go on into the future because God had secured it in the line of David. Not surprising then that in times of difficulty in exile the people were looking forward to someone in the direct line of David to be their Saviour, their Messiah. And so it was fulfilled in Jesus, who through his life, his teaching, his example demonstrated what was the essence of God's love, and so today, even in the depths of a pandemic we can see examples of God's love being carried out daily throughout the world as men and women from all backgrounds show love to those who are ill and dying, to those who mourn, to those who have little to eat, to those

who are lonely and the list goes on. Where a need is identified, it has been filled with God's love. That is truly amazing – no wonder the Psalmist wanted to burst into song.

*Let us do just that with the **hymn StF 98***

Your love is amazing
Steady and unchanging
Your love is a mountain
Firm beneath my feet
Your love is a mystery
How You gently lift me
When I am surrounded
Your love carries me

Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
Your love makes me sing

And hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
Your love makes me sing

Your love is surprising
I can feel it rising
All the joy that's growing
Deep inside of me
And every time I see You
All Your goodness shines through
And I can feel this God song
Rising up in me

Hallelujah hallelujah hallelujah
Your love makes me sing

Brenton Brown and Brian Doerksen

A prayer of confession

We confess that we have not always given of our best,
we have not always lived as people with faith,
welcoming the stranger;
and there have been times when we have given way to sin,
and not always shown kindness to our neighbours.
Hold us in your love,
as we make our confession in the silence...
With a love we cannot imagine,
and mercy that never fails to forgive,
grant us your pardon, O God,

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that we might live by your grace,
and your grace alone.

Amen.

Matthew 10: 40 -42

⁴⁰ “Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward.”

Many moons ago, when I was training would be youth workers, I was frequently asked, “What is the main quality you look for in a youth worker?” My stock answer was, “Well it helps if they like young people!” That may sound trite, but it is essential in all situations where you are trying to establish a relationship with someone you don’t know. It’s about making people feel welcome, whether it’s welcome into your home, into the church or into your presence. Jesus used very different words in this passage from Matthew, but to me he is saying something very similar, except Jesus is not talking about liking people, but loving them. That is a big challenge, but Jesus says if we offer the same unlimited love to those we encounter in our life’s journey, we will be rewarded with that love being reciprocated. He says the welcome we show is regardless of the person we are encountering, and whether you roll out the red carpet for a visiting dignitary or you simply offer a thirsty person a cup of water, the feeling you have inside (the reward) is the same. You have shown a welcome as if Christ were to welcome them. The current Black Lives Matter is essentially about black and minority ethnic people not feeling welcomed. Things may have appeared to have moved on from the 1950s and 60s when black people seeking accommodation would frequently encounter, “No Blacks” signs in windows. Legislation may have stopped this direct form of discrimination, but it doesn’t prevent what people feel inside and act out in their lives. Jesus wants his followers to offer a loving welcome to everyone, regardless of colour

or class. I wouldn’t claim to be an expert in mission, or in anything else to that matter, but it seems clear to me that in drawing together this chapter in Matthew, that mission depends on how you approach and how you receive people. If genuine Christian love is not evident in the way we meet and greet people, then our mission is unlikely to be productive. Before I moved to the Bedale area I worshipped at Horbury Methodist Church near Wakefield. During my time there we decided to re-designate door stewards as “smilers-in”. Again, this may sound a bit trite, but it reminding those on the door is not just about giving out the hymn books and notices, or crowd control occasionally (very occasionally!) it is about the welcome that is being offered, which is not just being offered in the name of the church, but in the name of Christ Jesus himself. No mean task. Some of you who are of a similar age to me may recall the hit song by Peter and Gordon, “A world without love”. That was 1964, the year I felt a call to preach, the year I truly felt the love of Christ was available to me. How did I come to know of that fact? Through the love that others showed to me! In the word of the TV advert, “Simple!” As I said at the opening, it’s hard to talk of mission in times of a pandemic, but in a way there’s no better time to reflect on the love that God has shown us and think how we can share it with other. Just because much of the world has stopped working, it doesn’t mean that God has! “We love because God first loved us” 1 John 4:19. Thanks be to God. Amen.

A prayer for others

Let us pray for the world, your world:
brought into being with a word of acceptance:
‘be’, designed with room for each and every
being to find their place,
intended with food and sustenance for all,
pronounced ‘good’ in every way.

Let us pray for the world, our world:
where the vulnerable long for acceptance,
where the needy struggle with the effects of
greed, where refugees are desperate to find a
welcome, and goodness competes with that
which is wrong.

Let us pray for the world, your world:
where societies make peace and work for the
greater good, where differences between

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communities are celebrated, where individuals reach out to those around them, and goodness prevails.

Amen.

Hymn StF 663

I, the Lord of sea and sky
I have heard my people cry
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save

I, who made the stars of night
I will make their darkness bright
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart*

I, the Lord of snow and rain
I have borne my people's pain
I have wept for love of them
They turn away

I will break their hearts of stone
Give them hearts for love alone
Who will speak my word to them
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?

I, the Lord of wind and flame
I will tend the poor and lame
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save

Finest bread I will provide
'Til their hearts be satisfied
I will give my life to them
Whom shall I send?

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

A closing prayer

May God who is all love, teach us all loving.
May God who is all peace, give us hope in all circumstances.
May God who is over all, call us to a larger future.
May God who is beyond all, lead us into glory.

Amen

Lister Baynes June 2020

Prayers from Roots for Churches.