

**Worship at Home 13 June 2021**  
**Ripon and Lower Dales Methodist Circuit**  
**“Telling the Story”**

**Welcome to worship.**

Let us - Still our hearts as we prepare to come before God in worship.

Let us - Bring our cares and concerns and lay them at his feet. Let us -Take time for him who knows no bounds of time.

**A Prayer**

Heavenly Father,  
 All honour is due to You who created all things and through whom all things come into being. For Yours is power and might, yours is the gentleness of the dove.

We thank you for your great mercy and forgiveness. For your overwhelming love.

We thank you that we can come before you today not because of anything we have achieved, but only through the love of Christ. For we are not fit to come before you, but Christ has made us worthy. Where we were once dressed in dirty garments Christ has dressed us in robes of white.

We lay before you our saddening deeds and wrong thoughts, and we say sorry. Sorry that we have let you down. We trust in your promise of forgiveness, and we rest in your presence.

Be with us in this short time of worship. Open our hearts and minds and spirits to receive from you. Amen

**Come thou fount of every blessing.**

Come Thou fount of every blessing  
 Tune my heart to sing Thy grace  
 Streams of mercy never ceasing  
 Call for songs of loudest praise  
 Teach me some melodious measure  
 Sung by flaming tongues above  
 O the vast, the boundless treasure  
 Of my Lord's unchanging love.

Here I raise my Ebenezer  
 Here by Thy great help I've come  
 And I hope by Thy good pleasure  
 Safely to arrive at home  
 Jesus sought me when a stranger  
 Wandering from the fold of God  
 He to rescue me from danger  
 Interposed His precious blood

Oh, to grace how great a debtor  
 Daily I'm constrained to be  
 Let Thy goodness like a fetter  
 Bind my wandering heart to Thee  
 Prone to wander, Lord I feel it  
 Prone to leave the God I love  
 Here's my heart, oh take and seal it  
 Seal it for Thy courts above.

**1 Samuel Ch 16 v 1-13**

*The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you continue to feel sorry for Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. Fill your container with olive oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse who lives in Bethlehem, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”*

*<sup>2</sup> But Samuel said, “If I go, Saul will hear the news and will try to kill me.”*

*The Lord said, “Take a young calf with you. Say, ‘I have come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord.’” <sup>3</sup> Invite Jesse to the sacrifice. Then I will tell you what to do. You must appoint the one I show you.”*

*<sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the Lord told him to do. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of Bethlehem shook with fear. They met him and asked, “Are you coming in peace?”*

*<sup>5</sup> Samuel answered, “Yes, I come in peace. I have come to make a sacrifice to the Lord. Set yourselves apart to the Lord and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he set Jesse and his sons apart to the Lord, and he invited them to come to the sacrifice.*

*<sup>6</sup> When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab, and he thought, “Surely the Lord has appointed this person standing here before him.”*

*<sup>7</sup> But the Lord said to Samuel, “Don't look at how handsome Eliab is or how tall he is, because I have not chosen him. God does not see the same way people see. People look at the outside of a person, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*

*<sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab and told him to pass by Samuel. But Samuel said, “The Lord has not chosen this man either.” <sup>9</sup> Then Jesse had Shammah pass by. But Samuel said, “No, the Lord has not chosen this one.” <sup>10</sup> Jesse had seven of his sons pass by Samuel. But Samuel said to him, “The Lord has not chosen any of these.”*

*<sup>11</sup> Then he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”*

*Jesse answered, “I still have the youngest son. He is out taking care of the sheep.”*

*Samuel said, “Send for him. We will not sit down to eat until he arrives.”*

*<sup>12</sup> So Jesse sent and had his youngest son brought in. He was a fine boy, tanned, and handsome.*

*The Lord said to Samuel, “Go, appoint him, because he is the one.”*

*<sup>13</sup> So Samuel took the container of olive oil and poured it on Jesse's youngest son to appoint him in front of his brothers. From that day on, the Lord's Spirit worked in David. Samuel then went back to Ramah.*

### Talk Part 1

“God has given us a book full of stories  
That were made for his children of old;  
It begins with the tale of the garden  
and ends with the city of gold”.  
And so we sang in Sunday School....

The Bible is full of Stories. There are stories from history, factual stories, at first shared orally, told and re-told to tell of God's relationship with His chosen people.

And there are fictional stories, parables and analogies, stories designed to lead people to a deeper truth.

And confusingly there are stories with a bit of both. The Story of Samuel anointing David is one of these. David (later King David) makes his first appearance here as a young shepherd boy.

The story launches us into a world of risk and danger akin to a modern-day thriller. God has lost confidence in Saul the king of Israel, and sends Samuel the prophet to anoint a son of Jesse of Bethlehem. It is a highly dangerous mission; King Saul is unstable and Samuel's life is in danger, not to mention that of David and his family.

As we heard in reading the story, Samuel took great precautions. The whole thing took place under the cover of offering a sacrifice to the Lord.

Samuel has the family gathered together and Jesse offers up Eliab the eldest son, but God tells Samuel – no he is not the one, and so they go down all the brothers that are present, but none, apparently, have been chosen by God.

Then we discover there is the youngest brother out on the hillside tending the sheep, and no-one is to “sit down” until he is brought. When he is, Samuel recognises that David is the one to be anointed.

It seems like a straightforward and well told yarn, but there are deeper truths to this tale, and the key one is in verse seven. “God does not see as man sees. Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart”.

A famous verse, and one that I often taught from when I was a schools worker, and is still used today in the secular world as the simple message “It's what's on the inside that counts”.

All through this story we see God at work. We also see the faithfulness and obedience of the prophet Samuel. And looking further afield, we see God's hand in bringing this about through the

foreigner Ruth, David's Great-Grandmother, and in future events as David does become King and with his legacy in the story of the Jewish people.

So, a story from the old testament. But our New Testament readings are quite different. They are teaching stories told by Jesus, parables as we know them.

They are both about a seed, the way a seed behaves, what happens where no-one can see – under the ground; what happens when no-one is looking; what happens when that seed grows.

### Reading Mark 4 26-34

<sup>26</sup> Then Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is like someone who plants seed in the ground.

<sup>27</sup> Night and day, whether the person is asleep or awake, the seed still grows, but the person does not know how it grows. <sup>28</sup> By itself the earth produces grain. First the plant grows, then the head, and then all the grain in the head. <sup>29</sup> When the grain is ready, the farmer cuts it, because this is the harvest time.”

### A Story About Mustard Seed

<sup>30</sup> Then Jesus said, “How can I show you what the kingdom of God is like? What story can I use to explain it? <sup>31</sup> The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, the smallest seed you plant in the ground. <sup>32</sup> But when planted, this seed grows and becomes the largest of all garden plants. It produces large branches, and the wild birds can make nests in its shade.”

<sup>33</sup> Jesus used many stories like these to teach the crowd God's message—as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup> He always used stories to teach them. But when he and his followers were alone, Jesus explained everything to them.

Jesus uses these story to illustrate how the kingdom of God will grow. Jesus uses everyday and familiar experiences to convey deep truths. The bible tells us:-

<sup>33</sup> Jesus used many stories like these to teach the crowd God's message—as much as they could understand. <sup>34</sup> He always used stories to teach them. But when he and his followers were alone, Jesus explained everything to them.

Why does he do this?

Well his Disciples asked him exactly that question, and he answers:-

<sup>13</sup> This is why I use stories to teach the people: They see, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really hear or understand”.

He's quoting the Old Testament. I believe what he is saying is that these things aren't easy to understand but stories are the key.

To me, Jesus told these stories firstly so that people would remember them.

The truth is wrapped up in a simple innocent looking little story.

Today we might look down on such methods. We would forecast the growth of the kingdom with projections and charts, mathematical equations and algorithms.

Such technical data is easily forgotten though, whereas a story is easily remembered.

It is easily remembered and as it is told, the truth leaks out into the consciousness.

But how reliable are these stories?

Have you ever had the privilege of reading a bedtime story to a child?

Sometimes the child has heard that particular story dozens of times. To a child the familiarity is comforting and just right for a bedtime. To an adult, if we are honest, it does get a bit boring, and so the temptation is to miss bits out - skip the odd page. I've been there.

That is the moment when we find out whether the child is asleep or not – because they know it by heart and will object if you try and change it.

But there is a follow up reason why Jesus taught using stories.

Again when I was a schools worker, we were exploring some of the parables with a class of eight or nine years olds, and I asked them why they thought Jesus used stories to teach people. One child put their hand up and answered "So they could tell others". That was very perceptive.

The parables of Jesus – those nuggets of truth so innocently wrapped up as a simple story, passed down by word of mouth, faithfully retold in gatherings and families, especially in times of persecution, kept the people together and helped them to grow.

Here are a few verses from Psalm 78

<sup>1</sup> Give ear, O my people, to my teaching;  
incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

<sup>2</sup> I will open my mouth in a parable;  
I will utter hidden things from of old,

<sup>3</sup> things that we have heard and known,  
that our ancestors have told us.

<sup>4</sup> We will not hide them from their children;  
we will tell to the coming generation  
the glorious deeds of the Lord, and his might,  
and the wonders that he has done.

When I was a child my grandparent's back bedroom was a treasure trove of "stuff". One item of interest was an old gramophone and a selection of 78 records. I don't remember any of these except for this one song – "Tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love".

### **Tell me the old, old story.**

Tell me the old, old story of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and His glory, Of Jesus and His love.  
Tell me the story simply, As to a little child;  
For I am weak and weary,  
And helpless and defiled.

*Tell me the old, old story,*

*Tell me the old, old story*

*Of Jesus and His love.*

Tell me the story slowly, that I may take it in -  
That wonderful redemption, God's remedy for sin.

Tell me the story often, For I forget so soon;

The early dew of morning

Has passed away at noon.

*Tell me the old, old story..*

Tell me the same old story  
when you have cause to fear

That this world's empty glory  
is costing me too dear.

Tell me the story always

If you would really be

In any times of trouble

A comforter to me.

*Tell me the old, old story..*

### **Talk Part 2**

One of the interesting things about that song is that it appears to be told from the perspective of the non-believer, or a searcher of truth who is urging the Christian to tell him or her the story of Jesus again. Of his life and the cross. To tell it slowly, and to tell it simply.

So do we need stories?

Do we need to tell again the story of Jesus? After all we have whatever information we need at our fingertips, we could just point people to the facts and they can make up their own minds.

Well yes, I believe we do need to tell that story, and more. We need to tell our own story.

During the most recent lockdown, some at Snape chapel have been working through a small book called "The one about". They are real life stories of ordinary people and how God has worked in their lives and, through them to the lives of others.

For example one was called "The one about The Venerable Beader" a bit of a pun there. Put simply, it's the story of a woman who took up making bracelets and beaded jewellery as a hobby for herself, but God used this simple activity to His purpose.

After a few reluctant moves she found herself running a class in the local women's prison.

Relationships grew, trust grew, courage grew, and not only did this simple act make a difference in individual women's lives, it made a difference in the prison.

Testimony is something we should all be capable of, but it sounds scary. Telling our story sounds easier but it's sometimes hard to see what God is doing in our lives, let alone share it with others. But testimony is powerful, and an encouragement to others. It's real life, and what the non-believer needs to know is that the Christian has not reached some unattainable level of spiritual perfection, but that we are ordinary people, but with an extraordinary God, and with an extraordinary story to tell.

If we keep a diary or a journal, we may start to see how those little "co-incidences" add up. We may recognise how one thing leads to another and another and another, until a train of events occurs that we couldn't possibly have devised for ourselves.

In the black and minority communities there is an established understanding that "telling our stories" helps us to recognise who we are. As we piece together our stories our eyes are opened. Telling our story isn't just helpful to others, it's helpful to ourselves. It helps us to recognise God's work in our lives.

When we go on a country walk sometimes it seems as though we haven't got very far, especially if it's uphill. It's only when we look back and see the rolling hills and our starting point far away in the distance that we realise how far we've come.

And the parables of the seed? You may be thinking – what kind of sermon was that? You didn't explain what they meant. True, I didn't. I'll leave that with you. You can read them in Mark chapter 4 v 26 – 34. Or maybe you know them by heart?

### **A Personal Prayer**

Heavenly Father.

You have sung your song over me for all of my life. I have walked this journey, often not taking note, and frequently unaware of your part in it.

I thank you for those moments you have spoken to me, and I have heard. Those times I have been consciously led and I have deliberately followed.

Help me to look back and see where you have walked with me.

Help me to recognise those moments when I have been guided without even realising it.

Write this story in my mind, space it out in paragraphs and chapters. For this story is our story. This book is our book.

And when the time is right, give me the opportunity to share it. Not for my sake, but for the sake of others, so that they may know more of you. And they may see that you are the living God, active and present. Always at hand. 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.

Give us this day our daily bread.

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

### **Blessed assurance**

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!

Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

*This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

*This is my story, this is my song,  
praising my Saviour all the day long.*

Perfect communion, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my sight.

Angels descending bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

*This is my story ...*

Perfect submission, all is at rest.

I in my Saviour am happy and blessed,  
watching and waiting, looking above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his love.

*This is my story ...*

***May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, ever more, Amen***

Graham Pentelow 2021