

Worship at Home
Ripon and Lower Dales
Methodist Circuit 8th August 2021

A Cairn for a Memorial

Before you begin this act of worship, if you are able please obtain a small pebble of stone (or something similar) for later.

Welcome to worship

I will call upon the name of the Lord

For He is worthy to be praised.

I will shout Hosanna to the rock of my salvation.

Songs of Fellowship 1047

These are the days of Elijah
 Declaring the word of the Lord
 And these are the days of Your servant
 Moses
 Righteousness being restored
 And though these are days of great trial
 Of famine and darkness and sword
 Still, we are the voice in the desert crying
 "Prepare ye the way of the Lord!"

*Behold, He comes, riding on the clouds
 Shining like the sun at the trumpet call
 Lift your voice, the year of jubilee
 And out of Zion's hill, salvation comes*

And these are the days of Ezekiel
 The dry bones becoming as flesh
 And these are the days of Your servant David
 Rebuilding a temple of praise
 Oh, these are the days of the harvest
 For the fields are as white in Your world
 And we are the labourers in Your vineyard
 Declaring the word of the Lord!

*Behold, He comes, riding on the clouds ..
 Robin Mark c 1996 Daybreak Music*

Opening prayer.

Heavenly Father,
 We are filled with thankfulness that that you have brought us to this place of worship. Whether we are on a grassy hillside, or within four walls; whether we are in a busy market place or by a babbling brook, we know that we can worship you wherever we are. For time and space are no barrier to you, and they will not lessen our worship.

We are filled with humility as we compare our sinfulness to your holiness. Only by your Grace may we enter the holy place.

We thank you for Jesus and the great sacrifice made for our sakes, and your willingness to forgive in his name.

We are filled with admiration at the works of your hand and the wonders of nature. Today as we consider the simple illustration of a stone, we pray that you will speak to our hearts and enrich our spirits as we spend this short time together.

In Jesus name we pray
 Amen

Songs of Fellowship 1291

How great are You Lord
 How great is Your mercy
 How great are the things
 That You have done for me
 How great are You Lord
 Your loving kindness
 Is filling my heart as I sing
 How great are You Lord

How great is Your love
 It reaches to the heavens
 How great is the heart
 That sought and rescued me.

Repeat

*Lynn DeShazo c1999 Integrity's Hosanna! Music
 Sovereign Music UK*

Reading Joshua Ch4 v 1-9

A Memorial for the Israelites
4 When the whole nation had finished crossing the Jordan, the Lord said to Joshua, ² "Choose twelve men from among the people, one from each tribe, ³ and tell them to take up twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, from right where the priests are standing, and carry them over with you and put them down at the place where you stay tonight."

⁴ So Joshua called together the twelve men he had appointed from the Israelites, one from each tribe, ⁵ and said to them, "Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, ⁶ to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean?' ⁷ tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

⁸ So the Israelites did as Joshua commanded them. They took twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan, according to the number

of the tribes of the Israelites, as the Lord had told Joshua; and they carried them over with them to their camp, where they put them down.⁹ Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been^[a] in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood. And they are there to this day.

Part one. A place of Memorial

When we climb a mountain or a high hill, we often find a pile of stones at the top, placed there by folk who have made it up the hill. Those who have struggled, puffed, panted, climbed and scrambled their way up the mountainside, feel justified in adding their own marker to the accumulated pile of the many who have been there before. In doing so, they are saying “I am here” “I made it”.

It is without doubt a ritual that has its origins in the dim and distant past, and such a pile of stones is called a “cairn”.

After crossing the river Jordan, God instructs the Israelites to build a sort of cairn. Twelve stones, one for each tribe. Why? To act “as a memorial to the people of Israel for ever”. It is to be a place where the people might come back and tell their children and their children’s children, of the goodness of God, his provision and his protection, and his leading them across the Jordan into the promised land.

It is to be a means by which the story is passed on so that it won’t be forgotten.

It is a KEY MOMENT in Israel’s history. Time and time again, at moments of trial and crisis, the people are reminded of their release from slavery in Egypt, the wilderness years and the deliverance into the promised land. This small stack of stones said “We are here; we have arrived”.

Whether we are aware of it or not, we build cairns in our own lives. Significant moments, key occasions when we might say “I am here”, mark this spot.

It might be a marriage or the birth of a child. It might be a qualification and a career move. It might be a physical move to a new area and a new start.

As Christians we might add “I am here – and I acknowledge God’s hand in this moment”.

The cairn we build might not be physical, it most likely won’t be a pile of stones, it might just be a memory, but it is a mile stone and a fixed place of remembrance for us.

Earlier in July I had the privilege of recording our own version of Desert Island Discs with our Minister Rev Gareth Baron. If you are familiar with the BBC radio programme you will know that the guest chooses 8 records to take with him or her to a desert island. Those 8 records invariably have real significance for the guest and are markers of special times in their lives. The music takes them, and us, right back into those moments. We learn about the guest, and their experiences in a way that a standard interview could never capture. The records are markers in their lives, like a cairn is a marker in a special place.

There is another time in the bible when someone sets up a monument. We read of it in Genesis 28. Jacob wakes after a vision filled night of angels ascending and descending to and from heaven, and hearing the promise of God for the future. Upon waking Jacob exclaims “*Surely God was in this place and I never knew it*”, “*How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven.*” and he sets up a pillar, and names the place “Bethel” - “House of God”.

Part two. A place to return to.

We all have times when the rug is pulled from under our feet. For the Jews this happened on numerous occasions on a national level, and I am sure that at such times many would visit the place of memorial – physically perhaps, or just in their imaginations.

Throughout the Old Testament the Jews are reminded by the prophets and others of how God brought them out of slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness years, and eventually into the Promised Land.

During times of dispersal and right up to current times the Jews have used memorials to remind them of their place in God’s purpose. Sometimes physical, but mostly through festival, ritual and story. The most familiar to us is Passover. These memorials have enabled the Jews to remain a “people” despite being dispersed around the world.

For the Apostles sharing the Gospel the same is true, this was still a part of their message, to

remind them of God's deliverance, and how Jesus is the completion of that deliverance. For us, at times of difficulty, crisis or great change, we might find ourselves turning back and remembering our "cairn moments". Those moments that we have put down markers in our lives, and as we return to them, they remind us of surer, more certain times.

We might – open up the photograph albums and pour over pictures of more settled times. We might travel to a significant place, a place of memories and special associations. Or we might listen to a particular piece of music, or a song or hymn. All these things act in a way that takes us back to more solid, more certain times.

This can be for us as individuals, but also jointly as a fellowship or a church.

Our church fellowships are living breathing, ebbing and flowing organisms. There are times of joy and elation, but also times of sadness and disappointment. There are times of confusion in a changing world, and times when what was considered sure and unchanging has been declared lacking.

Where do we go when our "certainties" have been declared "uncertainties"?
 Firstly we turn to God himself.
 He is our rock and our salvation.
 He is our Solid Ground, our firm foundation.
 On Him we can depend.

The teachings of Jesus are the rock on which we build our faith, not the shifting sands of the secular world.

But also we will turn to the "cairns" of our faith journey. Those times that we have been especially aware of his presence. Those "mountain top" experiences. Times of revelation, times of blessing, and also those times we have been particularly aware of him holding us.

Our significant moments with him are the "cairns" we have built and to which we may return. And when we do, we know we are in a good place. A place of assurance.

Part three. A place to set off from.

For the Israelites, the memorial by the river Jordan is not a place to stay forever, it's a place to return to for a while, and then move off from. It's a place to remind them of their

history and their purpose before they set off again.

It's the same for us. In our lives, in the church, in our personal journey, when the time is right, we proceed from the place of our memorial. For some that will come sooner than others, but to move on is to be human. It is life itself.

Our memorial isn't a place to become trapped in, but a place of transition. If we believe Jesus when he said "I have come that they may have life, and life in all it's fulness", then that promise is for all time, in all our stages of life. In Jesus we find rest, but it is a rest that equips us for the next stage.

Our need is to remain close to God, or indeed to come even closer to God. To hear from him, to receive from him, to be inspired and empowered by him. To remain true to his ways and his teaching.

As for God, his way is perfect:

The LORD's word is flawless;

He shields all who take refuge in him.

For who is God besides the LORD?

And who is the Rock except our God?

Psalms 18:30-31

A Quiet Response

Take a pebble (or equivalent) and hold it in your hand. This represents for you a moment of remembrance in your life. Ask God to show you where He was in this key moment.

Prayer of Response

Heavenly Father.

I thank you for my life's journey so far.

For the cairns built along the way.

For those key moments of remembrance.

I thank you that you have been with me, although I have not always been aware of it.

For the past and the present, I say thank you.

For the future and what lies ahead - I place it in your hands.

Prayer of Intercession

We pray for your world.

We remember those fleeing to places of safety, for refugees and asylum seekers.

Lord put your arms of protection around them.

For children and mothers, the young and the elderly, keep them safe, we pray.

We pray for the current Nationality and Borders Bill going through parliament and pray that the injustices contained within it will not be allowed to proceed unchallenged.

We pray that those seeking refuge being held in holding centres across our nation will be kept safe and be treated in a way that we as a nation can be proud of.

Where there is injustice and unfairness and expressions of intolerance and hatred towards others, Lord we ask – Let Thy Kingdom Come.

We pray for our own Church – the Methodist Church; that we return to seeking your ways only, unsullied by the ways of the world. Standing as beacons of light in a dim place. Prepared to swim against the flow. Lord let us be disrupters in this world, bearers of truth and the words of life.

For ourselves. Bring us close to you, we ask. Teach us not to struggle against your call, but catch the wind of your Spirit that we might fly once again in your love and grace.

In Jesus name we ask these prayers, and the silent prayers of our hearts.
Amen

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.

Songs of Fellowship 44

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 submission, 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 blest,
Watching and waiting, looking above,
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.
This is my story ...

Author Fanny J Crosby (1820-1915)

A parting prayer

Loving God, we thank you for hearing our prayers,
feeding us with your word,
and encouraging us in our meeting together.
Take us and use us
to love and serve you, and all people,
in the power of your Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Graham Pentelow Aug 2021

Youtube link Kings Praise July 2021
Desert Island Discs with Rev Gareth Baron
<https://youtu.be/v4Kaa5heTyk>