

WORSHIP AT HOME – 13TH JUNE 2021 – ‘DO NOT FEAR’

Dear Friends,

This week we read from Matthew and the prophet Jeremiah where we are reminded of the potential cost of carrying God’s message to others, whether it be to God’s own people or to the wider world. There is hope, too, for vindication and/or redemption from God. We also see the writings from Paul’s letter to the Romans and that in this and in the Gospel this is expressed as hope for life, with Christ, beyond the cross.

Becky and I are hoping to continue writing these Worship at Home services weekly for the foreseeable future. If, however, you no longer wish to receive them, please let me know and your name can be removed from the list. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be able to continue with this work for as long as it is of value. *Every blessing, Margaret.*

Call to Worship: The Lord is on our side – a powerful champion.
 The Lord searches the depths of our hearts and knows our longings.
 The Lord receives our commitment and renews our courage.

So sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For he would rescue us from all that entraps us, and he transforms our suffering.

Do not fear to bring your pain to God.

Do not fear to bring your doubts.

Do not fear to bring your lack of confidence.

Do not fear to bring your worst, as well as your best.

Do not fear to bring your memories and your dreams, your hopes and your anguish.

God knows you and loves you. God will never give up on you.

The words to ‘For the beauty of the earth’ written by Folliott Sandford Pierpoint [1835-1917]. StF 102

1 For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth over and around us lies:

Gracious God, to you we raise this our sacrifice of praise.

2 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:

Gracious God.....

3 For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind’s delight,
for the mystic harmony linking sense to sound and sight:

Gracious God.....

4 For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
friends of earth and friends above, pleasures pure and undefiled:

Gracious God.....

5 For each perfect gift and sign of your love so freely given,
graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven:

Gracious God.....

Prayers: Dear God, your only Son, Jesus, spelled out to his disciples the need to speak to others about his teaching. Jesus asked his disciples to be like him, their Master. He sent them out as sheep amongst wolves – he suggested they be as gentle as doves, and cunning as foxes. He worried about them – scared, badly treated, physically injured, shamed, insulted, ridiculed or worse – he warned of the danger of being destroyed in the deepest part of themselves, their souls – and so he said: ‘Do not be afraid.’

Once again as we hear your word, Lord God, we are reminded that we too are asked by you to be like Jesus, our Master.

O Lord, we know how your Son Jesus was treated. We know what happened to his disciples. We understand that you still ask for the support we can give in spreading the good news of your kingdom.

Sometimes we get frightened too and need once again to hear your words addressed to us: 'Do not be afraid.' Lord, despite any fears we have at times, help us to grow into being more like our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. Help us to confront the fears or other feelings we experience which hold us back from speaking about Jesus and his teaching to other people. We pray in his precious name, **Amen.**

Lord, we are sorry for the times we get our priorities wrong – when we do not put you first; when we fail to see the needs of our neighbours; when we lack the courage and the faithfulness of the disciples.

Grant us forgiveness – grant us perseverance – grant us vision, that we may serve you as you desire, and play our part in establishing your kingdom. **Amen.**

Lord, you have called us to be your disciples. Thank you for trusting us with this privilege. Thank you for empowering us in the ways of service. Thank you for giving us courage when we are fearful. Thank you for your strength when we are vulnerable. Thank you for knowing us, for enhancing our lives.

Thank you for all that you are, and make us all that we could be. **Amen.**

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

Jeremiah 20: 7-13; [NIV]: headed: Jeremiah's complaint to the Lord.

'You deceived me, Lord, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long. But if I say: "I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name" his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. I hear many whispering, "Terror on every side! Denounce him! Let's denounce him!"

All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, "perhaps he will be deceived; then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him."

But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fall and be thoroughly disgraced; their dishonour will never be forgotten. Lord Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.'

Comment: The prophet Jeremiah lived through times of enormous political upheaval during his 40 or so years of proclaiming God's word. During that time he saw a good king, a couple of bad kings, a weak one – and the forced deportation of everyone except the dregs of the population. A turbulent time!

Jeremiah actually warned the people that most of this was going to happen, but this foresight did not win him any friends. Instead, he was steadily isolated from his people who couldn't bear to hear that the real truth was so very different from what they wanted it to be.

Jeremiah, though, had no choice but to prophesy – God had prepared him for this role from his conception. I suppose he could have just refused to pass on what God gave him to say, but as we read, Jeremiah just could not stop. Not speaking God's word was just as painful to him as coping with the fear and loneliness which speaking it brought him. The pain of not speaking out burnt him up.

He longed to be able to speak to the people of love and reassurance – but he had to repeat to them the words of 'violence and destruction'. So here we read of Jeremiah's deep depression – his despair. He accuses God of lying to him – of forcing him to speak – he almost seems to hate God for this [but at least Jeremiah is honest about his feelings]. All around him, Jeremiah hears whispers, sees shadows – and knows

that any one of them could be bringing his death – though the God who forces him to speak also protects him from others. There was no hint of condemnation from God for what Jeremiah was feeling – for those accusations Jeremiah was levelling at him.

If the people had listened to the word of God, of course, Jeremiah's whole life could have been very different. But for now, it wasn't the self-serving people whom Jeremiah hated, but the God who called him to serve them, whether or not they would listen. But prophets then, and disciples throughout the ages, cannot choose to soften the message they are given to tell even if it isn't to people's liking. It can be hard – as Jeremiah found; but what seemed meaningless to him then was part of God's overall purpose – just as we might not see why what we are led to say or do by God matters, but we too are part of his overall purpose. We may not understand why just now – but in the overall scheme our calling has its place.

Romans 6: 1b-11 [William Barclay translation]:

Are we [the suggestion is yours] to keep on sinning so that there may be more and more grace? God forbid! We have died to sin. How can we go on living in it? You must be well aware that all of us who have been baptised into union with Christ have by that baptism been united with him in his death. Through his baptism, which united us with him in his death, we were buried with him, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too should live a completely new kind of life. If we have been so united with him that we died a death like his, we shall also be so united with him that we shall experience a resurrection life like his. For we are well aware that the person we were in our pre-Christian days has been crucified with him, so that our sin-dominated personalities might be destroyed and we might be released from our slavery to sin. Once a man is dead he cannot be persecuted for his sin. If we shared Christ's death, we believe that we shall share his risen life too. We know that the resurrected Christ is never again to die; he is removed for ever from the sway of death. For in the death he died, he died once and for all to sin; in the life he lives, he lives continuously to God. So you must regard yourselves too as dead to sin, and in your Christian life you must regard yourselves as living continuously to God.

The words to 'I'm not ashamed to own my Lord' written by Isaac Watts [1674-1748]. Hymns & Psalms 677. Based on 2 Timothy 1: 1-12

1 I'm not ashamed to own my Lord, or to defend his cause,
maintain the honour of his word, the glory of his cross.

2 Jesus, my God, I know his name, his name is all my trust;
nor will he put my soul to shame, nor let my hope be lost.

3 Firm as his throne his promise stands, and he can well secure
what I've committed to his hands till the decisive hour.

4 Then will he own my worthless name before his Father's face,
and in the new Jerusalem appoint my soul a place.

Matthew 10: 24-39: [William Barclay translation]:

A scholar cannot hope to escape what his teacher has to suffer, nor a slave what his master has to suffer. The scholar must be content to undergo the same experience as his teacher, and the slave as his master. If they called the head of the house a child of the Devil, it is only to be expected that they will do the same to the members of the household. Don't be afraid of them. What is veiled must be unveiled, and what is hidden must be made known. What I tell you in the darkness, speak in the full light of day; broadcast from the housetops what is whispered in your ear.

Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body but who cannot kill the soul. The one you must fear is the One who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell.

Everyone knows that two sparrows can be bought for one farthing, and yet death does not come to one of them without your Father knowing about it. Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. So, then, don't be afraid. You are more valuable than a whole collection of sparrows.

If anyone publicly acknowledges his loyalty to me in front of his fellow men, I will do the same for him in front of my Father who is in heaven. If anyone disowns me in front of his fellow men I will disown him in front of my Father who is in heaven. You must not suppose that the result of my coming will be peace for the world. The result of my coming will not be peace but a sword. My coming is bound to cause a cleavage between a man and his father, between a daughter and her mother, between a daughter-in-law and her mother-in-law. A man's enemies will be his own kith and kin.

If a man loves his father and mother more than he loves me, he is not fit to belong to me. If a man loves his son or daughter more than he loves me he is not fit to belong to me. If a man does not take up his cross and follow in my footsteps, he is not fit to belong to me. To find your life is to lose it, and to lose it for my sake is to find it.

Saviour Christ, for all our talk of costly discipleship and of walking the way of the cross, when even small sacrifices are asked of us we balk at the prospect, making excuses to avoid or water down your call. We are reluctant to give a little, let alone contemplate anything amounting to real sacrifice. Forgive the feebleness of our faith, our weak and feeble commitment, and help us to follow you more faithfully, if not to the cross then at least to denying ourselves for the sake of others and of you. **Amen.**

Comment on the readings: Today's readings show us a fundamental principle which may sound nonsense but always turns out to be true. We might prefer to avoid this principle – but we cannot. It is the claim that through death you gain life – and, actually, goes even further than that as unless you take on death you cannot know life. How is this possible?

We all know that we have a strong instinct for survival and our brains use vast amounts of energy in supporting our life-systems. If anything threatens our survival, then there are all kinds of emergency strategies that kick in – and indeed the body is often so good at managing these that we often don't notice for we are probably occupied in other ways. If this had been different then the human race would probably have died out long ago – certainly most of the achievements would never have been made. So how does 'taking up our cross' and 'losing our life for his sake' fit in?

Nowadays there is a lot of value placed on self-confidence and self-assurance – people are encouraged to become their true selves and not be so vulnerable to abuse or pressure from others. We are told to be self-assertive – if we give up that right then we are considered weak and foolish. Again – how does this fit in with Christ's teaching?

It is a hard teaching to accept – there has to be a complete change of values and direction of life. This can hurt – can be very costly – and Jesus wants his followers to fully understand exactly what commitment means. Is it normal, then, to 'lose' the life they are living by choice? Jesus' self-giving in death gave new resurrection life – giving up our natural self-centredness is a new sense of life in which we find we are more free to be ourselves than ever.

Susan Sayers [priest and writer] says that 'it is the answer of a God who loves and cherishes us. It is like the difference between a tissue-paper flower and an alpine meadow in Spring..... the way of Jesus gives us an inner sense of rightness, calm and integrity, which is very richly fulfilling and enables others to become their true selves as well.'

Prayer: Loving God, so often we act with little or no thought as to the potential repercussions of our words and deeds, only to find later that decisions taken – whether our own or others – are hard to bear. Hear now our prayer for all those who are suffering as a result of unforeseen consequences.

We pray for those who wish they could go back on their decisions – those whose consciences are troubled, who are burdened by thoughts of what might have been or who wish they had taken another course – maybe have simply found they have taken on more than they can manage.

We pray for those who regret decisions they made or failed to make – unhappy in their relationships, their work, their homes, or in life itself.

We pray for those suffering the consequences of other people's decisions – those whose marriages have been destroyed, whose careers have been wrecked, whose confidence has been undermined or whose feelings have been hurt.

We pray for those suffering the consequences of war – their way of life overturned, their livelihoods shattered, their country destroyed, their loved ones killed or injured. And we pray for the victims of economic systems and structures – the poor, the hungry, the sick and the exploited.

We pray for the casualties of careless or thoughtless actions – victims of road or industrial accidents – of misdiagnoses or inappropriate treatment – of nuclear, biological and chemical testing – of crime or miscarriages of justice.

Loving God, there are so many whose lives have been changed for ever by the consequences of their own or other people's actions. Give to each one the ability to live with the decisions that have been taken – to reshape the results in the best they can – to pick up the pieces of their lives and begin again in the knowledge that you are able to make all things new.

Take what is and has been, and direct what shall be. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Meditation of Simon Peter [Nick Fawcett: An Amazing Man Year A]:

We all have our cross to bear, isn't that what they say? Whatever it may be, we all wrestle with some trouble or other. So is that what Jesus means by those words of his? No – it has to be more than that, for the cross he has in mind seems to be shouldered *voluntarily*, willingly and knowingly embraced. So what *does* he mean? You'd almost think he has crucifixion in mind – as though someday he might have to pay the ultimate price. But that's ridiculous, isn't it, for surely he's sent by God – the one long promised who will establish his kingdom and set us free at last. He's come to reign, not to die; to triumph over evil, not suffer at its hands. It has to be a figure of speech that stuff about a cross, for I've seen all too many strung up over the years, life draining excruciatingly away till they beg for somebody to end it, as they writhe in agony – and take it from me, it's not a pretty sight, not pretty at all.

No – he must mean something different, for no-one would choose to face such horror – not even Jesus. Special he may be, but could anyone be unique enough not only to give his own life but inspire *me* to do the same?

The words to 'Spirit of the living God' written by Daniel Iverson [1890-1977] Singing the Faith 395

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.

Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me,

Spirit of the living God fall afresh on me.

Closing Prayer:

Go now, not to serve yourself but to serve others;
not to seek your glory but the glory of God the Father;
and so may all that you are and do make him known
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And may the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with you all and with those whom you love and for whom you pray this day and for ever more. **Amen.**