

WORSHIP AT HOME FOR 18TH OCTOBER 2020 – POWER GAMES

Call to worship: Let us worship our God who is mighty and whose glory covers the earth. Let us take refuge in him, for he is our deliverer!

And we come to you, Lord Jesus, who opens the way for us; who speaks on our behalf, and has made atonement for our sins. We acknowledge your majesty – the suffering servant who is now glorified, and in whom we find eternal life. **Amen**

The words to ‘Jesus is Lord! Creation’s voice proclaims it’ written by David John Mansell [b. 1936] StF 353

1 Jesus is Lord! Creation’s voice proclaims it, for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made. Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it; sun, moon and stars in heaven cry: Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord! Praise him with alleluias, for Jesus is Lord!

2 Jesus is Lord! Yet from his throne eternal in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary’s tree.
Jesus is Lord! From him all life proceeding – yet gave his life a ransom, thus setting us free.
Jesus is Lord!.....

3 Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror, from death he rose, and all his foes shall own his name.
Jesus is Lord! God sends his Holy Spirit to show his works of power that Jesus is Lord.
Jesus is Lord!.....

Prayer: Praise the Lord on high who was once here below. Praise be to the One who sits at God’s right hand but who often sat by the sickbed. Praise be to the Son of Man who comes on clouds of glory, yet who suffered and died on the cross. Praise be to the suffering servant, our Lord and Saviour!
Lord, you are our dwelling place and we can trust in you. When storms rage all about us you will see us through. You save us and protect us – you hear us when we call. Thank you for your love, Lord, that shines upon us all. **Amen**

Lord, where we have sometimes been puffed up with a sense of our own importance, forgive us.
We confess that we are often tempted by the ways of this world – seduced by ideas of power, probably not on a large scale but possibly within the many interactions of our lives. Help us if ever we get that temptation to lord it over others or be determined to get our own way whatever.
Instead, Lord, help us to serve, to seek peace, and to put others first – for that is the pattern of life to which you call us. Help us always to pattern our lives on Jesus, the master who chose to serve, in order to bring you praise and glory. In his name we pray. **Amen**

A personal prayer: Oh God, I am sometimes so aware of all the things I cannot do. I feel tired, vulnerable, and worry that my efforts are not worthwhile.

But you lift up my head, and one touch of your love reminds me that this is all about you.

I am here for you. I am part of your plan, and part of your family.

Help me to serve you today in my own small way. For Jesus’ sake – **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 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 forever and ever. **Amen.**

Reading: Isaiah 53: 2-12 – using ERV from World Bible Translation Centre

He was always close to the Lord. He grew up like a young plant, like a root growing in dry ground. There was nothing special or impressive about the way he looked, nothing we could see that would cause us to like him. People made fun of him, and even his friends left him. He was a man who suffered a lot of pain and sickness. We treated him like someone of no importance, like someone people will not even look at, but turn away from in disgust.

The fact is, it was our suffering he took on himself; he bore our pain. But we thought that God was punishing him – that God was beating him for something he did. But he was being punished for what we did. He was crushed because of our guilt. He took the punishment we deserved, and this brought us peace. We were healed because of his pain. We had all wandered away like sheep – we had gone our own way. And yet the Lord put all our guilt on him.

He was treated badly, but he never protested. He said nothing, like a lamb being led away to be killed. He was like a sheep that makes no sound as its wool is being cut off. He never opened his mouth to defend himself. He was taken away by force and judged unfairly. The people of his time did not even notice that he was killed. But he was put to death for the sins of our people. He had done no wrong to anyone. He had never even told a lie. But he was buried with the wicked. His tomb was with the rich.

But the Lord was pleased with his humble servant who suffered such pain. Even after giving himself as an offering for sin, he will see his descendants and enjoy a long life. He will succeed in doing what the Lord wanted. After his suffering he will see the light, and he will be satisfied with what he experienced.

The Lord says: ‘My servant, who always does what is right, will make his people right with me; he will take away their sins. For this reason I will treat him as one of my great people. I will give him the rewards of one who wins in battle, and he will share them with his powerful ones. I will do this because he gave his life for the people. He was considered a criminal, but the truth is, he carried away the sins of many. Now he will stand before me and speak for those who have sinned.’

Comment: This is probably the best known of the ‘servant songs’ we find in Isaiah. The subject of this poem is ‘the righteous one, my servant’ – an anonymous, mysterious figure. Who was he? Maybe a contemporary of the prophet – or a royal person, abused by the powerful, whose unjustified suffering somehow represented that of the exiles? We don’t know, but perhaps the prophet saw the mysterious purposes of God at work in the way he bore his own suffering – as if he were a sin-offering in the now defunct Temple, carrying his people’s pain and opening up the possibility of a new future for them. Whatever it originally meant more than 500 years before Christ’s birth, the poem has been read in the light of Jesus from earliest Christian times as can be seen from Acts 8: 26-39 where the eunuch reads from this chapter of Isaiah. Perhaps Jesus encouraged this line of interpretation, either directly or indirectly, by speaking of his own vocation as a servant. And this theme is developed greatly in John’s gospel. The least to be said is that the pattern of the servant’s suffering and subsequent honouring by God matches that of other righteous sufferers in the Bible – as in the Psalms 22 & 69 – and converges on the experience of Jesus.

Reading: Mark 10: 35-45 – taken from the Translation made by William Barclay.

James and John, Zebedee’s two sons, came to Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we want you to do for us whatever we ask you.’

‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus said.

They said to him, ‘Give us the right to sit one on your right hand and one on your left in your glory.’

‘You do not know what you are asking,’ Jesus said. ‘Can you pass through the bitter experience through which I must pass? Can you be submerged in the sea of troubles in which I must be submerged?’

‘We can,’ they said.

Jesus said to them; ‘You will pass through the bitter experience through which I must pass. You will be submerged in the sea of troubles in which I must be submerged. But the right to sit on my right and left hand is not mine to give you. This is reserved for those for whom it has been prepared.’

When the ten heard this, they were annoyed with James and John. Jesus called to them, ‘You know,’ he said, ‘that those who have the prestige of ruling over the Gentiles lord it over them, and that in their society the mark of greatness is the exercise of authority; but in your society the situation is very different. With you, if anyone wishes to be great, he must be your servant; and, with you, if anyone wants to hold the first place, he must be everyone’s slave. Yes, indeed! For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’

Comment: here Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. He has turned towards the opposition – towards the cross and death. He wants his disciples to understand and be prepared. Just think how hard it must have been for Jesus when time after time they failed to grasp what he was saying to them.

James and John had just heard Jesus talking about his death and yet here they were, still thinking in terms of power and rule. They still didn’t understand what sort of Messiah Jesus is but could only hink in earthly terms. It would only be after the crucifixion that they would see it differently.

James and John were after position and promotion – they wanted personal gain and power and their thoughts were focussed on getting rather than giving – on personal success rather than sacrifice.

Not surprisingly the other ten disciples were angry with James and John because they thought they had tried to gain a lead on them. All twelve, then, could only see the rule of Jesus and his kingdom in earthly terms of power and force. The Messiah the Jews had hoped for was the Lion of Judah – a king like David who would drive out their enemies.

Back in our reading from Isaiah we had a glimpse of a different Messiah – not so much a Lion of Judah but the Lamb of God. There we saw the portrayal of the Suffering Servant who gives his life for the sins of the world.

Jesus wanted his disciples to understand that he was about to fulfil that role of the Suffering Servant. Indeed, they would see that triumphal entry into Jerusalem – but the road still led to the cross.

Jesus did not come to rule by force or to wield power. He came to win by love and to give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus could call on all the power and might that he desired – but he chose the way of self-giving and love. He understood that you cannot force people into the kingdom – you cannot make people love God but that you can only win them by love and grace.

This is why he calls his followers to do as he does – to give of themselves and to serve. It is what he asks of us too.

As Christians we need to be seen as people who can step off our pedestal, relinquish our hold on power and possessions, and give ourselves in love and service. It isn’t a question of how much we might have gained but rather how much of ourselves have we given.

The church that wields power and strives for position or is full of pomp and possessions is in danger of betraying the Servant King. We are called to follow his way and to serve him and one another.

Illustration: [from David Adam]

When Toyohiko Kagawa, who lived in Japan, met Christianity he was captured by the call to serve. He prayed: ‘O God, make me like Christ.’ To become like Christ he went to live in the slums of Tokyo to care for others. He chose to live in a shed that was about two metres square.

On the very first night he was asked to share with a man suffering a contagious itch – the first test of his aim to serve. He welcomed the poor man.

Then a beggar asked for his shirt – and he gave it. The next day the beggar came back for Tagawa’s coat and trousers. Kagawa gave them and was left wearing a ragged kimono. At first the slum dwellers laughed at him but they soon came to admire him. Kagawa wrote:-

'God dwells in the lowliest of men. He sits on the dust heap among the prison convicts. He stands with the juvenile delinquents. He is there with the beggars. He is among the sick; he stands with the unemployed. Therefore let him who would meet God visit the prison cell before going to the temple. Before he goes to church let him visit the hospital. Before he reads the Bible let him visit the beggar.'

The words to 'Here is love, vast as the ocean' written by William Rees [1802-83] Songs of Fellowship 168

Here is love vast as the ocean, loving kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of life, our ransom shed for us his precious blood.
Who his love will not remember? Who can cease to sing his praise?
He can never be forgotten throughout heaven's eternal days.

On the Mount of Crucifixion fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God's mercy flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers, poured incessant from above;
And heaven's peace and perfect justice kissed a guilty world in love.

I honestly don't know what came over us – a meditation as from James.

I honestly don't know what came over us. What on earth could we have been thinking of. Believe me, we don't usually go around acting like that, thrusting ourselves forward, seeking special favours. Yet this time we just couldn't help ourselves.

It was all that talk of death, I suppose – his warnings of disaster lurking round the corner. Those were enough to unsettle anybody. So when he suddenly spoke of resurrection – light at the end of the tunnel – we just reached out for it without a second thought. After all, let's face it, we'd given up a lot to follow Jesus – waved goodbye to any hope of a normal life getting mixed up with him; and, if he seriously expected us to stand by him while the sparks were flying, well, we simply felt we deserved some kind of reward. Wasn't that reasonable enough?

But when the others got to hear of it, what a rumpus! It was as though all hell had broken loose. Don't ask me who started it, but all at once there we were, arguing among ourselves like a bunch of washer-women – each claiming to be number one, the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. We were acting like spoilt children, of course – making a right spectacle of ourselves into the bargain – but it didn't matter at the time; nothing mattered then but our wounded pride – our punctured self-importance – our frustrated self-interest. Pathetic!

We realised that later, once we'd had time to stop and think. But it was too late by then, the damage was done. No, not to ourselves, I don't mean that, though we had let ourselves down, undeniably – but to him, the one we'd claimed to stand for – who we had talked so much about – the one we were meant to be representing. 'Do not let the sun go down on your anger' – that's what he had said, and we'd been snarling at one another like spitting camels. 'Love your enemies' – that's what he'd commanded, and we couldn't even love each other. 'Turn the other cheek' – and we'd traded insult for insult. 'Judge not, lest you be judged', and we'd condemned one another without a flicker of compunction. We let Jesus down; that's what hurts now. It doesn't matter about us, not when it comes down to it. But Jesus?

He had put his faith in us – called us to a position of trust, responsibility, and we'd thrown it all back in his face. I ask you, who's going to listen to us now? We can talk all we like about changed lives – about becoming new people – but they've seen for themselves, all too clearly, that we are no different from the rest of them.

He forgave us, of course – well, he always does, doesn't he? Told us to put the whole business behind us. So we're trying, we really are; trying to be the people he called us to be – trying to be more like him. I only hope we've learned our lesson and seen the error of our ways, for I'm telling you straight, unless we're

together in this – seen to practise what we preach – you can hardly expect anyone to take us seriously, can you? Well, can you? **Nick Fawcett [No Ordinary Man]**

Prayer Lord, we pray for those who have given their own lives to serve, whether on far-off mission fields or just around the corner, pouring out love and compassion on those you have placed in their care and their lives. May they know your strength, especially when they are weary or overwhelmed. Be their refuge, O God, and give them all they need for each day.

Lord, we pray for those who in their vocations and workplaces are in a position of caring for others in tangible ways – looking after the sick and the lonely – providing housing or advice – being at the other end of a phone - transporting those who cannot get around easily. We thank you for them, and ask your blessing on them. May they be provided with the resources to do their job well. And we pray that those in supervisory positions might have wisdom and awareness of the needs of those who work for them.

Lord, we pray for ourselves, that you may lead us in our own service of others, reminding us of the deep motivation of Christ's love, and giving us a heart for all your people. In Jesus' precious and holy name we pray. **Amen**

The words to 'The Servant King' written by Graham Kendrick [b.1950] Singing the Faith 272

1 From heaven you came, helpless babe, entered our world, your glory veiled,
Not to be served but to serve, and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the, he calls us now to follow him,
To bring our lives as a daily offering of worship to our Servant King .*

2 There in the garden of tears my heavy load he chose to bear;
His heart with sorrow was torn, 'yet not my will but yours,' he said.
This is our God.....

3 Come see his hands and his feet, the scars that speak of sacrifice,
Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered.
This is our God.....

So let us learn how to serve and in our lives enthrone him,
Each other's needs to prefer, for it is Christ we're serving.
This is our God.....

Closing Prayer: We go to serve the one who served us by giving his life, by showing the way.
May Jesus guide us and be near us, helping us to follow our calling to walk in his footsteps, 'each other's needs to prefer'. May we follow him always, in all our ways. **Amen and may God bless each one of us.**