

## WORSHIP AT HOME – 29<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2021 – REALITY OF FAITH

Dear friends,

Here we are at the end of August already! I hope that you are all able to enjoy the rest of the summer and the coming mellow days of autumn.

In our worship last week we saw Peter as a rock – this week he is a stumbling block as he offers Jesus safety instead of boldness – but Jesus needs to face risk to fulfil his mission of salvation for the world.

Every blessing, Margaret

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**Call to worship:** Let us hear the words of Jesus:

Some are hard – some are for us as individuals; some for us as a community.

Some are challenging – some are reassuring;

Some are difficult to understand and some we would rather not hear.

But we come to Jesus as we are and may we be bold, for he wants to speak to us today the words of truth, words of direction and words of hope.

We follow in your footsteps, Lord Jesus:

you who knew what it was to be betrayed and misunderstood;

you who had to bear the knowledge that you were to suffer;

you who had to walk alone.

Strengthen us so that we might strengthen one another, and go before us as we seek to live lives that reflect your compassion and love. **Amen.**

**The words of ‘Who would true valour see’ written by John Bunyan [1628-1688] Singing the Faith 486**

1 Who would true valour see, let him come hither;  
one here will constant be, come wind, come weather;  
there’s no discouragement shall make him once relent  
his first avowed intent to be a pilgrim.

2 Whoso beset him round with dismal stories  
do but themselves confound, his strength the more is.  
No lion can him fright, he’ll with a giant fight;  
but he will have the right to be a pilgrim.

3 Hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt his spirit;  
he knows he at the end shall life inherit.  
Then fancies fly away, he’ll fear not what men say;  
he’ll labour night and day to be a pilgrim.

**Prayers:**

God of all, we proclaim your greatness, declare your majesty, sing of your might and rejoice in all that you have done. You are a God of love and mercy and we praise you.

We like to hear of your great acts across history and your wonderful deeds among your people – and we long to hear again and again of all you have accomplished in Christ Jesus.

We lift up our hearts to you – we lift up our voices – and we celebrate again the Gospel.

But as we praise you, we also bring our confession for there have been times when our praise has been hollow – times when we restrict our praise only to Sundays and to the four walls of church – we may have found it hard to worship you as we ought when restrictions made going to church impossible, forgetting that we are church and that you are with each one of us.

We are sorry that when the chance has come to speak of you to others we have sometimes kept silent – and that when we could have served you we have held back. Sometimes, even when we have known what we should do, we haven't done it – and when we have known what not to do, we have gone ahead anyway.

And, though we know that you are always ready to forgive and renew us, in the midst of what we know we have done wrongly we burden ourselves with feelings of guilt and despair instead of turning to you.

Merciful God, forgive us for failing to practise what we preach – for denying what we proclaim by the way that we live – for letting you down in so many ways through our often weak and feeble discipleship.

Help us to live in such a way that our words and actions may be one, and our faith seen as real.

And so may all we say, and all we do, and all we are witness to you and the wonder of your love through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**You are a God of love and mercy and we praise you in Jesus' name. 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.**

**A reading from Jeremiah 15: 15-21. [Living Bible paraphrased]:**

Jeremiah replied to God: 'Lord, you know it is for your sake that I am suffering. They are persecuting me because I have proclaimed your word to them. Don't let them kill me! Rescue me from their clutches, and give them what they deserve! Your words are what sustain me; they are food to my hungry soul. They bring joy to my sorrowing heart and delight me. How proud I am to hear your name, O Lord.

I have not joined the people in their merry feasts. I sit alone beneath the hand of God. I burst with indignation at their sins. Yet you have failed me in my time of need! You have let them keep right on with their persecutions. Will they never stop hurting me? Your help is as uncertain as a seasonal mountain brook – sometimes a flood, sometimes as dry as a bone.'

The Lord replied: 'Stop this foolishness and talk some sense! Only if you return to trusting me will I let you continue as my spokesman. You are to influence *them*, not to let them influence *you*! They will fight against you like a besieging army against a high city wall. But they will not conquer you for I am with you to protect and deliver you, says the Lord. Yes, I will certainly deliver you from these wicked men and rescue you from their ruthless hands.'

**A reading from Matthew's Gospel, chapter 16: 21-28:**

From then on Jesus began to speak plainly to his disciples about going to Jerusalem, and what would happen to him there – that he would suffer at the hands of the Jewish leaders, that he would be killed, and that three days later he would be raised to life again.

But Peter took him aside to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven forbid, sir,' he said. 'This is not going to happen to you!'

Jesus turned to Peter and said, 'Get away from me, you Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me. You are thinking from a merely human point of view, and not from God's'

Then Jesus said to the disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who keeps his life for himself shall lose it, and anyone who loses his life for me shall find it again. What profit is there if you gain the whole world- and lose eternal life? What can be compared with the value of eternal life? For I, the Son of Mankind, shall come with my angels in the glory of my Father and judge each person according to his deeds. And some of you standing here now will certainly live to see me coming in my Kingdom.'

### **Meditation of Simon Peter. [written by Nick Fawcett]**

I should have learned, shouldn't I – for that rebuke was devastating: 'Get thee behind me, Satan!' Not that Jesus was angry, despite how it sounds – more dismayed, frustrated, and hardly a surprise given the temptation he'd faced and was facing still.

You see, he didn't relish suffering any more than the rest of us, but he'd wrestled in the wilderness with that calling, as he'd wrestle again in Gethsemane and knew there was no other way.

He had to carry the cross to bear our sins – to die that we might live – and the thought that / at least understood that had warmed his heart.....only for those impulsive words of mine to blow it all away.

I was mortified, shame overcoming my hurt, but would you believe it, when the moment came and the soldiers closed in, the spectre of his death drawing near, I grabbed a sword and lunged at them – me, denying his way to the last.

I had failed to grasp the nature of his kingdom – a kingdom in which success means sacrifice and splendour involves service, its king crowned in thorns via a cross.

Don't make my mistake, judging the divine by the human, things above by the world below.

However hard it may be – however strange – however contrary to logic and inclination – you too must trust in him, ready to lose *much* to receive *all*.

Forgive us, Lord, for eroding the message of the gospel – for blunting its challenge on the anvil, of expediency, self-interest and complacency.

We are swift to compromise when staying faithful involves the prospect of cost.

We rebel when your way runs contrary to our own.

We close our minds to what upsets the status quo.

We resist your call when it poses awkward questions that we would rather not face.

Teach us to set our hearts on things of heaven rather than those of earth and to acknowledge you as Lord, not only with our lips but also with our lives. **Amen.**

**Comment:** The harder we push against God's will for us, then the harder that will appears to be. These readings prepare us for the serious business of committed following – and we have to take careful note of this if we are not to be thrown by what can seem impossible demands to us, yet which can suddenly turn into blessings as soon as we approach them differently.

Jeremiah is thoroughly fed up with his impossible position. He knows God's hand is on him to be a prophet and he knows he must speak God's word to the people. He feels he has indeed sacrificed the pleasures of life in order to be obedient. Yet what has he got in return? Misery and loneliness – rejection and insult, that's what! So he complains bitterly – he is full of self-pity – it simply isn't fair.

God isn't that sympathetic, instead suggesting that Jeremiah gets back to the right place and starts speaking some sense instead of all this moaning! God wants to speak through him again to proclaim what needs to be proclaimed.

But he does assure Jeremiah, very tenderly, that he is going to stay with him and keep him ultimately safe through everything he will have to suffer.

Susan Sayers [writer and priest] writes: 'It is so easy to get into the worldly habit of trading where spiritual matters are concerned; so easy to start totting up the noble sacrifices we have made, and the time or money we spend for God, expecting tangible returns of our own choosing. Even our intercessory prayer can so easily turn into a kind of bullying of God, or bribery, and, of course, as soon as this happens we have actually swung round with our backs to the Lord we claim to love.'

There is another danger too. Peter genuinely loves Jesus and his horrified denial of the necessary suffering to come is so very understandable, isn't it. Wouldn't we all react in the same way at the prospect of a loved friend having to go through that?

Yet here Satan has hijacked this human friendship to tempt Jesus as powerfully as he possibly can. You can just hear him, can't you - 'Avoid the cross and gain the crown without having to go through all that agony of body and spirit. How will you or your friends cope?'

This reply from Jesus shows us just how deeply the temptation has stabbed him. How deeply – in his humanness – he must have yearned for Peter to be right – but he recognises Satan's cunning and so shows Peter that he is, in this instance, not a rock but a stumbling block – and what terrible consequences there would be for the world should Jesus have tripped over it.

The suffering has to be – there is no other way. Jesus braces himself for what lies ahead in the certainty that it is for great and permanent good – and he also wants us to hear that message and understand it. Susan Sayers again: 'Any cross laid on us will be heavy, and it will hurt, but the loving God lays it on us with such tenderness and as gently as he can. Any cross laid on us is not to do with us only, but has far-reaching effects which we will never realise till we reach heaven and see there the value of the painful journey we have lovingly travelled in God's company.'

**Prayers:**

Lord, it is hard to read that it was the religious folks of your day who were the ones who would hurt you.; that it was those who taught others about God who were the very ones who would condemn you to death. It is hard – but maybe I am like them?

Challenge me, Lord, when I hurt others – when I think I know best .

Challenge me – and draw me deeper into your heart of love that I might embrace suffering if it should come, and support others when they are wronged.

I pray in your name, Lord, **Amen.**

**Within this prayer there are spaces for you to bring your personal thoughts.**

Faithful God, we bring to you those facing persecution.....

Those facing illness.....

Those facing financial hardship.....

And all those who know the way ahead is going to be difficult and painful.....

Strengthen them through the power of the cross.

We pray for those who have been wounded, physically or spiritually –

by their families – by their friends – by their church fellowship.

Strengthen them through the power of the cross.

We stand with those who have been misunderstood, wrongly judged or betrayed.

We remember those who have carried their cross in the name of Christ, and have been imprisoned, ostracised, betrayed, killed.....

Strengthen them in the power of the cross.

All these prayers we bring in the name of Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

**Illustration written by David Adam:**

When the devil cannot get at us directly he will seek to lead us astray by our friends. It is sad how many people are led astray by friends and family. Sometimes our loved ones are only seeking to protect us but in doing so they can stop us from taking risks for God.

Columbanus was born in Ireland about 540 AD. He was of noble birth, strong and intelligent and destined to be a ruler of people. Columbanus heard the call of God and decided to dedicate his life to God in a monastery. His poor mother was heartbroken. He could have such a wonderful career and he was hardly ready to leave home. She tried to stop him, at first holding on to him, and then lying down in front of the doorway, sobbing. It was very difficult for Columbanus but he had set his sights on serving God. He stepped purposefully over his mother and set out for the monastery.

If he had stayed at home, we would never have heard of him, but in time he became one of the greatest missionaries and teachers in Europe.

**The words to 'Praise to the Holiest' written by John Henry Newman [1801-1890] and adapted by Compilers of 'Hymns for Today's Church' 1982. Singing the Faith 334**

1 Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depths be praise,  
in all his works most wonderful, most sure in all his ways.

2 O loving wisdom of our God! when all was sin and shame,  
a second Adam to the fight and to the rescue came.

3 O wisest love! that flesh and blood which did in Adam fail,  
should'st strive afresh against the foe, should strive and should prevail.

4 And that a higher gift than grace should flesh and blood refine,  
God's presence and his very self, and essence all divine.

5 O generous love! that he, who came as man to smite the foe,  
the double agony for us as man should undergo;

6 And in the garden secretly, and on the cross on high,  
should teach his followers and inspire to suffer and to die.

7 Praise to the Holiest in the height, and in the depth be praise;  
To all his words most wonderful, most sure in all his ways.

**Closing Prayer and Blessing:**

God of life,

May the promise of the sunrise be echoed in our minds.

May the warmth of the midday sun flow through our hearts.

May the peace of the sunset touch our souls.

And when life seems dark teach us to remember that even then you are with us, and that we will again see your light.

And may the blessing of God – the Father who created us – the Son who found us and saved us – and the Holy Spirit who lives and works within us – be with us and those for whom we pray this day and for all eternity. **Amen.**