

## **2022 – 13<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY – WORSHIP AT HOME – EPIPHANY 6**

Dear friends,

So the year goes on apace – and we aim to keep going with it! It seems that new possibilities are beginning to show, and it would be exciting to see where God wants us to be and respond to him.

Today we see that Jeremiah announces that God blesses those who trust in him and curses those who rely on their own resources. Jesus promises God's blessings on those who suffer now, while those who prosper will be brought low.

Have a good week. *Every blessing, Margaret.*

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**Call to worship:** Lord, there are so many obstacles that we bring to worship:

The hurt and anger we feel within us – the worries and concerns that fill our minds – our awareness that life and our lives are being changed – painful memories of the past that still cause anguish even now – the uncertainty and bleakness of our tomorrows – the emptiness, sorrow and doubt that fill our lives today.

We do not find it easy to keep Christ at the centre, but open our eyes, Lord – we want to see Jesus. **Amen**

**The words to 'Praise the Lord!' taken from Foundling Hospital Hymns c. 1796, based on Psalm 148.**

**Singing the Faith 86:**

1 Praise the Lord! You heavens adore him; praise him, angels in the height;  
sun and moon, rejoice before him; praise him, all you stars and light.

Praise the Lord, for he has spoken; worlds his mighty voice obeyed;  
laws that never shall be broken for their guidance he has made.

2 Praise the Lord, for he is glorious! Never shall his presence fail;  
God has made his saints victorious; sin and death shall not prevail.  
Praise the God of our salvation; hosts on high his power proclaim;  
heaven and earth, and all creation, laud and magnify his name!

**Prayers:**

Almighty God, we come rejoicing in your love and celebrating your goodness.

We praise you for the constancy of your love, new every morning – for your handiwork in creation, the miracle of life in all its infinite variety – and the wonder and the beauty of the world around us.

We thank you for all you have done for us in Christ, opening, through him, a way for us to know you better, revealing something of your greatness and goodness, filling our lives to overflowing with your unfailing love.

We praise you for the way you have guided us across the years, and for the assurance that you will continue to lead us every step of our way; for the strength you have offered us in times of need, comfort in times of distress, encouragement in times of uncertainty, and joy in times of sorrow.

Accept now our worship, poor though it is and however inadequate our words may be.

Open our hearts to your sovereign presence so that we may be filled with an ever-deepening sense of wonder – a greater feeling of awe – and a richer understanding of your purpose for us and for all the world.

Richly you have blessed us and with grateful hearts we praise you. In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

Sometimes our mindset has been so misguided, and for so long, we fail to see how you can forgive us. Mired in dark thoughts that hastily curse and rarely bless, we are ashamed when a ray of holy light reveals the dust and ashes of our lives.

Yet with you, Lord, there is forgiveness and redemption, the chance to turn our thoughts around, and bless with the blessings that come from you. Thank you. **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 17: 5-10:**

God's Message:

Cursed is the strong one who depends on mere humans – who thinks he can make it on muscle alone and sets God aside as dead weight.

He is like a tumbleweed on the prairie, out of touch with the good earth.

He lives rootless and aimless in a land where nothing grows.

But blessed is the man who trust me, God – the woman who sticks with God.

They are like trees replanted in Eden, putting down roots near the rivers – never a worry through the hottest of summers, never dropping a leaf.

Serene and calm through the droughts, bearing fresh fruit every season.

The heart is hopelessly dark and deceitful, a puzzle that no-one can figure out.

But I, God, search the heart and examine the mind.

I get to the heart of the human – I get to the root of things.

I treat them as they really are, not as they pretend to be

**[from The Message – Eugene Peterson]**

**Comment:**

Jeremiah's career began in 627BC, in a time of national promise under King Josiah. However with Josiah's death in 609BC there began a period of great tension, leading up to the Babylonian invasion in 597BC. Jeremiah put his life in personal danger when he denounced the nation's sin and warned of God's punishment. The nation had to turn to God, repent and cease sinning. Here Jeremiah offers a stylistic seed that Jesus developed into the Beatitudes.

In this passage we are reminded by Jeremiah that to be blessed – to be living in God's fullness and delight – is not a matter of appearances as he suggests that those who trust in the wrong things can have the appearance of health when, in fact, they are rootless and lacking in depth. A community or person who trusts in mere mortals is like a desert shrub, looking good and healthy on the outside but which are actually parched and so easily destroyed.

The challenge is how to work out the difference between trusting in God and trusting in that which cannot truly satisfy.

Blessings wait to be found, but Jeremiah suggests they will not necessarily come easily. He recognises that the heart is devious, with a capacity to trick itself into believing all sorts of things to be good, which are, in fact, bad. Yet, God is reliable and when we centre our lives on him and discerns those who trust in him – those who are like trees near a stream and whose roots which tap into the living water. He will test minds and search hearts and reward according to people's behaviour.

**LUKE 6: 17-26:**

Coming down off the mountain with them, he stood on a plain surrounded by disciples, and was soon joined by a huge congregation from all over Judea and Jerusalem, even from the seaside towns of Tyre and Sidon. They had come both to hear him and to be cured of their ailments. Those disturbed by evil spirits were healed. Everyone was trying to touch him – so much energy surging from him, so many people healed. Then he spoke:

You are blessed when you've lost it all; God's kingdom is there for the finding.

You're blessed when you are ravenously hungry. Then you are ready for the Messianic meal.

You're blessed when the tears flow freely. Joy comes with the morning.

Count yourselves blessed every time someone cuts you down or throws you out – every time someone smears or blackens your name to discredit me. What it means is that the truth is too close for comfort and that that person is uncomfortable. You can be glad when that happens – skip like a lamb, if you like – for even though they don't like it, I do, and all heaven applauds. And know that you are in good company, my preachers and witness have always been treated like this.

But it's trouble ahead if you think you have it made. What you have is all you'll ever get.

And it's trouble ahead if you're satisfied with yourself. Your *self* will not satisfy you for long.

And it's trouble ahead if you think life is all fun and games. There is suffering to be met, and you're going to meet it.

There is trouble ahead when you live only for the approval of others, saying what flatters them, doing what indulges them. Popularity contests are not truth contests – look how many scoundrel preachers were approved by your ancestors! Your task is to be true, not popular.

**[taken from The Message – Eugene Peterson].**

### **Comment:**

People had come to hear Jesus' teaching and for his healing as they were well aware of the energy coming from him. In Jesus there were signs of the kingdom of God at work – and they wanted to know more.

Jesus tells them of the 'blessed' – blessed being a good translation of the Greek 'makarioi' which means 'happy' – though 'blessed' also speaks of the favour of God.

Jesus connects some strange things with happiness or blessedness and it is the oddness of what he says that should bring us up with a jolt.

'Happy are the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, those who are hated on his account.'

We tend to make happiness dependent on external circumstances, such as: 'I would be happy if I won the lottery'. So many material things which we think would make us happy.

But Jesus wants us to know that happiness comes from something deep within us. It isn't about 'having' or 'not having' but about our relationship with God.

True happiness is not dependent on outward things [though they can help] – but true happiness is dependent on God.

The danger with riches or plenty is that they can make us feel that we are self-sufficient and can provide for ourselves – then God can be moved to the side-lines. True happiness comes from knowing that it is God who provides for us – it is God who loves us.

Just think, though, of many who listened to Jesus that day – those who had decided to follow him – those who had given everything up, homes, families, livelihoods – they have no security, not even knowing when or where the next meal would appear. Not only that, they have already glimpsed the hostility surrounding Jesus and realise that they are opening themselves to coming in for such hostility themselves.

Jesus now speaks into their natural concerns – their possible misgivings – and reassures them that although they have chosen this road, they have chosen wisely and that the rewards of living by faith are great and lasting. He makes it clear that it is those who cling to the material possessions who cannot be swept up into the fullness of the joy which God provides.

Our challenge? We should look at our lives and our feelings and if we discover that we our happiness is linked things or other people's praise then perhaps we can choose instead to be vulnerable and take the risk of living by our faith in God, whatever others may think.

### **The words to 'Father, hear the prayer we offer' written by Love Maria Willis [1824-1908] StF 518**

1 Father, hear the prayer we offer; not for ease that prayer shall be,  
but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously.

2 Not for ever in green pastures do we ask our way to be;  
but the steep and rugged pathway may we tread rejoicingly.

3 Not for ever by still waters would we idly rest and stay;  
but would strike the living fountains from the rocks along our way.

4 Be our strength in hours of weakness, in our wanderings be our guide;  
through endeavour, failure, danger, Father, be there at our side.

### **Prayers:**

Living God, we thank you that you are a God who hears and answers prayer, and we praise you for those times when you have responded to us and granted our requests. There are times though, Lord, when it seems to us that you remain silent and when, listen though we might, we cannot hear your voice.

Lord, in your mercy, hear us, and all who pray to you.

We think of those known to be facing hard times – battling with illness, wrestling with depression, anxious about the future, grieving for loved ones. And for those for whom life seems to be a puzzle, maybe even a burden, people who long to find hope to make some sense out of their confusion.

We think of all who feel far from you – burdened by doubt, overwhelmed by temptation, crushed by failure.

We pray for those who long to get to know you better but who find it hard to get close; those who seek to serve you but who are weighed down by a sense of their weaknesses, their lack of faith or repeated mistakes.

We think of those who seek guidance – who may feel unsure of the way ahead or uncertain of their ability to face that future and unclear as to what you want from them, or what you plan for their lives. We pray for all who ask you to lead the way forward yet who still have no sense of their specific calling.

Lord, we think of the poor and the weak, the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society – those denied their rights, their dignity, their freedom, their livelihoods. We pray for all who long for a time when justice will be established but who have given up really believing that it ever will be.

Living God, we are conscious that so many in our world cry out to you yet seem to receive no answer; for some it may be because they do not expect to receive one; others may be unready or unwilling to listen; yet others because they do not understand what you are saying – but many genuinely and urgently longing to hear your voice, yearning for some response.

Speak to them, we pray – reach out into their pain and hurt, their need and hopelessness, and bring your word of comfort – of peace – of healing, love, and renewal.

Lord, in your mercy, hear us and all who pray to you.

In the name of Jesus Christ, your Word made flesh. **Amen.**

### **Meditation of the Apostle John on Luke 6: 26:**

***Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.***

We were puzzled, I don't mind telling you, for why should we be concerned instead of pleased when people think well of us?

Surely, if we live up to what Jesus asks of us – loving our enemies, responding to those in need – we're bound to create a good impression.

Well perhaps, perhaps not, for truly following Jesus involves rather more.

It means rejecting the way of the world, refusing to conform.

It means speaking the truth in love, even though the truth may hurt.

It means speaking out against evil and standing up for what we believe.

All this, and much more, can be harder than we might think, costing us money, comfort, opportunities, friends.

Far easier to go along with the crowd, compromise our convictions, water down our faith.

And that's what false prophets did and continue to do – telling people what they want to hear, seeking approval at the cost of truth.

Yes, true faith will win its admirers, but it will win its cynics too, its mockers, its enemies, just as Jesus found – and much though you might wish it were otherwise, if you've never encountered some of those then it's time to ask whether the faith you proclaim is really faith at all.

**[Nick Fawcett]**

**The words to 'How small a spark' written by Shirley Erena Murray [b. 1931] Singing the Faith 408  
'Aldersgate' used in the final verse refers to Aldersgate Street, where John Wesley had his conversion  
experience on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1738**

1 How small a spark has lit a living fire!

How small a flame has warmed a bitter world!

How great a heart was moved to hope, to dare  
and bring the faith out in the open air!

2 No boundary sign will stand against this faith,  
no wall restrain the preaching of the Word:  
the Good News travels on, it rides the road  
and draws to unity the realm of God.

3 The single note becomes a psalm of praise,  
the single voice grows to a swelling choir  
and born in song, new stories now are sung  
of freedom, chains unbound, and loosened tongue.

4 Thank God for all who listened and believed,  
who still are by the Spirit set on fire –  
our hearts be warmed again, for Christ will wait  
on beach, in upper room, or Aldersgate.

**Closing Prayer:**

Lord, as we step out into this week, help us to cultivate our relationship with you.

We want to be rooted in you.

Show us our barriers to receiving your blessing.

Help us not only to recognise how blessed we are but also show us ways that your blessing can overflow to others through us.

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