

Worship at Home Sunday January 10th 2021

Good morning and welcome to this next series of *Worship at Home*.
I wonder how many of us expected to be in this position in 2021?
It became clear very quickly in the run up to Christmas and the days that followed that we were heading this way.
We are getting used to making plans – and then they have to be stopped.
We are becoming very adaptable –
We keep telling ourselves and each other – this is not for ever.

There is good news; the roll-out of the vaccine brings hope and some chance of a little bit of normality.
We have warm, comfortable homes where we are safe and we have things to keep us occupied.
Time is in itself a precious gift, one that we have lamented a lack of in the past; now we have an abundance of time and we can use it in many ways.

So as we come to worship let us focus not on what we can't do, but what we can do.
Let us focus not on what we have lost, but what we can gain.
Let us welcome the promise of a new year as we would always do and open ourselves to the possibilities it will bring.
Let us worship God.

*Reveal to us the single loving heart
That beats behind the being of all things
And calls and keeps and kindles us to light.*

(1)

Let us pray.

Eternal God, source, guide and goal.
Through your power the world was created;
in your name the void became earth and heaven,
by your will and for your purpose
humanity was formed and brought to life.

We, your people
know both our history and our responsibility-
and even though we are scattered at this time
we can come together
in an act of praise, adoration and thanksgiving.

As the green shoots of a new year peek above the ground,
We confess the promise we usually find is absent;
But absent only from our sight,
Its revelation clear if we search harder.
We confess today our lack of inclination to do so;
We admit to a degree of despondency-
the cold reality of life right now is having an impact
upon thoughts and words and actions,
and we need reassurance.

As we confess our failings, we ask for your mercy;
your grace, your love,
your peace.

Help us to know you are with us,
in days of darkness as well as light-filled days of joy.
Restore us to you, not by any right of our own,
but by your mercy and grace.
Amen.

We sing or read the words of the hymn ‘I owe my Lord a morning song.’

The tune is Dorking, a Common Metre, if this is not familiar to you then any other CM tune will work.

*I owe my Lord a morning song
for God has meant this day.
Through fears of night and hidden light
God moves and wills my way.*

*I owe my Lord a morning song
for Jesus rose at dawn;
he made death die and would not lie
that others might live on.*

*I owe my Lord a morning song:
the Spirit gave me voice,
nor did she force my soul to praise
but honoured me with choice.*

*I owe my Lord a morning song.
How can I help but song
when God is all in all, and I
am one with everything? (2)*

The set readings for today are Genesis, chapter 1 verses 1-5 Mark, chapter 1 verses 4-11, Psalm 29 and Acts chapter 19 verses 1-9.

Our focus is on the reading from Acts.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?”

They answered, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

So Paul asked, “then what baptism did you receive?”

“John’s baptism.” They replied.

Paul said, “John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptised into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all. Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way. So Paul left them. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.

Each of our readings could be headed ‘The whole world changed.’

Genesis, the very beginning and an outpouring of life.

Mark, his bold introduction stating ‘The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ.’

The psalm, images of storms giving way to stillness.

And finally, from Acts the completion of the baptism previously offered which is followed immediately by evidence of the new relationship with God.

And we put those alongside the events of this past week.

A new relationship with Europe ... a big change for our country certainly, for the EU?

The horrific events that unfolded on Capitol Hill ... a dark day for America, for democracy and perhaps a subtle shift of power on the world's stage?

And as we enter Lockdown 3 we find ourselves holding in one hand the hope and promise of a vaccine and in the other the lives already lost to something that 12 months ago had no name.

The whole world has changed.

John and Paul knew what that was like.

They didn't ask for it either.

But neither did they complain or refuse to do what was asked of them.

The Greeks had a word, *Metanoia* which means a change in life, it encourages, invites individuals to look to a new future where the mistakes of the past are left behind.

At the beginning of a new year

the idea of leaving behind what we didn't like,

or didn't enjoy,

or reflected badly,

or seemed like too much effort

is wrapped up in what we call new year resolutions,

but this year there appears to be less enthusiasm than ever to do so.

Have can we be the change the world needs?

The Revd. Richard Coles, arguably the nation's favourite Anglican

Priest was featured in a programme on Friday, entitled Winter Walks.

He was walking around the North Yorkshire moors ending up at

Rievaulx Abbey, as he stood in its ruins he said, "that at the centre of what we do, in order to be who we are, we need silence."

We cannot be the change the world needs if we do not remove ourselves from the clamour and chaos of these days and prayerfully consider what we are called to do.

We will not be the change the world needs if we refuse to live with the silence, even if it makes us uncomfortable.

We could be the change the world needs if we accept that these days have changed everything and that what will emerge in the months ahead may better shape and equip the church for mission, based on hard-lived experience and a clearing of all things it has believed it has to do – and what may emerge, well, that is exciting and exhilarating and a chance of a lifetime.

In order to be who we are, we need silence.

Silence will enable God's voice to be heard.

But silence can also root us and restore souls and minds that are restless.

“All that is unforeseen will appear with the certainty of the sun who every morning shakes a leg in the sky.” The inimitable way Dylan Thomas had of saying something quite profound with an easy touch seems a good place to end these thoughts.

In the certainty of God's promise, we can raise a smile.

In the uncertainty of life today, we can raise a smile.

And so we smile – until we can meet again.

**We sing or read the words of the hymn ‘Nothing distress you.’
The tune is Many Mansions and can be found in Rejoice & Sing
number 548.**

*Nothing distress you,
nothing affright you,
everything passes,
God will abide.
Patient endeavour
accomplishes all things;
who God possesses
needs naught beside.*

*Lift your mind upward,
fair are his mansions,
nothing distress you,
cast fear away.
Follow Christ freely,
his love will light you,
nothing affright you,
in the dark way.*

*See the world’s glory!
Fading its splendour,
everything passes,
all is denied.
Look ever homeward
to the eternal;
faithful in promise
God will abide.*

*Love in due measure
measureless Goodness;
patient endeavour,
run to Love's call!
Faith burning brightly
be your soul's shelter;
who hopes, believing,
accomplishes all.
Hell may assail you,
it cannot move you;
sorrows may grieve you,
faith may be tried.
Though you have nothing,
he is your treasure:
who God possesses
needs naught beside. (3)*

Let us pray.

Nothing distress you.

In the present difficulties and strains,
we take a step back and re-focus;
on what we are doing – and why.

Where we are needed,
where you need us to be.

Lord, help us to see there is always hope;
and that we can be bringers of hope as well as receivers
of its blessing.

Lift your mind upward.

In short, dark days we search for the positive.

If our eyes are cast down, we cannot see the stars,

if our minds are closed, we miss snippets of good news;
if we walk and only look ahead
we lose sight of what and who is around us.
Lord, help us to search for the stars;
So that their brightness can shine through us
And we can lighten these days for those around us.

See the world's glory!
Creation wakes once again,
Green shoots emerge
and with it the promise of new life and the
continuity of rhythm that is a reassurance.
Lord, we have time to look and see and hear
and enjoy that which is often only a backdrop to each day,
encourage us to stop and stare and listen.

Love in due measure.
Small acts of love mean as much as grand gestures,
Often more because they are unexpected.
Love might not 'make the world go round,'
but it makes it a better place –
and love is always needed.
Lord, help us to show the love that is needed.
To live *agape* as well as receive it in turn,
so that hate may cease and love prevail.
Amen.

Things to consider this week.

1. When feeling overwhelmed, find a space free of any news or technological interruptions and use as a prayer the words from John 14, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid”.
 2. Limit the amount of time you spend listening to the news.
 3. Find a recording of ‘Fields of Gold’ (either Eva Cassidy or Sting) and sitting down with your eyes closed, spend a few minutes listening to the song and see in your mind the pictures it paints.
 4. Consider how this gift of time may be used by beginning / taking up something you have thought about doing for some time. (Your Minister is committing 2021 to re-learning all the Welsh she has forgotten. Bob lwc!)
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Blessing

May the grace of God thrill your hearts,
the mercy of God transform your minds,
the peace of God flood your souls,
and the love of God flow through your lives,
to the honour of his name.

Amen. (4)

1. Extract from *The Baptism of Christ* by Malcolm Guite
2. Written by John Bell
3. From ‘Nada te turbe’ St. Theresa of Avila, translated by Colin Thompson
4. Nick Fawcett