

Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit

Sunday Worship Sheet – Sunday 15th November 2020

Our Worship for this week was written by Anne Jackson, one of our Local Preachers and a member at St. John's, Bangor. You may wish to have your Bible to hand.

Call to worship

Thirsty for you, O Christ, let us drink of the Living Water.

Hungry for you, let us taste the Bread of Life.

Lost without you, let us hear the Shepherd's voice. *Anselm of Canterbury.*

Hymn: StF.343. *All my days I will sing this song of gladness.*

All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
for in my helplessness you heard my cry,
and waves of mercy poured down on my
life.

I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails,
of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
of death defeated and life without end.

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
you're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
you're the risen one, heaven's champion,
and you reign, you reign over all!*

I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
yearn to dwell where the glory never fades,
Where countless worshippers will share
one song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
you're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
you're the risen one, heaven's champion,
and you reign, you reign over all!*

Stuart Townsend (b. 1963)

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Introductory prayer

Sovereign God, awaken us to your greatness, your majestic power that fills the universe.

We fall down before you in humble worship.

You are sovereign over all, higher than our highest thoughts,
greater than we can comprehend or imagine.

Teach us to worship and acclaim you as King of kings and Lords of lords.

Lord of all, anchor our lives in your love, your word and your will.

May this time of worship and teaching

nurture our faith and strengthen our commitment. **Amen**

Our New Testament reading is from Paul's oldest letter in the New Testament written to the church he established in Thessalonica. [Act 17:1-19] Paul encourages the Christians, in spite of their difficult situation, to live in the light of the risen Christ.

New Testament Reading

 **Thessalonians 5:1-11.**

Prayer of confession *based on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11*

Sovereign God, we have failed you.

We have become disillusioned and disgruntled by our present difficulties.

We have forgotten that you called us to be children of the light.

Generous God, we have failed you.

We have become lazy and complacent not using our energy, skills or imagination to serve you.

Merciful God, we have failed you.

We have not defended ourselves with the faith, love and hope you provide.

Thank you that our Lord Jesus Christ died for us and we now live in him. **Amen**

In the 80's I worked for an organisation that helped young people prepare to become self-employed. My job was to help them undertake market research and prepare a realistic business plan so that they could apply to the Prince's Trust for grants or loans. You need capital to start a business. Today's gospel reading tells the story of three men who were given capital to invest for their master.

Gospel Reading

 **Matthew 25:14-30**

Reflection.

Jesus told some amazing stories, many of them full of surprises. This is a three-gasp story! First gasp! A rich businessman gave three servants money to invest on his behalf. He gave his most competent servant 1½ million pounds, the next man was given 600,000 pounds and £300,000 to the last man. Then he went away on business and left them to get on with it. An unbelievably large amount of money to trust his servants with. The crowd must have waited in eager anticipation to find out what happened when the owner finally returned. What would the outcome be? Embezzlement, fraud, failure or worse and how would the master react?

Second gasp! The first two men were amazingly successful. They must have worked incredibly hard using all their skills to double their money and to make a huge contribution to their master's riches. The first man made another 1 ½ million pounds. The owner is delighted, he praised him for his diligence and hard work, and promised him promotion with even more responsibility. Similarly the second man made £600,000 pounds to the delight of the owner who praised him for his diligence and promised him promotion.

The crowd anticipates that the pattern of the story will continue. But no! Third gasp! The last man has nothing to offer. He simply returns the original £300,000 and explains he is so terrified of his master that he could not take the risk of losing the money so simply buried it in the ground to keep it safe. The owner is scathing about this servant. He considers him lazy and useless. He gets no praise. He gets nothing; even what he had is taken away. The story ends not with a gasp but a sad sigh. The man is alone, excluded from the plans and celebrations which his colleagues are sharing with their master.

What did Jesus' first listeners make of the story? They must have been amazed by the enormous amount of money the business man was prepared to trust his servants with.

This may come as a surprise to some. The Greek refers to talents. A talent is a weight of silver or gold. Some translations retain the word even though its meaning has changed. Others are more helpful; five thousand gold coins, two thousand, one thousand in the Good News Bible or five bags of gold, two or one in the New International Version. I used Tom Wright's figure of a talent as 15 times a labourer's annual salary. What matters is not the exact amount money but that it was ridiculously large, enough to make the Dragon's Den team wince.

30 years ago the Prince's Trust was prepared to give young people a grant of up to a £1,000 and a £5,000 loan depending on their application and business plan. In those days that was enough to buy tools or a van or even rent premises to enable them to start their business. So what was Jesus' story teaching the people of his day and what, if anything, does it teach us today. The crowd must have been stunned by the wealth and character of the businessman. Not only did he have enormous wealth but he was prepared to entrust large sums to his servants. Admittedly they weren't all treated equally. One man received 1½ million - far more than either of the others. But they all received substantial sums which they were trusted to invest wisely apparently without weekly reviews or meetings. He took risks with both his money and his servants in the expectation his money would not be wasted. Even more amazing was the relationship the master offered the two successful servants. They received praise, were included as fellow workers but even more amazingly they were invited to come and share their master's happiness.

If the crowd thought the rich businessman represented God, they would have had to rethink their picture of God. They had been taught about their creator, caring, covenant God who wanted to bless them provided they gave him their wholehearted allegiance. Unfortunately, this had come to mean that to gain God's approval they must meticulously keep all the laws and traditions. A daunting task for many and impossible for some.

The picture of God in this story is very different in which they are being invited into a new kind of relationship.

The third man was treated very differently. In spite of doing nothing dishonest he was condemned as being useless and stupid and excluded from the enterprise and the relationship.

A business is no easy option. It demands skill, hard work, attention to detail and a certain amount of luck. This servant refused to attempt to use the resources he had been given. He said he was paralysed by fear of failure. Fear was the plight of Jesus' listeners. They feared however much they tried it might not be enough to please God. Now they were being encouraged to consider the possibility of a loving, joyful relationship as God's fellow workers in which they receive, use and add to God's bounty and share his joy.

When we dramatize this story with the children in school the final scene shows the master and his two servants, carrying 14 bags of gold, dancing off the stage, arm in arm, in one direction while the other servant walks sadly off in the other direction.

This was the choice Jesus was presenting to the crowd. The picture of God he had been presenting in stories throughout his ministry is of a loving bountiful God whose kingdom they could be part of, a God they could have a relationship with. This was revolutionary idea to Jesus' hearers. They would need time to take it in.

This story also encourages us to rethink our picture of God. To see ourselves as fellow workers with God in his kingdom. God who will provide abundant resources to enable us to contribute and to share his joy in the growth of his kingdom and celebrate its growth with him and his fellow workers.

☉☉Time for thought☉☉

Hymn: StF.391. *O breath of life come sweeping through us.*

O Breath of life, come sweeping through us, revive your church with life and power; O Breath of Life, come, cleanse, renew us, and fit your church to meet this hour.	O Breath of love, come breathe within us, renewing thought and will and heart; come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us, revive your church in every part.
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O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore, for this we plead.

Elizabeth Ann (Bessie Porter) Head
(1850-1936)

*Reproduced from Singing the Faith
Electronic Words Edition, number 391*

Intercessory Prayers

Lord, we seem to be surrounded by bad news and confusion at the moment. Help us to see the world as you see it. Help us to recognise the needs of those around us and show us how we can be your hands and feet at this difficult time.

We pray for our friends and family..... Help us to support, console and counsel one another with patience, wisdom and discernment.

We pray for those we know who are struggling at the moment, especially those who are unwell, lonely or unhappy..... May their burden be lifted. May they receive and accept the help they need.

At this time of adversity we pray for those in the caring professions. We give thanks for their skills and hard work. May they be strengthened and encouraged by your grace and our appreciation. **Amen**

Hymn: StF.424. *God forgave my sin in Jesus' name.*

God forgave my sin in Jesus' name, I've been born again in Jesus' name; And in Jesus' name I come to you To share His love as He told me to.	All power is given in Jesus' name, In earth and heaven in Jesus' name; And in Jesus' name I come to you To share His power as He told me to.
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*He said: 'Freely, freely, you have received,
Freely, freely give;
Go in My name, and because you believe
Others will know that I live.'*

He said: 'Freely, freely, ...

Carol Owens (b. 1931)
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Sending out prayer

May the Father, who created us; the Lord Jesus, whose love holds us safe; and the Holy Spirit, who works creatively in and through us; be with us this and every week. **Amen.**