

Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit

Sunday Worship Sheet 29th January 2023

Our worship for this week was written by Dr Jean Ware You may wish to have your Bible to hand. Please note the hymns are now at the back of the sheet for ease of printing. CCL licence 556292

Call to worship:

Creator of the Universe, as we come to worship, we cannot help being aware of our own insignificance. We feel too small and few to make a difference. Help us to feel your presence with us wherever we are. Strengthen us and remind us that you are not just the maker of all things, but also our loving parent. Every one of your children matter to you. We worship and praise you now.

Hymn 82 O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder

Prayer of Praise and Confession



Creator God, as we look around us we can't help marvelling at the beauty and intricacy of creation; every snowflake different, and each one beautiful. Pebbles, mosses, bark, and fungi full of colour and variety. Every person made in your image, every one different and each one revealing to us a little more of what you are like. We praise you for the beauty and variety of creation. God of surprises, we praise you for

the unexpectedness of things, a flower growing on a rubbish heap, bacteria that have learned to eat our plastic waste, and most of all for Jesus, who turned our ideas of who matters upside down.

We are sorry that we have been so reluctant to see things your way, we have valued wealth and status, and have failed to care for creation. Help us to change our ways, and treat all that you have made with respect. Amen

Assurance of Forgiveness

Parent God, we know that you long for us to change our ways and you are delighted when we are sorry for the way we have lived, and always willing to forgive us and help us to change our ways. **Amen.**

Bible Readings: Matthew 5 vv 1-12, 1Corinthians 1 vv18-31

Hymn 359 Lord Christ we praise your sacrifice (Tune Abingdon, the same tune as Great God, your love has called us here) A version sung by Victoria Methodist Church can be found here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utifpTRzr1g>

Reflection

The passage from 1 Corinthians which is one of today's lectionary readings has been one of my favourite pieces of scripture for years; but my understanding of it has changed over time. I used to particularly love it because it carried a clear assurance that however daft we look to other people, however much we are ridiculed for our faith in Jesus, yet we're on the

winning side. Of course that's true, but not, I think, with the emphasis I used to read it with. This is no triumphalist passage, but a sharp reminder of our need for humility. It isn't because of anything special about us that God has chosen us. Just like that motley crew who were the first disciples, God's choice of us is pretty incomprehensible.

But, perhaps more importantly, it's a reminder of how God chooses to work. Corinth was an important cosmopolitan city, the seat of the regional government. It became a byword for vice, but it was not far from Athens, and probably had many orators visiting it and displaying their skills in the marketplace. There were both Greeks and Romans living in Corinth and there was also a synagogue there. The Greeks valued skill at oratory and philosophical debate highly; and perhaps expected Paul to convince people of the truth of the gospel through his skill with words. The Jews expected the Messiah to be a powerful figure to free them from rule by Rome, just as God had led them out of Egypt at the Exodus, and to make their nation powerful in worldly terms. But Paul will have none of it. Jesus is himself the Word, God himself speaking to us in a human life, lived alongside, lived *with us*. Jesus' power is shown as he hangs on the cross, while the passers-by call out "if you really are the Son of God come down from the cross and save yourself". From a human perspective Jesus was crucified because powerful people could see that he was turning their values upside down. But although, perhaps, we can't fully grasp it, God's power is shown in Jesus hanging on the cross, not in God sending legions of angels to rescue him. This is still how God chooses to work and that is just as counter-cultural in our society now, as it was to the Greeks and Jews of Corinth 2000 years ago. We need constantly to be aware of how easy it is to adopt the values of the society in which we live. There is much focus today on celebrity culture, and individual celebrities, and it's easy for the church to think it has to buy into this to be successful in the modern world. But earlier in this letter Paul has already made it clear to the Corinthians that they have no business forming factions round different Christian leaders (1 Corinthians 1 vv10-13).

On thought for the day last week, the Dean of Trinity College, Cambridge, spoke of how the great and powerful, from Greek gods to film stars living in gated estates, tend to isolate themselves on real or metaphorical mountain tops, keeping aloof from the ordinary, messy world. As humans we tend to see money, success and glory as enabling us to rise above all the humdrum ordinariness and messiness of life. What a contrast with Jesus, who turned down Peter's offer to build shelters for him, Elijah and Moses at the transfiguration and hurried down the mountain to heal a boy of his epilepsy. In Jesus we see the immensity of God's involvement with his creation. Following Jesus means being prepared to be where people are in need and suffering and doing what we can to help.

The beatitudes are a reminder of what it means to adopt this counter-cultural lifestyle – you may find this modern version of them (Taken from Roots for Churches January 29th-February 4th 2023) helpful.

“Are you aware of your spiritual needs? Seek out the kingdom of heaven.

Do you mourn, or have regrets? Ask God to comfort you.

Are you meek before God and others? Be strong in your reliance on God.

Do you long for righteousness in the world? Be filled with a passion for justice.

Are you merciful to others? Accept God's love and mercy for yourself.

Do you strive to be pure in heart? Look for God in the world.

Are you a peacemaker? Share love with all God's children.

Are you persecuted for your faith? Hold fast to the kingdom of heaven.”

This version of the beatitudes makes it clear that Jesus is not simply offering a list of the sort of people of whom God approves, rather they are both a call to action and a great source of reassurance. We may think of people we have wronged in the past, either as individuals, or as churches, or as nations with whom we believe it is too late to make amends, but Jesus calls us to accept forgiveness and act differently in future. For example, as I write this, I read that the Church of England Bishops are to apologise for the way that gay and trans people have been treated by the church in the past. As we look at what’s happening in Ukraine, Afghanistan Iran or in the many countries where members of minority faiths including Christians are persecuted, it’s all too easy to conclude that there’s nothing we can do except long for righteousness. But longing for righteousness means acting justly in our own lives, and campaigning for justice.

To paraphrase Paul: “Think what sort of people we are who God has called; we’re not exactly celebrities, not great influencers, any of us. But in Jesus we are being made righteous, holy and free- now that’s really something worth celebrating”

You may like to pause for a few moments at this point

Prayers for others, the world and ourselves

Amazing God, your ways are not our ways. You turn the values of the world upside down. Your wisdom looks like folly to us, your power like weakness.

We pray for those who hold positions of power in international affairs, remembering the many places where people are fighting to try and gain power. We remember especially Afghanistan, the leaders of the United Nations’ mission there: give them the wisdom they need to work out what to do. And we pray for the leaders of the Taliban, that they may learn the strength that comes from being merciful.

We pray for those who hold positions of power in our country, for employers, union leaders, members of the government and of local councils, help them to use it for the good of all your children.

Teach us and all people the responsibility which comes with power; and help us wherever we have influence over the lives of others to use it justly and with mercy.

We pray for all who care for others, especially those exhausted by their task, and finding it harder and harder to cope. Give them strength for their task, and give us the wisdom to know how best to support them. We pray, too, for all those who are dependent on others for their care. God, who cares for all your children as a loving parent, and who, in Jesus, was cared for as a child and as a dear friend, help us to give and receive care with love and gratitude.

We pray for the church; help us to be recognisable as your people by the lives we lead. We remember all those who have served you by the way they lived, and pray that we too may serve you here, and come with them to share in your kingdom of justice joy and love. **Amen**

The Lord’s prayer

Hymn 545 Be thou my vision

Closing prayer: Lord, you bless us in so many ways. You love us just as we are and you want us to grow closer to you. Show us how we can bless others by putting them and you before ourselves. May we walk humbly with you every day. **Amen.**

Hymn 82

1 O Lord, my God, when I in awesome wonder
consider all the works thy hand hath made,
I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder,
thy power throughout the universe
displayed :

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to
thee :*

how great thou art, how great thou art !

*Then sings my soul, my Saviour God, to
thee :*

how great thou art, how great thou art !

2 When through the woods and forest glades I
wander

and hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees ;
when I look down from lofty mountain
grandeur,

and hear the brook, and feel the gentle
breeze :

3 And when I think that God, his Son not
sparing,
sent him to die, I scarce can take it in
that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
he bled and died to take away my sin :

4 When Christ shall come with shout of
acclamation
and take me home — what joy shall fill my
heart ;
then shall I bow in humble adoration,
and there proclaim : my God, how great
thou art :

Stuart K. Hine (1899–1989)

vv. 1, 2, 4 based on *O store Gud* 1885 by

Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859–1940)

Hymn 359

- 1 Lord Christ, we praise your sacrifice,
your life in love so freely given.
For those who took your life away
you prayed : that they might be forgiven ;
and there, in helplessness arrayed,
God's power was perfectly displayed.
- 2 Once helpless in your mother's arms,
dependent on her mercy then ;
at last, by choice, in other hands,
you were as helpless once again ;
and, at their mercy, crucified,
you claimed your victory and died.

3 Though helpless and rejected then,
you're now as risen Lord acclaimed ;
for ever by your sacrifice
is God's eternal love proclaimed :
the love which, dying, brings to birth
new life and hope for all on earth.

4 So, living Lord, prepare us now
your willing helplessness to share ;
to give ourselves in sacrifice
to overcome the world's despair ;
in love to give ourselves away
and claim your victory today.

Alan Gaunt (*b.* 1935)

Hymn 545

1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou
art ;
be thou my best thought in the day and the
night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my
light.

2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord ;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me
be ;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the
fight ;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true
might ;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong
tower :
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power
of my power.

4 Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise :
be thou mine inheritance now and always ;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart :
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou
art.

5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright
Sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won ;
Great Heart of my own heart, whatever
befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, 8th century