

Dorset South and West Circuit Service for Sunday 22nd August 2021

by Revd Steph Jenner

Call to Worship: Psalm 34 v 22

The LORD redeems the life of his servants;
none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.

Prayer of Confession

Loving God, when we condemn others because we perceive them to be lacking some way,
help us to repent, seek forgiveness, and move forward in love.

When we condemn ourselves because we perceive ourselves to be lacking in some way,
help us to repent, seek forgiveness, and move forward in love.

Help us replace condemnation with compassion for all God's people, including ourselves.
Give us strength and courage to repent and seek forgiveness,
in the name of God who first loved us and condemns nobody. Amen.

Hymn H&P 45

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| 1. The great love of God
Is revealed in the Son,
Who came to this earth
To redeem everyone. | 3. It binds the whole world,
Every barrier it breaks,
The hills it lays low,
And the mountain it shakes. |
| 2. That love, like a stream
Flowing clear to the sea,
Makes clean every heart
That from sin would be free. | 4. It's yours, it is ours,
O how lavishly given!
The pearl of great price,
And the treasure of heaven.
Daniel T Niles |

Prayer of Praise

As we reflect on who we are and have been, where we are and have been, what we do and have done, what we say and have said, and yet God seeks us in love, we can do nothing but praise and worship our God. Our God who loves unconditionally; our God who continues to seek us out to tell us of this love; our God who helps us to seek to be better, to be our best, for the betterment of humanity, creation and the world. We begin this day to offer our praise anew, and take heart in an awesome, loving, encouraging, compassionate God, Saviour and Spirit. Amen.

Lord's Prayer – please use whichever version you prefer.

Readings: Joshua 24: 1, 14 – 18

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God.

'Now therefore revere the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. Now if you are unwilling to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the river or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD.' Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for it is the LORD our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; and the LORD drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the LORD, for he is our God.'

Ephesians 6: 10 – 20

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints. Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

John 6: 56 – 69

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live for ever.' He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.' Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

Hymn StF 164/H&P 482

1. Yours words to me are life and health;
they fortify my soul,
enable, guide, and teach my heart
to reach its perfect goal.
2. Your words to me are light and truth;
from day to day they show
their wisdom, passing earthly lore,
as in their truth I grow.
3. Your words to me are full of joy,
of beauty, peace, and grace;
from them I learn your blessed will,
through them I see your face.
4. Your words are perfected in One,
yourself, the living Word;
within my heart your image print
in clearest lines, O Lord.

George Currie Martin

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

God of all blessings, source of all life, giver of all grace:

We thank you for the gift of life: for the breath that sustains life, for the food of this earth that nurtures life, for the love of family and friends without which there would be no life.

We thank you for the mystery of creation: for the beauty that the eye can see, for the joy that the ear may hear, for the unknown that we cannot behold filling the universe with wonder, for the expanse of space that draws us beyond the definitions of our selves.

We thank you for setting us in communities: for families who nurture our becoming, for friends who love us by choice, for companions at work, who share our burdens and daily tasks, for strangers who welcome us into their midst, for people from other lands who call us to grow in understanding, for children who lighten our moments with delight, who offer us hope for the future.

We thank you for this day: for life and one more day to love, for opportunity and one more day to work for justice and peace, for neighbours and one more person to love and by whom be loved, for your grace and one more experience of your presence, for your promise:

to be with us, to be our God, and to give salvation.

For these, and all blessings, we give you thanks, eternal, loving God, through Jesus Christ we pray.
Amen. (Vienna Cobb Anderson)

And we turn our minds and prayers to our wider world:

We think of, and pray for those of us who feel unloved, uncared for, ignored, persecuted because of:

mental and physical health problems;

financial and employment situations;

arguments and upsets;

ethnicity and skin colour;

gender and sexuality;

education and literacy;

beliefs and religion;

and all the other human traits that we condemn each other unjustly for.

Help us, we pray, to speak out boldly when others are put down and left out;

help us, we pray, to challenge ourselves when our own thoughts, words, and actions hurt and damage others;

help us, we pray, to be Christlike in our dealings with others, through God, Saviour and Spirit who love us and advocate for us. Amen.

Thoughts

It's been a peculiar few months and years and I'm not talking about coronavirus, although that has been part of it. What I mean is that we have had different to normal time and space to think, to reflect, to stop and to do new. We may have had our way of life challenged; our thoughts and actions may have been self-examined and found wanting; our words and habits called out.

In this time we have re-examined what is important for us as individuals, as community, as a world.

The balance is shifting away from the selfish towards working together, looking after each other, taking care of our mental and physical well being, whilst being kind and considerate to others, especially if their experience is different from our own and we need to expand our education.

As Christians, this should be second nature (Joshua 24: 15 "but as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."), but as ever we need reminding, repentance and restarting. However, we know that it's not easy to stand up and be counted for every cause, but we are coming to a convergence where everything is interconnected and we must declare boldly (Ephesians 6: 20 "Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.") that we are stewards of creation and every human is our neighbour; that the poor and the hungry are blessed by justice and our sharing and that every person is made in God's image – we forget these at the peril of our faith.

But we need help, as we are merely fallible human. So God gives us armour – protection that is also truth, righteousness, faith, salvation and proclamation of peace. And we work together, checking on each other, and ourselves, in love, remembering that God is in command and love is the overriding action, thought, and feeling, whether for our siblings in Christ, our neighbours or our enemies.

There will be new ideas and ways that we may find odd, difficult, or even be offended by (John 6: 60 – 64a “. When many of his disciples heard it, they said, ‘This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?’ But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, ‘Does this offend you? Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.’”). So, it may be that some people turn their backs because they find Jesus’ teaching too difficult, or it’s not what they thought, it has changed. We must continue to love them, but also continue the work of the gospel to find the lost, the outcast, the hurt, the disillusioned and show them that God loves them, as they are, as God loves us, as we are.

May God bless us in our endeavours to bring justice, peace, hope and love.

Hymn StF 615

1. Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage or to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go.
*As God loves us, so let us love each other:
with no demands,
just open hands and space to grow.*
2. Let love be real, not grasping or confining
that strange embrace that holds
yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength
when all my words are weakness;
give me your love in spite of all you know.
3. Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other’s incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope
through dreams and disappointments;
give me your trust when all my failings show.
Michael Forster

Blessing

May love and laughter light your days and warm your heart and home.

May good and faithful friends be yours, wherever you may roam.

May peace and plenty bless your world with joy that long endures.

May all life's passing seasons bring the best to you and yours!