

Dorset South & West Written Service for Feb 28th 2021, prepared by Revd Brenda Stephenson

Call to worship Seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.
For my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.
Isaiah 55:6,8,9.

Hymn We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
not in a royal house or hall,
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary:
hated by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.

Edward Joseph Burns

Prayer We bring our worship to the God who has revealed himself
in Jesus, in his death and resurrection.
We offer it with these words adapted by Satish Kumar from the Upanishads.
Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth.
Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace.
Let peace fill our heart, our world, our universe.

And we offer it in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray:
Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial, and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen.

Readings Romans 4:16-24
16 (Therefore God's plan) depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham.....17 —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20 No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 being fully convinced that God

was able to do what he had promised. 22 Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." 23 Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Mark 8:31-38

31 Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32 He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

34 He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35 For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36 For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? 37 Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? 38 Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

God's template for Life

I was watching a concert of classical music being streamed the other day.

The piece was being played by four people on different instruments.

Professional musicians will tell you how difficult it can be to play with social distancing. So I can understand that and wonder how much that was a factor in one passage of music where two of the players were obviously meant to be in sync and weren't.

It got me thinking about playing music in a small group. It's no good each person playing their music as they think it ought to go, at the speed they are comfortable with and the volume that is easiest on their instrument. That would be a recipe for chaos – it certainly would not be lovely music. To play in a group is to agree certain ground rules, to listen to one another intently as you play, and to be willing to give up your way of playing those notes so that you do actually play together and make music. What's more all of you play in the service of the music, not yourselves, or your skills, or even the audience.

This must apply to all kinds of activities you might do in a kind of team environment. You can probably think of some. You have probably taken part in some at one time or another.....

Like reading verses of a psalm as part of a congregation..... Or.....

Let's spend a little time with those followers of Jesus near Caesarea Philippi. Peter has just confessed that Jesus is the Messiah. Then Jesus tells them for the first time (of three) that he must suffer and die - before resurrection. Peter leaps in again as though to say "I won't let that happen to you. That mustn't happen to you." And Jesus rebukes him for thinking human thoughts rather than God thoughts. So Jesus goes on to teach them. He wants them to realise God thoughts about life and death. He says that you don't find life by clinging on to what you have. You find it by letting self go. And then waiting for God to give you a deeper, wide-awake, broadening-out life that even death cannot put an end to. You find life by losing it.

In the early days of the Christian Church this could literally be true. Today, we interpret this in different ways. It is about putting your own wishes, plans, preferences aside, both for others and in order to live according to the good news God has shown you in Jesus. Hence the Methodist Covenant service confession of faith "I am no longer my own, but yours....." I'm talking about what can be a radical move. Perhaps taking part in group or team events is a help in developing our ability to do this. It happens in making music. It happens in families. And in the family of the church. It also needs to be said that it must go hand in hand with loving yourself, so you can love others, and not pretending to be someone you are not.

How does Abraham fit into this picture?

God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations with as many descendants as there were stars in the sky. The difficulty was that both Abraham and Sarah

were as good as dead (in terms of being able to father children). Could they trust that God would be able to do what he promised? Could life come forth from this deadness? Abraham was able to keep faith in God and his relationship with him prospered. It was faith and trust that mattered most. And out of what seemed dead, new life did come. Isaac was born. Paul is also clear that there is a message here for us as well. *Our* trust in God is what matters. For it is trust in the One who raised Jesus from death to new life. The God Jesus called father is one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Do you believe that God can create out of nothing? That he can bring new life out of deadness? Have you experienced this in your own life or the life of someone close to you? If so, give thanks and take a little time to ponder this as God's template for life. It is there at the very centre of our faith – from crucifixion to resurrection. It is there in creation and its evolution – there must be destruction for the new to emerge. And for us to find new ways of living and declaring our faith some old ways must go. The letting go is nearly always painful unless you can see and trust a vision of something better. When you discover a promise for the future you want to trust, keep hold of it and look for it to be fulfilled. Find ways of acting as though it was already here. That way you are looking in the right direction to see its fulfilment. And resurrection *is* already here, in small or greater ways, for us, in our lives.

How much we have needed to know this during the Covid pandemic.
How much we shall continue to need it as we try to change the course of climate change.
As we seek to bring justice and greater equality to our land.
As we each struggle with personal issues in our own lives.
Look to "Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God." Hebrews 12:2. Amen

Hymn God it was who said to Abraham,
 "Pack your bags and travel on".
 God it was who said to Sarah,
 "Smile and soon you'll bear a son."
 Travelling folk and aged mothers
 wandering when they thought they'd done -
 this is how we find God's people,
 leaving all because of One.

 God it was who said to Joseph,
 "Down your tools and take your wife."
 God it was who said to Mary,
 "In your womb I'll start my life."
 Carpenter and country maiden
 leaving town and trade and skills -
 this is how we find God's people,
 moved by what their Master wills.

 God it was who said, "Zacchaeus
 I would like to eat with you."
 Christ it was who said to Martha,
 "Listening's what you need to do."
 Civil servants and housekeepers
 changing places at a cost -
 this is how Christ summons people,
 calling both the loved and lost.

 In this crowd which spans the ages,
 with these saints whom we revere,
 God wants us to share their purpose

starting now and starting here.
So we celebrate our calling,
so we raise both heart and voice,
as we pray that through our living
more may find they are God's choice.

John Bell & Graham Maule

Prayers for others and ourselves

First of all let us be still and allow whatever is going round our minds to settle.
Keep still for however long you need

Good Lord, thank you for all you teach us through Jesus.

We look to him to show us what it means to lay down life and wait to receive it renewed from you.

Thank you for others who have inspired such faith in us.

May remembering give us strength and confidence to offer our prayers in faith.

We pray for those on our minds and in our hearts today.

Whatever their needs we ask that they may know the healing touch of your love.

We pray for our nation and those who take responsibility for government at all levels. Give them the wisdom they need and the courage to do what they believe is right for all.

We pray for the world as it tackles Covid-19. We are thankful for the efficient rollout of the vaccine in this country. We pray there may be generosity to share vaccine and knowledge wherever possible, so that people all over the earth may be protected.

We pray for all the preparations for the Glasgow conference on the environment later this year, for organisers, representatives and those who will wield the most influence. May they find the inspiration they need and the trust in each other to make significant progress.

And we pray for ourselves; for our greatest needs, and for ways to live our lives true to the prayers we offer. We ask it through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Hymn

Have faith in God, my heart,
trust and be unafraid;
God will fulfil in every particularly
each promise he has made.

Have faith in God, my mind,
for when your light burns low;
God's mercy holds a wiser plan
than you can fully know.

Have faith in God, my soul;
his cross forever stands;
and neither life nor death can pluck
his children from his hands.

Lord Jesus, make me whole;
grant me no resting place,
until I rest, heart, mind, and soul,
the captive of your grace.

Bryn Rees

Blessing May God's richest blessing be with you and go with you, now and always. Amen.