

Dorset South and West Circuit Written Service

Sunday 25th October – Rev Helen Harrell

Bible Sunday

CALL TO WORSHIP

With all our hearts we seek you.
Blessed are you, God
And blessed are those who learn your ways.

STF 254: SEEK YE FIRST

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you; Allelu-, alleluia,	Ask, and it shall be given unto you; seek and ye shall find; knock and the door shall be opened unto you; Allelu-, alleluia.
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*Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia,
Allelu-, alleluia*

We shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord,
Allelu-, alleluia

PRAYER OF APPROACH

Lord God, we praise you for your world, speaking to us of you, our Creator.
Help us to hear your word.
Lord God, we praise you for your word, speaking to us of your promise and your plan.
Help us to hear your word.
Lord God, we praise you for Jesus, speaking to us of your love and salvation.
Help us to hear your word. Amen

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

You have called us to be your people, to follow where you lead,
be obedient to your word and bring your Good News wherever we might go.
Forgive the impatience and lack of faith which causes us to stumble,
preferring our way to yours, relying on human wisdom rather than the truth which comes from you. Draw us
back into your arms, as prodigals to our Father and grant us patience, perseverance, and a child-like faith in
our journeying with you.

STF 156: FROM THE BREAKING OF THE DAWN

From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun, I will stand on every promise of your word. Words of power strong to save, that will never pass away; I will stand on every promise of your word. For your covenant is sure, and on this I am secure: I can stand on every promise of your word.	When I stumble and I sin, condemnation pressing in, I will stand on every promise of your word. You are faithful to forgive, that in freedom I might live; So I stand on every promise of your word. Guilt to innocence restored; you remember sins no more. So I'll stand on every promise of your word.
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When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
and I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,

Hope that lifts me from despair;
love that casts out every fear
As I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,

you will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
every work begun in me,
so I'll stand on every promise of your word. We will stand on every promise of your word.

for the comforter has come,
And I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
grace for all who will believe.

COMMENT

Understanding that we are all made in God's image and that the Bible is central to our lives as Christian is important for our self-recognition. When we can grasp this, then we can better understand the message of God's love for us written in Scripture.

In our first reading from the Bible today, we see how the people of Israel recognize that scripture is central to their lifeline and identity - In fact, it is inseparable from their story.

OLD TESTAMENT READING: NEHEMIAH 8:1-11

GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 22:34-46

SERMON

Inlaid in the floor of the Central Lobby in the Houses of Parliament in Westminster are the words (in Latin) 'Unless the Lord builds the house the builders labour in vain' (Psalm 127.1). They are a reminder that Scripture has informed, shaped and provided the foundations for our country. God's word is a strong foundation not just for a nation, but particularly for God's people as we know it and learn to live by it.

Nehemiah Chapter 8 is one of the rare and exciting public readings of the Scriptures found in the Bible and it shows us how inseparable the Bible was from the lifeline of the people. At the time it was written, Jerusalem's walls had just been rebuilt and the gates made secure. The people had experienced the first wind of change, but incredibly they knew there was still something missing. They asked for the Scriptures to be read – they weren't forced to listen! The people had rebuilt the city with God's help, but recognised that they still needed to be built up spiritually.

We are fortunate to live in a nation that has relative wealth and security. But we still need spiritual values to guide all aspects of our lives. When we look at the news on TV about riots on the streets of our cities or hear about young people stabbing other young people with knives, it is clear that some people have lost their way. A key goal for our ministry and prayer is to lead people into a hunger for God which goes beyond their material needs or relative comfort.

No-one should read the Bible, without finding themselves in it. The Bible speaks to all people, whatever their status, and in all types of situations. The Bible speaks across gender – to men and women, to everyone old enough to understand – to children too! Our task is to find ways in which the Bible continues to speak to our different needs and situations. Scripture can be explored through the use of puppets, technology, creative writing, art, Godly Play and drama. At Synod we were introduced to the Singing Bible – if you have internet access, you might want to google it and explore it!

Elevating the Scriptures raises people up in worship.
Elevating the Scriptures leads people to bow in humility.

Biblical transformation brings new values which lead to a better quality of personal and community life. God's truth speaks equally in times of crisis and times of relative security. We are at our best not when we build material walls of comfort or security, but when God has our full attention. We need to really listen to the message of the Bible, because the Bible presents itself as a book not of information, but of transformation.

In Nehemiah Chapter 8, the people stood up to hear the scripture being read, raised their arms in worship, then bowed down in an act of reverence. When we stop, and give God our full attention and acknowledge him as Lord, when we are really listening, his word can bring radical change to our lives.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Gracious God, we pray for your Church throughout the world. May your Word continue to be proclaimed faithfully, received with humble hearts and lived out in love. Bless all who preach, teach and interpret the Scriptures. Give wisdom to ministers and local preachers, that they may faithfully share the truth of the Gospel and lead your people in the way of Christ. May our churches be places where the Bible is treasured, understood and put into practice.

God of all nations, we pray for Bible translators, linguists, publishers, printers, missionaries and all who work to make your word available to people everywhere. Strengthen those who labour to translate the Scriptures into different languages and dialects, so that all people may hear the message in the language of their hearts. We remember those who have little or no access to the Bible and those who face opposition or danger because of their faith. Provide resources, protection and encouragement, that your Word may reach every nation, community and generation.

We commit our children and young people into your loving hands. Help them to discover the beauty and wisdom of the Bible from an early age. Bless parents, guardians, Junior Church leaders, youth leaders and all who nurture young people in the Christian faith. In a world filled with competing voices and influences, help our young people to discern what is true, to choose what is right and to grow in the knowledge and love of Jesus.

God of peace, your Word teaches us to love our neighbours, care for the vulnerable, seek justice and live in peace. We pray for nations torn apart by war, violence, hatred and division. Comfort those who have lost loved ones, shelter those who have been displaced and strengthen all who work for peace and reconciliation.

Merciful God, we remember those who are sick in body or mind, those who are lonely, those who are grieving and those who are burdened by anxiety or despair. May the promise of your Word bring them comfort, hope and renewed strength. We pray especially for those who find it difficult to pray or to trust in your goodness during times of suffering. Surround them with your presence and grant them the support of caring families, friends and communities. May your Word remind them that nothing can separate us from your love in Jesus Christ.

Lord God, as we celebrate Bible Sunday, we ask you to renew our commitment to reading, studying, meditating on and obeying your Word. Give us understanding when we are confused, courage when we are afraid, patience when we are tested and faith when the way ahead is uncertain. May the Scriptures shape our thoughts, guide our decisions and transform our relationships.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

STF 470: LORD FOR THE YEARS

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,

teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

BLESSING

May God our Creator guide you on your way,
May Jesus our Saviour accompany you with love,
May the Spirit encourage you to go out and live the good news. **Amen**