

Sunday 15th November 2020

Worship for 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online) Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome to worship with the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit – we continue to worship God from our homes, as we are once again joined by a wide selection of people from across the circuit in leading our worship. My name is Michael, and I will be joined by our Superintendent minister, Rev Dr Iain Ballard to lead our prayers. Rev Jeongsook Kim and Mr Trevor Pethick will bring us our Bible readings and Rev Barbara Greenwood will bring us our reflection. We have some beautiful songs as part of our worship today which have been chosen by Margaret Weir and special thanks goes to Catherine Evans-Routley who has put the service together in Kate's absence as she enjoys a well earned break.

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

So let's be still for a moment as we prepare to come into God's presence

You are here, moving in our midst - We worship You - We worship You

You are here, working in this place - We worship You

You are here, moving in our midst - We worship You

You are:

Way maker, miracle worker, promise keeper

Light in the darkness

Oh God, that is who You are

We worship you

HYMN StF 20 – Be still for the presence of the Lord

**1. Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found –
we stand on holy ground.
Be still,
for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.**

**2. Be still,
for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight –
our radiant King of light!
Be still,**

**for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.**

**3. Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him –
in faith receive from him.
Be still,
for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.**

David J Evans (*b.* 1957)

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Prayer of approach

Father, accept us here, accept us as we gather, not in one building, but in one heart – with a heart for you – a heart to love you and to serve you.

Accept us in our brokenness, in our isolation and despair, accept us in whatever way we come to you – at whatever time we come to you – accept us as your children – in our uncertainty and fear – accept us.

Prayer of adoration

We love you, because you first loved us, before we even took our first breath, you loved us, you imagined us into being, you gave us so much.

Through our darkness and fear we come to you with shouts of adoration, of joy in knowing that whatever may come and whatever may lay before us, you are with us, you are our God and no matter what we know that the best is yet to come.

Prayer of Confession

So receive your children, your children who love you and want serve you, you give us so many good gifts, so much treasure, we see the beauty of your creation all around us, we are aware of our gifts and talents that come from you. But Lord we confess that sometimes in our brokenness, often unintentionally, we fail to be good stewards of those gifts, we fail to use the skills you give us for your kingdoms sake, we fail to play our part in sustaining your world, we fail to speak up for justice and equality

For these things we are truly sorry and ask your help in changing our ways. But loving Father you did not give us a spirit of shame and self-hate. You came in the form of Jesus so that we may have life in all its fullness. So, we ask for your forgiveness knowing that in you forgiveness is freely given – and we hear your small voice telling us – My Child – your sins are forgiven.

HYMN StF 545 – Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart

- 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, *translated by* Mary Elizabeth Byrne (1880-1931) versified by ELEANOR Henrietta Hull (1860-1935) (*alt*)

Musice Irish Tadtional melody *harmonised by* Erik Routley (1917-1982) *adapted by* Martin V. Clarke (*b1982*)
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THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm Psalm 90:1-17 (NIV)

A prayer of Moses the man of God.

- ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling-place
throughout all generations.
- ² Before the mountains were born
or you brought forth the whole world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- ³ You turn people back to dust,
saying, 'Return to dust, you mortals.'
- ⁴ A thousand years in your sight
are like a day that has just gone by,
or like a watch in the night.
- ⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death –
they are like the new grass of the morning:

- ⁶ In the morning it springs up new,
but by evening it is dry and withered.
- ⁷ We are consumed by your anger
and terrified by your indignation.
- ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- ⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath;
we finish our years with a moan.
- ¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years,
or eighty, if our strength endures;
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
- ¹¹ If only we knew the power of your anger!
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.
- ¹² Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- ¹³ Relent, LORD! How long will it be?
Have compassion on your servants.
- ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
- ¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
for as many years as we have seen trouble.
- ¹⁶ May your deeds be shown to your servants,
your splendour to their children.
- ¹⁷ May the favour^[a] of the Lord our God rest on us;
establish the work of our hands for us –
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Epistle 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 (NRSVA)

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When they say, 'There is peace and security', then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labour pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness. So then, let us not fall asleep as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober; for those who sleep sleep at night, and those who are drunk get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him. Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing.

Gospel Matthew 25:14-30 (NRSVA)

The Parable of the Talents

'For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and

made five more talents. In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, "Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, "Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents." His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." Then the one who had received the one talent also came forward, saying, "Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours." But his master replied, "You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

HYMN StF 706 – Longing for light we wait in darkness

1. Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Long for truth, we turn to you.

**Make us your own, your holy people,
light for the world to see.**

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

2. Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has power to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your Church gathered today.

3. Longing for food, many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

**Make us your bread, broken for others,
shared until all are fed.**

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness.

Christ, be our light!
Shine in your Church gathered today.

**4. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.
Longing for warmth, many are cold.
Make us your building, sheltering others,
walls made of living stone.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
*Shine in your Church gathered today.***

**5. Many the gifts, many the people,
many the hearts that yearn to belong.
Let us be servants to one another,
making your kingdom come.
Christ, be our light!
Shine in our hearts.
Shine through the darkness.
Christ, be our light!
*Shine in your Church gathered today.***

Bernardette Farrell (b. 1957)

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Sermon

A week is a long time in politics, said Harold Wilson in the 1960's. Well, a week and a half, which is how long I am preparing this sermon in advance of you hearing it, is an extremely long time in a tightly contested American presidential election taking place in the midst of a global pandemic. Is it Trump again, or is it Biden? I don't know – you might, or you might not. If the result has been announced, has it been accepted with good grace by the loser, or are there appeals to the Supreme Court, or even worse, unrest and violence? And how about that pandemic? I think the new lockdown will have started – parliament had voted for it as I was preparing this – but are the schools still in, or has the petition asking the government to close them been successful? What about the appeal from some church leaders demanding that churches stay open? You know, I don't. And what about the prospect of a vaccine starting to be rolled out before Christmas? I've seen reports that there is going to be an announcement next week – or last week, as far as you're concerned.

All these possibilities, these things which may or may not happen – some of them good, some of them frightening – you know, whereas I am still living with uncertainty. That is the sort of febrile atmosphere in which the Christians of Thessalonica were living when they received a letter in the early 50's AD. They couldn't worship openly either – they were persecuted outlaws, they had to keep quiet about their faith in order to stay safe – but their faith compelled them to talk about Christ, to share the good news of God's love. Whenever they did that, whenever they talked to a new person about their faith, they took the risk that they were exposing themselves to danger. Can you imagine that – doing something you long to do, knowing that to do so might be to sign your own death warrant.

Now there were stories – I heard it from Claudius, and he got it from Simon the ropemaker, and he has a cousin in Jerusalem who knows one of the Twelve – there were stories that Jesus was returning soon. Very soon – maybe even next week!! So, we don't need to do anything – we don't need to take risks, we don't need to reach out, because Jesus is coming soon to save us, and then this will all be over.

But then they received this letter which said, in essence – you don't know when he's coming. He could be coming soon – or it might be a long time. And from a distance of nearly two thousand years, we know that it was going to be a very long time. It could be a long time, or it could be tomorrow – but whenever he comes, be ready. And that means, be occupied in doing the things which please God.

Psalms 90 starts by recalling that God has been our dwelling place, our stronghold for generations. Towards the end, the writer appeals to God for help: Turn, O Lord! How long? Have compassion on your servants! It's as if the writer is saying, come on God, we are relying on you, we are expecting you to rescue us from this, as you always have done before. But it's going on so long, we're tired of waiting, and not knowing how much longer we have to wait. We humans are not good with uncertainty.

The debate around the handling of Covid centres round uncertainties. How many people will fall seriously ill and die if we don't lock down? Will the capacity of the NHS to treat people be exceeded? How many jobs will be lost, how much education, how many people's mental health will suffer if we do lock down for a longer time? We don't know! How long do we need to wait for a vaccine? We don't know for sure – we have estimates, but they might be wrong.

Life is tough at the moment. It's tough for the politicians, making those decisions, and it's tough for the rest of us, whose lives are massively affected by what they decide. But however tough it is, we are still called, as followers of Christ, to live lives that are pleasing to God. And God does not leave us to do that on our own – we have a whole host of resources to enable us to cope.

The word "talent" is used in modern English to denote an inborn aptitude or ability. It derives from the parable in our reading from Matthew – a talent was a unit of weight, and then a unit of currency. In the parable the talents are given to the servants by their master who then goes away for a long and uncertain period of time. The servants were expected to use what they had been given to be fruitful. And so are we. They say necessity is the mother of invention – necessity has caused mature people to learn how to use Zoom and churches which had never previously recorded or broadcast their service to do so. And probably we're a bit ham-fisted with a lot of it. But you know what? We're doing what we can in extraordinary circumstances. We're using our talents, some of them long buried, in order to fulfil God's purposes.

But I wonder, is there more that we could be doing? Is it enough for us to be continuing to provide worship in some shape or form and pastoral care to our own people, when we are surrounded by communities in which people are struggling in a whole host of ways. It may be practical, financial, emotional, who knows. Is it enough to use our talents to look after our own, to hunker down and hope to survive? Or can we use what we have – what we have been given – to do more?

The resources we have to get us through this period of uncertainty come in a whole host of shapes. They come as family, friends and neighbours who ring us up or offer to fetch things or do jobs. They come as favourite books or programmes, which comfort us with their familiarity. They come as skills, old or new, a calm temperament, honed with the experience of years; they come as the quiet, felt presence of God, speaking to us in stillness. These resources help us – but they are not only for us.

They are also for us to share, because in sharing, they multiply. The God who has been our refuge for generations, will be our refuge for generations to come. And when we meet him face to face, what will we be able to say we did with the talents he gave us?

THE RESPONSE

HYMN Stf 513 Take this moment, sign and, space

- 1. Take this moment, sign , and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where your love is found.**

- 2. Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.**

- 3. Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget.**

- 4. Take the little child in me,
scared of growing old;
help me here to find my worth
made in Christ's own mould.**

- 5. Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
let my life be yours, and yet,
Let it still be me.**

John L. Bell (*b.1949*) and Graham Maule (*b 1958*)
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Prayers of intercession

Holy and present God,
We thank you that you are always with us,
Regardless of where we are or how we feel your presence surrounds us
Whether we can feel your presence or not your Holy Spirit is within each and every one of us.
When we feel alone help us to become more aware of you, your love, your peace, your Spirit.

Holy and powerful God,
We thank you that you are always with us,
When we are weak your strength hold us up
When we are exhausted you bid us rest

When we feel powerless, help us to trust in you the all powerful God.

Holy and all knowing God,
We thank you that you know us better than we know even our selves
That you know how we feel, our concerns, our fears as well as our joys
When we are anxious and scared about the future help us to know your peace and to put our trust in you.

Holy and all Loving God,
We hold before you all those who are finding this lockdown time to be difficult,
Those who are worried about themselves or loved ones,
Those who are unwell in body, mind or spirit
Those whose relationships are strained or breaking
Help us to be your people in the world, speaking words of care and kindness, loving others just as you love us.

Holy and eternal God,
We pray for all those who have died during this pandemic.
Those who have died from Covid, those who have died of other causes.
Those who have died alone and those who were unable to be there with loved ones.
Living God we hold before you all those who rest in your loving care.
Holy One you have promised that whenever we pray to you our voices are heard
We ask these your prayers in the name of Jesus Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit,

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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.
Forgive 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**

THE DISMISSAL

HYMN StF 410 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking

- 1. Lord, your Church on earth is seeking
your renewal from above;
teach us all the art of speaking
with the accent of your love.
We would heed your great commission:
sending us to every place-**

**preach, baptise, fulfil my mission
serve with love and share my grace.**

- 2. Freedom give to those in bondage,
lift the burdens caused by sin.
Give new hope, new strength and courage,
grant release from fears within:
light for darkness: joy for sorrow;
love for hatred; peace for strife.
These and countless blessings follow
as the Spirit gives new life.**

- 3. In the streets of every city
where the bruised and lonely dwell,
let us show the Saviour's pity,
let us of his mercy tell.
In all lands and with all races
let us serve, and seek to bring
all the world to render praises
Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.**

Hugh Sherlock (1905-1998)

Music: Cyril Vincent Taylor (1907-1991)

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Blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine on you
and be gracious to you;
the Lord look on you with kindness
give you peace. Amen.

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StF 20 Be Still for the presence of the Lord

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StF 706 Longing for Light

Bernardette Farrell (b. 1957)

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StF 513 Take this moment , time and space

John L. Bell (b.1949) and Graham Maule (b 1958)

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StF 410 Lord your Church on earth is seeking

Hugh Sherlock (1905-1998)

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NIV

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