

# Online Worship for Sunday 30th August 2020

from the United Reformed Church at  
Morpeth, Widdrington and Gt Bavington  
Prepared and led by Louise Sanders

## Opening Words:

We gather together to worship the God of our fathers  
and mothers—  
the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Miriam and Moses  
—  
who hears the cries of His people and comes to their  
aid;  
who meets us on holy ground and calls us follow;  
who invites us to leave our selfish ways behind,  
take up our cross, and discover what it means to truly  
live. This is our God!  
Let's worship together.

## Hymn: Praise to the Holiest in the Height (R&S 103)

1 Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
and in the depth be praise:  
in all his words most wonderful,  
most sure in all his ways.

2 O loving wisdom of our God!  
When all was sin and shame,  
a second Adam to the fight  
and to the rescue came.

3 O wisest love! that flesh and blood,  
which did in Adam fail,  
should strive afresh against the foe,  
should strive and should prevail;

4 And that a higher gift than grace  
should flesh and blood refine,  
God's presence and his very self,  
and essence all-divine.

5 O generous love! that he, who smote  
in Man for man the foe,  
the double agony in Man  
for man should undergo;

6 And in the garden secretly,  
and on the cross on high,  
should teach his brethren, and inspire  
to suffer and to die.

7 Praise to the Holiest in the height,  
and in the depth be praise:  
in all his words most wonderful,  
most sure in all his ways.

J.H. Newman

## Prayers of Confession:

We confess to God that in our busy lives  
we so often fail to discern that God is always with us.

We confess that even when we are aware of God's  
presence in our midst we are too busy to stop and  
notice.

We confess that we miss so many opportunities to  
recognise your work in our lives and in the lives of  
others.

We confess that we fail to live the Christian lives that  
you have called us to by clinging so tightly to the  
things of this world that seem important but are in  
truth insignificant.

We confess that we often exclude others from our  
tightly drawn circle for fear they make demands of us  
or complicate our lives.

Forgive us O God,  
Help us to witness to you in our lives every day,  
to see you in the everyday things of our lives.  
Help us to proclaim your great goodness and love to  
those around us.  
Release us from the boundaries we have placed  
around our lives, and help us to love and welcome  
others into our lives.

Commission us anew,  
In the light of your forgiveness  
To draw attention to you in all of life.  
Amen.

## Reading: Exodus 3:1-15

## Hymn: The Church is Wherever God's People Are Praising (R&S 583)

1. The church is wherever God's people are praising,  
singing God's goodness for joy on this day.  
The church is wherever disciples of Jesus  
remember his story and walk in his way.

2. The church is wherever God's people are helping,  
caring for neighbours in sickness and need.  
The church is wherever God's people are sharing  
the words of the Bible in gift and in deed.

Carol R Ikeler, ©1963 W.L.Jenkins Westminster/John  
Knox Press

## Reading: Matthew 16: 21-28

## Sermon: Sacred Space?

Some of you who have got to know me over the last year will know that I like to watch a good movie! Friday or Saturday nights are often spent curled up on the sofa with a blanket (even in July up North!) a bowl of popcorn, maybe a glass of something?? And a good movie, which is often projected on the wall with the sound through the sound system, giving the complete cinema experience!

Sometimes the movie turns out to be not very good at all and sometimes the title puts me off but I watch it anyway on the recommendation of someone else. When our vicar in Thetford said they were going to show the movie *War Room* at church one evening as a movie night I was somewhat disappointed. It didn't sound at all like something I wanted to watch. But on her assurance I would enjoy it I went along and was pleasantly surprised by how much I had indeed enjoyed it.

The movie tells the story of two women in America, one older who was widowed and lived alone, and a younger lady who was married with a young daughter. They become acquainted and the older lady extols the virtues of her *War Room* to the younger one who was having marital problems and generally struggling somewhat with the pressures of life.

So what was the *War Room*? Basically a cupboard! But what made it so special was the hours the lady spent in there praying! She had prayer requests on the walls and Scripture passages stuck on the walls, and this was where she prayed and did battle with the things in her life that she could change through the power of prayer. The younger lady then empties her fitted wardrobe and transforms it into her *War Room* where she too learns about the power of prayer and the idea of sacred space. I won't tell you what happens in the end as I would hate to spoil it for you if you have plans to watch it, but it really is a good movie to highlight the power of prayer and the idea of sacred space.

In our Exodus reading we heard that when Moses approached the burning bush, he was instructed to remove his shoes as he was now standing on Holy Ground. The video that we started our worship with asked whether as we approach God, whether we consider ourselves as standing on Holy ground and whether we prepare appropriately?

One of my biggest struggles during lockdown has been not being able to go to church. Yes I have been able to worship – but being physically in the building has been something that I have missed with my whole being. There is something deep inside which longs to be in that space where so many have worshipped and

prayed before me, where the air is filled with the prayers of those now long gone. That Holy space.

And whilst I have come to my living room almost every Sunday and worshipped as we are now, I have struggled with not being in what I would consider a holy place. But this week our readings have challenged me to consider what is a holy place and to question why I have come to worship? There are many times in our lives when we can feel the presence of God all around us, whether in our homes, out walking, in the company of others or when we are alone. But how often do we stand still and notice. How often do we take time to acknowledge it?

Our lives are so busy and we all have so many other things to attend to that it is hard sometimes to notice the presence of God with us. For some we only notice the presence of God when we are in church because at most other times we are caught up with the pressures that come every day and it is only when we take time on a Sunday to sit in church and be still that we notice the presence of God. But that does not mean that God is only in that place or that when we pray or worship in other places that he is not with us. In our reading from Matthew we are reminded that to follow Christ is not the easy choice. We have to pick up our cross, leave self behind and follow him. But this isn't easy and for many during this pandemic this will have been made even harder.

It is easy for us to neglect our faith when we don't have to go to church every Sunday, or attend prayer meetings or Bible studies. It is easy to leave our Bibles on the shelves and deal with the many other demands on our time, but this does not mean that God is not with us, or does not require anything of us. Whilst we have not been able to meet in our usual church buildings, many of us have struggled to find that Holy space where we can meet with God.

For some, taking time away from the pressures of everyday living has brought a closer walk with God. They can see God in the beauty all around them, in being able to take time to just be still and notice. For others, and I include myself, it has been difficult to find that Holy space, that time to set aside for prayer and worship, and worshipping at home in front of the television brings an attitude of '@'it just doesn't do anything for me'. But then I am reminded that this isn't and never has been about me. I don't go to church on a Sunday for me. I don't read my Bible or pray for me. It's about God, about being in a relationship with Him who calls us to change our ways, and follow Him.

Maybe during this time we have had time to reflect on things and consider how often we go to our churches to worship God. Or do we go because we need to see Matilda about the coffee rota, or speak with Simon about the leaky roof. It is easy to forget that we go to church, enter that Holy space with the sole purpose of worshipping God. To give thanks for his many blessings, for his mercy to us and to pray our intercessions for those in need.

It isn't meant to be easy, we aren't meant to reach a plateau where following becomes easy because we have reached that Holy place, that comfortable place where we can stop trying. We have to follow Him through our hard times and our suffering, to find that sacred space in the everyday places we find ourselves, whether that is a cupboard, a fitted wardrobe or standing at the kitchen sink. Where we worship doesn't matter, what does matter is that we approach God with a reverence due to the one who loves us unconditionally. To take off our sandals, bow our heads and take time to notice the God who is all around us, who never leaves us, even through the hard and difficult times. The God who rejoices with us when we rejoice, who weeps when we weep and who carries us when we think we can go no further.

As we go through the coming week and for some of us, prepare to return to the church building, let us continue to look out for signs that God's presence is with us – and maybe even be brave enough to share those experiences with those around us. We never know when a word from us can become a word from God to someone else. Jesus himself told us that to follow Him would not be the easy path, that we would be engaged in a constant spiritual battle. But he also said that in losing our lives to Him we would gain eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Amen

#### **Prayers of Intercession:**

God You love all that You have made, the world and all its creatures.

Your love gathers and enfolds all things.  
Your heart breaks when any part of Your creation suffers.

So God, as our awareness grows of Your presence all around,  
may we be so attuned that we weep where You weep  
and our hearts break where Yours is broken.

We offer back this complex, crazy world,  
like children offering our broken Lego sets to parents,  
asking that You fix it.

Parent God, in love, You won't do as we ask  
but You will kneel beside us and patiently show us  
how to make things better.  
You will unearth the wisdom that You created in us for  
the healing of the world.  
You will affirm us and give us each a unique part to  
play in changing the world,  
in ushering in Your justice and Your peace.

So, God, prepared to roll up our sleeves and work  
alongside You,  
we pray for world leaders,  
that they too may be filled with Your wisdom and love  
and Your healing power.  
We pray that their eyes, and our eyes,  
may be opened to the need to find new ways forward  
and the possibilities that abound for honouring all  
creation  
and for building nations where all are valued,  
where all matter, where the economy is modelled on  
Your divine economy.

We pray for all who live in fear today  
and for those whose fears have been realised –  
those who mourn loved ones,  
those who see no light of dawn after darkness.

We pray too for those who have given up hoping for  
different or better.  
May we hold out hope and faith enough for the world  
and may we live in love.

God awaken us to Your truth and Your light,  
to all the opportunities we have of emerging from  
darkness  
fuelled by new energy to make our world, our church  
and our neighbourhood  
beacons of hope that is realised in our serving You by  
serving one another.  
Your kingdom come, Your will be done O God.  
Amen.  
(Prayer taken from The Church of Scotland website,  
written by Rev Liz Crumlish)

Our Father, who art in Heaven  
Hallowed be your name  
Your Kingdom come  
Your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who  
trespass against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil  
For the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory are yours  
Now and forever  
Amen

**Hymn: God Who Spoke In The Beginning (R&S 60  
tune 344)**

God who spoke in the beginning,  
forming rock and shaping spar,  
set all life and growth in motion,  
earthly world and distant star;  
he who calls the earth to order  
is the ground of what we are.

God who spoke through people, nations,  
through events long past and gone,  
showing still today his purpose,  
speaks supremely through his Son;  
he who calls the earth to order  
gives his word, and it is done.

God whose speech becomes incarnate  
Christ is servant, Christ is Lord!  
calls us to a life of service,  
heart and will to action stirred;  
he who uses our obedience  
has the first and final word

Fred Kaan  
© Stainer & Bell Ltd

**Blessing:**

Go out into the world to join God  
in the work of love, of peace, of justice.  
Take in the breath of life.  
Take off your shoes.  
Know that you are ever in the presence  
of the Holy and Living God.  
Go in peace. Amen.