

Worship for Sunday 12th July

Welcome

A very warm welcome to our worship for Sunday 12th July. We are pleased to welcome our good friend the Rev Ian Ring to contribute to our service. He is taking Isaiah's words of invitation and asking what they might mean for us today. His pieces were recorded in church and so we can all, hopefully, feel that we have met together in God's name today. You may even recognise the voices singing in one of the hymns!

And so we come together to worship the King!

Hymn O worship the king!

Prayers of approach

Almighty God, Creator and Sustainer of all that is seen and all that is unseen, all that is known and all that is unknown we bow before your throne in awe and wonder, in love and joy. There is no place that we would rather be than with your arms outstretched around us making us feel loved and wanted, safe and secure. **Thank you Lord.**

You existed before time began and you will exist when time is no more. There is not a moment in eternity when you are not present, not a moment in our lives when you are not with us. You hold us in the palm of your hand yet give us the freedom to go where we like, do what we like and say what we like, We have total freedom because you love us perfectly. **Thank you Lord**

Snow covered mountain peaks, deep valleys and vast plains; raging oceans, smooth seas, cascading waterfalls, babbling brooks and meandering rivers; the sun, moon and stars; clouds, rain, wind and mist; forests, meadows and gardens; brightly coloured flowers, fruit and vegetables; fish, birds, animals and insects all created by you for our pleasure, our enjoyment and set in the most magnificent and marvellous universe imaginable. **Thank you Lord**

We thank you for it all and we thank you for the people who enrich our lives, family, friend and stranger. We thank you for those who shared their lives with us and led us to faith in you. We thank you for our homes, for our comfortable beds and for the food on our plates. We thank you for those who have answered the call and become Ministers of your church. We thank you for your word in Holy Scripture that teaches us, rebukes us, corrects us and inspires us. But we thank you most of all for Jesus who came to show us how to live and to restore the relationship between you and your people. **Thank you Lord**

We seek your forgiveness Lord for the times we have marred our relationship with you by the words we have spoken or the silence we have kept; the actions we have committed or the inaction we have indulged in; the thoughts we have harboured. All our sin we confess to you. Forgive us Lord when we have been complicit in systems that are unjust, unethical and wrong; that keep the poor in poverty, accentuate the divisions in the world and keep us among the rich and powerful. Forgive us Lord when we have allowed the church to turn

aside from your truth and compromise its relationship with you and its effectiveness in the world. **Thank you Lord**

As you forgive us Lord we forgive anyone who has wronged us in any way and we ask you to fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit that we may become more like Christ everyday and thus more useful to you and to the world. We pray that the fruit of the Spirit may grow in us and that you will give us such gifts of the Holy Spirit as we need to fulfil the tasks you are calling us to. **Thank you Lord**

Amen

Lord's Prayer

Reading Isaiah 55

Address

This passage of Scripture is sometimes known as 'The Great Invitation'. Four times the word 'come' is used in verse one. It is definitely a great invitation! It is genuinely an invitation to a free lunch but of course it is symbolic. Symbolic of something almost beyond our imagination. God is going to meet all our needs and it will cost us nothing. Furthermore it is not just basic provisions, it is not just water it is wine as well, it is not just food it is the richest of fare. It is not beans on toast washed down with orange squash, it is a seven course banquet accompanied by a different wine for each course.

This is all about restoration. It is not a touch up paint job it is a full restoration. It is beyond our wildest dreams, above our greatest hopes, way beyond our expectations and far more than we deserve. It is a loving God giving his children the finest treasures from his store, not because we have been especially good but simply because he loves us and wants to do it.

God is saying if you want life listen to me, a wonderful statement and one that is full of meaning. God is saying I have designed this universe, I have set everything in place, I have written the instruction manual, I know how to get the best out of it. Listen to me means take time to hear my words, immerse yourself in them, let them flow through you, let them initiate everything you think, everything you do and everything you say.

I was once asked to represent a football team at a hearing brought by the County Football Association over the breach of a rule. I said yes and I asked for a copy of the rule book so that I knew exact wording of the rule in question. I read that rule book from cover to cover. Then I read it again, just to make sure that I understood it. Finally I read the particular section again. I worked out my argument and I knew we could not lose. It was not confidence in my own wisdom or powers of persuasion which gave me the answer it was the rule book itself. Why was I so confident? The rule in question was not in the book. You should have seen the face of the gentleman who had travelled from FA headquarters in London to Old Swan, Liverpool when I presented my defence and the county officials had to omit I was right. The rule was custom and practice, not written down anywhere. Does that remind you of the church?

So back to the church. How much of what we do is custom and practice and not the will of God? How often do we study God's word in Scripture? Not just glance at it as we read it, not just listen as someone else reads it but study it and discern its meaning. To take an example. Nowhere in Scripture does it say we have to meet for worship on Sunday morning and Sunday evening. What it does say is keep the Sabbath holy and do no work on it. It also records Jesus as regularly attending worship in synagogues and at the Temple. From that we can discern **the** importance of regular worship and prayer and of having one day that is different, more relaxing than the rest of the week. We can follow the same process for every aspect of our life. God has caused it to be written in the book we call the Bible.

The word Bible means book and originated in the Greek language. It is not 'a book' it is 'the book'. This is a massive clue to its importance and its purpose. By calling it 'The book' it implies it is the only book you ever need, it is the ultimate guide to God's relationship with his people, it the book of life. In Isaiah 55 verse 3 God says 'come to me, listen, that you may live'. That is the *raison d'être* of the Bible. It contains all we need to know about life in God's kingdom. It starts with the Garden of Eden, Paradise, and finishes with the City of Gold, Paradise.

Isaiah seems to be speaking to a world in crisis where poverty abounds and he is offering them not just hope but salvation for ever. I wonder what he would say today? What should the church be saying today? We stand in the prophetic line of Isaiah. It is up to us to bring the good news to the world. We spend hours and hours discussing online communion, human sexuality, gender, race, use of language, who can preside at the sacraments, church structures, building repairs, the colour of the walls, the choice of music, the nature of God, the person of Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit and on and on and on. What good does it do us? I am not saying that these issues are unimportant. Of course they are important. But the church's real role is to take the good news of God's Kingdom to those who don't know about. Thank heaven that this year's Methodist Conference might have finally grasped it.

Here in this passage from Isaiah that good news is laid out. As we saw earlier it is in the metaphor of food and drink. It is the obvious imagery, after all who doesn't love a good banquet? But it is so much more than that. Look at that wonderful poetry, let it permeate your soul. It is the offer of life eternal at no cost to us. It is all our prayers answered at once! All nations in peace and harmony with God at the centre. No more hunger, the best food and drink available is there for us to freely consume. God's mercy and pardon poured out on all. Gone are the hardships of the world, all replaced by blessings – juniper replaces thorn bushes, myrtle replaces briars. This is not a random choice of plants. Both are aromatic, both are used to produce fine drinks, both are used to enhance flavours in cooking, both have medicinal properties. This is not a God of the ordinary but a God of the extraordinary.

Sometimes I think about the people who helped me on my faith journey. Freda, John, Dick, George, Fran, Peter, Paul, Geoff, Jo, Louise and many, many more. I pause and give thanks for them. Then I wonder who would name me as someone on their faith journey. I look around the church today and ask who are we helping on their faith journey, who are we bringing in to the life of faith. This is not about growing the church, it is about extending the Kingdom of God. I reflect with John Bode who wrote 'I see the sights that dazzle, the

tempting sounds I hear'. I wrestle with the Apostle Paul's words that 'you shine like stars in a wicked and depraved generation'. Do I outshine the dazzling sights John Bode wrote about? Is my life attractive enough to attract others to it? In the end all I can do is to get to know God better, live more like Jesus and let the Holy Spirit fill me more.

Next time you are tempted to despair, or at least a little moan, at the state of the world or the state of the church, remind yourself of Isaiah's words that God's ways are not our ways and God's thoughts are not our thoughts. Praise God for that. Then pause, pick up your Bible and read about God's ways and thoughts, immerse yourself in them, let them speak to you. Praise God again. You will feel better, about yourself, about the church and about the world. What better way to finish than to quote the words of Isaiah, 'Seek the Lord while he may be found'

Amen

Hymn

God has given us a book full of stories

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus Christ, you call us, as you called your first disciples, to follow you – not simply to believe, not merely to declare our faith and confess you as Lord, but to keep on following wherever you lead.

Help us to follow you eagerly, faithfully, devotedly, seeing where you are at work and staying close to you.

We pray for those who struggle to follow you, for whatever reason, for those who have not heard 'the most beautiful story of all'. We pray that as we continue to face uncertain times, where things are very different we may use this time to rethink what it means to be 'church' for you today.

We pray for those who thirsty- those who need for any of the basics in life may they come to you. We pray for those who feel a sense of isolation and loneliness, may they come to you and hear you.

In a moment of silence we bring before you those people and situations known to us to whom we would say "come".....

Lord Jesus Christ, you call us to come to you and to follow you. Teach us what that means and by your grace help us to respond and be followers of your way. We pray in your name.

Amen

Hymn

O Jesus I have promised

Blessing

Let us go out in joy and be led forth in peace to be followers of Christ in the world today.

Amen