

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 10:30 am

Local Preacher Mrs Lorraine Wheeler and Rev'd Danny Wheadon

## Welcome & Candle to Light

### Call to Worship

O God, you have called us to power.  
But not a power that shouts, rather, a  
power that invites – because this is your  
power: a power to call all to be with all.  
In this power, we find room, we make  
room, and we are made whole. Amen.

### HYMN: Thine be the Glory

- 1 Thine be the glory,  
risen conquering Son;  
endless is the victory  
thou o'er death hast won.  
Angels in bright raiment  
rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave clothes  
where thy body lay.  
*Thine be the glory,  
risen conquering Son:  
Endless is the victory,  
thou o'er death hast won.*
- 2 Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
lovingly he greets us,  
scatters fear and gloom.  
Let his church with gladness,  
hymns of triumph sing;  
for her Lord now liveth,  
death hath lost its sting.
- 3 No more we doubt thee,  
glorious prince of life!  
Life is nought without thee;  
aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors,  
through thy deathless love:  
Bring us safe through Jordan  
to thy home above.

Edmund L Budry (1854-1932),  
translated by Richard B Hoyle (1875-1939)

### Prayers:

We are gathered here today around Word  
and word. God, your Word lives: it breathes,  
it encourages, it pleads. It urges us towards  
love and greater love. As we listen to your  
Word today, may we hear the words in our  
hearts that call us towards love of other, self  
and stranger. Your Word is an invitation  
towards an ever greater hospitality. And so,  
we stand, supported in the living Word that  
always welcomes. **Amen.**

### A Prayer of Confession

God of justice, Justice is your name.  
We who call ourselves yours have often left  
justice at the door – preferring words to  
action. O God, we have done wrong.  
May we pick up justice, and hold it in our  
hands as we turn back to you. Support us, O  
God, in our justice, and in our turning  
towards justice. Amen.

### A Prayer of Thanksgiving:

We lift up our hands.  
We lift up our voices.  
We lift up our hearts.  
We lift up our lives.  
Search us, O God, and bring us deeper  
into the justice of your life-giving Word.  
Call us, O God, into knowing more of life –  
your Word is life, so may we find life with  
each other. We rejoice in your never-failing  
invitation to celebrate and engage with your  
welcome. Amen.



### **Joshua 3:7-17 NIV**

7 And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I will begin to exalt you in the eyes of all Israel, so they may know that I am with you as I was with Moses. 8 Tell the priests who carry the ark of the covenant: 'When you reach the edge of the Jordan's waters, go and stand in the river.'"

9 Joshua said to the Israelites, "Come here and listen to the words of the LORD your God. 10 This is how you will know that the living God is among you and that he will certainly drive out before you the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites and Jebusites. 11 See, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth will go into the Jordan ahead of you. 12 Now then, choose twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one from each tribe. 13 And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap."

14 So when the people broke camp to cross the Jordan, the priests carrying the ark of the covenant went ahead of them. 15 Now the Jordan is at flood stage all during harvest. Yet as soon as the priests who carried the ark reached the Jordan and their feet touched the water's edge, 16 the water from upstream stopped flowing. It piled up in a heap a great distance away, at a town called Adam in the vicinity of Zarethan, while the water flowing down to the Sea of the Arabah (that is, the Dead Sea) was completely cut off. So the people crossed over opposite Jericho. 17 The priests who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD stopped in the middle of the Jordan and stood on dry ground, while all Israel passed by until the whole nation had completed the crossing on dry ground.

### **REFLECTIONS:**

Good morning brothers and sisters in Jersey and elsewhere. It is such a privilege to be able to share worship with you today.

This morning's reflection is continuing the story from last week, which Reverend Jenny shared around Moses and his followers arriving at the promised land after a 40 year journey – quite something when I often hear moans on Jersey about traveling from one side of the island to another! Moses had anointed Joshua to be his successor and it was now up to Joshua to finally lead the Israelites to the promised land – the land which had been promised to Abraham and his descendants.

This morning's reading is something of a bookend. As the Exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt began with the crossing of the Red Sea, the Exodus ends with the crossing of the River Jordan into the promised land. Two bodies of water at either end of the Exodus story. I was walking on the beach last weekend with my husband and my dog. It was a stormy evening and as I looked out to sea, I thought about how God had parted the Red Sea and the River Jordan and as I looked out at the fierce waves, I thought anew how miraculous both these events would have been. We read about the parting of the Red Sea or the River Jordan as though it is an everyday occurrence but if we really think about how amazing those miracles are, instead of reading a

familiar story, we realise the majesty and power of our awesome God. But whilst it's the end of the Exodus story, it is a new beginning – a totally new chapter in the history of God's People.

As the Red Sea washed away the identity of Israel as a nation of slaves, Jordan's waters washes away their identity as homeless wanderers. Crossing the Red Sea, God was shown as a God who liberates. Crossing Jordan, God is shown as a God who provides – and provides richly. Both of those aspects are so important to the character of God. Forged out of their experience in the wilderness, the Israelites receive a new beginning. A new crossing. A new mighty act of God where the chaos of the waters is harnessed. Just as God had selected Moses and made it known that He was to lead the people of Israel, He made it known that Joshua was anointed as his successor. And many years later, our Lord, Jesus Christ was baptised in this very river.

In life, and in ministry, we can often find bookends which mark momentous occasions. Occasions of birth and death, comings and goings, loss and gain, grief and joy. And, we can also find events which don't just encapsulate, but which propel us forward. In my own life, it was on the occasion of the birth of my son, Charlie, which filled me with so much thankfulness that I came to know the Lord in a much closer way as I knew in that moment as I thanked my

husband for this wonderful second child that I realised that it was from God that all our blessings stemmed.

It hit me like a thunderbolt – so many years of searching – of attending different churches in the places I have lived – knowing there was something peaceful and renewing about attending church but not knowing why. In that moment as I saw my new baby son, I knew that I didn't have to look for God in a church for He is with me wherever I am.



Our baptisms – the moments when we step through Jordan's waters, the waters which Jesus was baptized in – are moments of such newness. Where God does a new work in us, and we are propelled forward. Where God gives us a fresh new chapter to write, live, and begin the journey of marking our new, and freshly washed, identity as a child of God. In my own life, it was my first trip to Israel and my rededication in the waters of the River Jordan, which preceded my first experience of hearing God as closely as if He had been sitting next to me having a cosy chat. Whilst He wanted me to become a Local Preacher, initially I fought this and made excuses – I didn't have enough time and my husband wouldn't like it

but gradually, He removed the obstacles I had set myself and gave me the means and the confidence in Him to follow the path He had set out for me – as if he had parted the waters in my life and given me a new beginning – a life, which would still present obstacles along the way but what a privilege to know peace – even in times of challenge and adversity – for I am never alone. And that close and personal relationship with God, which fills me with comfort, peace and love is available to everyone. We just have to stand at the edge of the river and take that first step in faith.

As we heard in the Bible Reading and reflection from Revd Jenny last week, Moses had been shown the promised land but was not able to cross into that land, as he had already been advised. He died after seeing the purpose of his life fulfilled and having sight of the promised land and having laid his hands on Joshua as his successor.

We never know how God's timing will be implemented. For Moses and the Israelites, the exile in the wilderness took 40 years – a long time to be waiting for an answer to prayer. And yet, the Israelites had continued to follow Moses and to trust in their God – our God.



Whilst they may have grumbled about eating the same food, they continued with their journey and trusted in God. I am sure that at some point during our lives, we have all spent time in the wilderness. No doubt in those dark times, we will also have thought of our promised land – a place where our lives would be more fun, less lonely, less tiring, just easier.

Each one of us could no doubt tell a story of life in the wilderness. It is that place where life is just difficult. It is a struggle to just get up each morning and make it through the day. In the wilderness we walk and walk and walk, and get nowhere. Then we discover we have been walking in circles. No matter what we do, progress eludes us. We feel lost, confused, and not sure which way to go or what to do. In the wilderness it takes all our effort to just survive.

We all have some idea of what the promised land will be like. Our promised land generally corresponds to our wilderness experience. So for most of us the promised land is either a return to the way things were before, back in the good old days, or it is a jump forward into an idealized future. Either way we want to escape the wilderness. So for those who wander in the wilderness of deep sorrow, loss, and tears the promised land might be a place of joy, where memories no longer cripple, tears no longer flow, and enthusiasm for life returns. For those who know the wilderness of loneliness

the promised land is a place of relationship, acceptance, and belonging. In the wilderness of fear the promised land is about security, control, predictability. In the wilderness of unhappiness we long for a promised land of fulfilment and meaning.

Sometimes the wilderness is simply about moving, changing, and growing. Even though those are good things, sought out, and welcomed the way can still be hard, tiring, and perilous. If the wilderness is about survival then the promised land holds before us the image of living, really living.

Most of the time we want to escape the wilderness. If we could have our way, we would probably like God to pluck us out of the wilderness and set us down in the promised land but as Moses, Joshua and the Israelites discovered, that's not how it works. God does not rescue or save us from the circumstances of our lives. Instead, God goes through those circumstances with us. For every wilderness there is a promised land; and for every promised land there is a River Jordan that must be crossed.

The Jordan River is the boundary between the wilderness and the promised land. It is the obstacle standing between us and the promised land. Joshua has led the Israelites to the Jordan River. The promised land is in sight. Four hundred years of slavery and forty years of wilderness wandering have brought them to the edge. They have hoped, walked, suffered, prayed,

talked, cried, trusted, regretted, sinned, and whinged their way to this moment.

What do they see? A river in flood stage, overflowing its banks. There is no low water crossing in sight. The river is 150 miles long. They cannot go around it. There are no bridges. They cannot go over it. The way is blocked. The river is impassable. This is neither a good time nor a good place to cross. More often than not that is how our River Jordan looks. We forget, however, that this is not our time or place. God has chosen and brought Israel to this time and place even as God chooses and brings us to the time and place for our river crossings. The only way across the river is through the river.



We never go alone. God himself goes into the river. He is, let us not forget, the God of water crossings. He was there as Noah drifted across the flood waters that swept away the old and receded to reveal a new world, a new life, a new relationship. He wrestled with Jacob in the night, blessed and renamed him, and then watched him limp across the Jabbok River with a new identity, Israel. He called his people out of bondage in Egypt and through the Red Sea to a journey of salvation. Every crossing is an act of God's faithfulness.

We each have a Jordan River that must be crossed and usually more than one. It seems that the life of faith is a series of water crossings. The Jordan River, however, is not a geographical feature. It is a part of our inner landscape. Crossing the Jordan, entering the promised land, will not change the circumstances of our lives. It changes us, and that changes everything.

Like Israel we stand at the edge of the Jordan. The only way into the promised land is through the flood waters of life. How deep is it? How solid is the bottom? Is it slippery? Is the water cold? How strong is the current? How far across is the river? What will I find on the other side? All good questions. In some way those are the questions of life, the questions that arise every time we make a move, whether geographical, emotional, or spiritual. They are not, however, questions that get answered before we step into the river of new life. Ultimately, it is God not the answers to our questions that takes us across our Jordan.

God, however, did not hold back the water for Israel before they put their feet in. It is only after they stepped into the water that God acted. The waters do not part until we step out in faith, until our feet are dipped in that impassable river. God can only work with what we give him. Standing on the bank waiting for answers, waiting for a better time and place, or waiting for the flood to subside offers God nothing with which to work. God will not act,

the river will rage, and we will remain stuck. That first step, however, gives God something to work with.



One step is all it takes. One step. As soon as Israel's feet were "dipped in the edge of the water" God acted, the flowing waters stood still, there was dry land, and all the people crossed over.

We all have that one step, that first step, that needs to be taken. Take that first step and you have offered God something with which to work. The flood waters of your life will be parted, dry land will be revealed, and the way forward will be opened to you. What is that first step for you? There are as many first steps as there are circumstances of life. Maybe the first step is to offer someone forgiveness and reconciliation. Maybe your one step is to let go of anger or resentment. Perhaps your first step is to let go of having to be right or in control. Maybe it means you no longer let fear dominate your life. Perhaps the first step for you is to risk intimacy and vulnerability. Maybe your life is unmanageable and that first step is just one of several. Sometimes the first step is to simply be quiet, be still, and listen – to not be so busy complaining to God in

our prayers that we don't wait for His response. Maybe that one step is taking responsibility for your life.

I do not know your first step but I trust that God does. I do not know when or how you will cross your Jordan but I know it happens one step at a time and that first step always takes us to a new land, to a new way of being, and to a new life, God's life. Step out in faith. Get your feet wet. You will never look back. Amen.



### **HYMN: Turn your eyes upon Jesus**

Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth  
will grow strangely dim  
In the light of his glory and grace.

Helen H Lemmel (1864-1961) © Singspiration Music  
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### **Prayers for Others:**

Lord, when we are frightened by the waters and the promised land seems so far away, grant us the courage to march straight ahead in the way you have told us to go. Help us to enter into the raging river in the confidence that you are with us and that you will cause the waters to part and allow us to pass through safely to the other side. Lord, hear our prayer.....

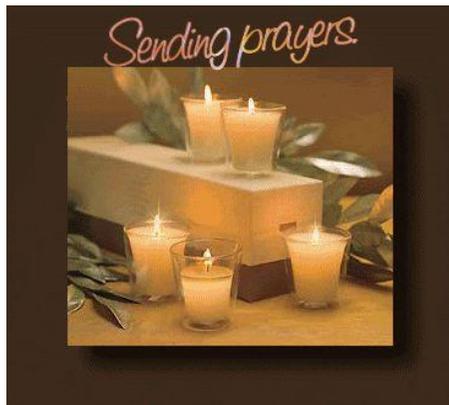
Hear our prayers, O God, this day, for all those situations in our lives that are conspiring together to prevent us from experiencing the fullness of the life that Jesus came to bring us. Hear not only our prayers for ourselves - but for those people in the world who are suffering this day because of the sin of this world -- for the children around the world who are hungry, for Christians around the world who are persecuted and for everyone suffering in their own wilderness.

We pray, Lord, now for those who are still on this side of the Jordan - for those whom we name in our hearts at this time....

Bring us all O God, safe to the other side - we ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour – Amen.

## HYMN: How great thou art.

- 1 O Lord my God!  
when I in awesome wonder  
Consider all  
the works Thy hand hath made,  
I see the stars,  
I hear the mighty thunder,  
Thy power throughout  
the universe displayed:  
*Then sings my soul,  
my Saviour God to Thee,  
How great Thou art!  
How great Thou art!  
Then sings my soul,  
my Saviour God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art!  
How great Thou art!*
- 2 When through the woods  
and forest glades I wander  
And hear the birds  
sing sweetly in the trees;  
When I look down  
from lofty mountain grandeur,  
And hear the brook,  
and feel the gentle breeze;
- 3 And when I think  
that God His Son not sparing,  
Sent Him to die-  
I scarce can take it in.  
That on the cross  
my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died  
to take away my sin:
- 4 When Christ shall come  
with shout of acclamation  
And take me home-  
what joy shall fill my heart!  
Then shall I bow  
in humble adoration  
And there proclaim,  
my God, how great Thou art!



### A sending out prayer

God of power and light,  
you have called us into light and  
friendship.

Send us, now, into more light,  
with more of the power of friendship.  
This love is the love at the heart of all  
things –  
that you call us friends.  
Empower us in this friendship, this  
power, this glory.  
Amen.

### Blessing

The blessing of God Almighty, the  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you  
and all whom you love, and to all whom  
you are called to love, this day and for  
evermore. **Amen.**

