

Sunday 10th January 2021

Order of Service

Welcome

Reading: Genesis 1:1-5

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 2 The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3 And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. 4 And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. 5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Hymn StF 136 Morning has broken

Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing
Praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word

Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlit from heaven
Like the first dew fall on the first grass
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden
Sprung in completeness where His feet pass

Mine is the sunlight
Mine is the morning
Born of the One Light Eden saw play
Praise with elation, praise every morning
God's recreation of the new day

Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing
Praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word

Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965)

Prayer

God, we come before you in worship to honour you and acknowledge that you are our Lord and we are your people. God of clean sheets and new beginnings, we come before

you while the year is in its infancy, knowing you want us to have a new beginning with you. We praise you that even though the year has barely begun, we can place our trust in you, because you have always been faithful in the past. We can confidently expect you to accompany us through all of our new experiences in the coming year. We have come before you this morning to listen to what you have to say to us. We have experienced your voice calming our fears and apprehensions in the past so we trust you with our future. Your voice is powerful and majestic. When we hear it we find strength to follow and we are blest and comforted.

Forgive us that we are so slow to believe, and fail to claim our place in your family. Forgive us because often our faith waivers and we fail to live the life you intended for us. When we catch a glimpse of your holiness, we find ourselves saying, 'depart from me Lord for I am a sinner', yet secretly we long for your hand of blessing to rest upon us and to know that we belong to you. Lord whatever our state is before you now, grant us a clean sheet and a new beginning. So that our praise and prayer may be acceptable to you, in Jesus name we pray. Amen

Hymn StF 158 Lord you sometimes speak in wonders.

Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders
unmistakable and clear;
mighty signs to prove your presence,
overcoming doubt and fear
O Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders

Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers,
still and small and scarcely heard;
only those who want to listen
catch the all-important word.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers

Lord, you sometimes speak in silence,
through our loud and noisy day:
we can know and trust you better
when we quietly wait and pray.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in silence,

Lord, you love to speak in Scripture:
words that summon from the page,
shown and taught us by your Spirit
with fresh light for every age
O Lord, you love to speak in Scripture:

Lord, you always speak in Jesus,
always new yet still the same;
teach us now more of our Saviour;
make our lives display his Name.
O Lord, you always speak in Jesus,

Christopher Idle

Reading: Mark 1:4-11

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness, and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ And he preached, saying, "After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Sermon: 'The word of God'. - Does God Speak

Sometimes I really sense God's presence in my life. I am truly aware that I am a child of God. On other occasions I long to hear God speak but I am simply aware of God's apparent absence. I then begin to wonder if it is I, or God, who has retreated. My wife and I say our prayers each morning at the breakfast table. We use 'Fresh from the word', and 'the Methodist prayer handbook' to help focus our attention. We add to these our own prayers about family and church, folk in need and issues in the world. Sometimes there are quiet moments where we listen out for what God might be telling us and we have a sense of God being present and directing us.

Many years ago I was with a Canadian minister who asked, 'What has God said to you this week?' He didn't want to hear my testimony, how God called me to faith. He expected me to have a contemporary experience of God; an ongoing conversation with God. It was a demanding question. I wonder if I have the right to expect God to speak to me daily, weekly or even annually.

A friend of mine often reminds me that God is very busy; 'She has a lot to do!' Why should she look after your every need? You can tell this friend is a woman, and with tongue in cheek believes God is a bit like her. Her parting shot is, 'You have no idea how busy God can get.'

I wonder what your experience of God is like. Do you hold frequent conversations with God? When you rise in the morning are your first thoughts to surrender the day into God's keeping? Do you listen for a word from God and do you hear God addressing you about the concerns of the day? Or maybe you go through the day offering up snippets of prayers relevant to the moment or situation you find yourself in and you simply have a sense of knowing God is present with you as you stick to the broad biblical principles of being loving, generous and kind.

I ask these questions, because in today's readings, God speaks. He says, 'Let there be light' and the cosmos hears and responds and that is the beginning of the first day. There was light and God saw that it was good.

In the gospel reading, the voice of God speaks to Jesus, 'You are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.' Jesus is about to embark on his ministry, and he hears God declaring his love for him. God is already pleased with him. What a tremendous blessing that was. It is the kind of affirmation that every child longs to have from a loving parent, especially as the child goes off to fulfil his or her calling or career. This is God speaking directly into a particular situation.

Wherever we look in the bible, God speaks to his people. God tells Abraham to leave the lush civilisation of the Ur of Chaldees and go to a land God would give him. God speaks to the Psalmist, (107:20.) His word heals in one psalm, (Psalm113:103) is sweeter than honey in another, and in a third (Psalm119:105) a lamp to our feet. God speaks to the Prophets, In Jeremiah 23:29 God declares 'Is not my word like a fire? And like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?' Both are powerful images. We have seen enough fire raging across the planet during the past year due to global warming, to know exactly what Jeremiah is talking about. The second image remains with me because of Nelson Mandela who was forced to go to the quarry daily to swing a sledge hammer to break up rocks. Both fire and hammer images, are an attempt by Jeremiah to describe the power of God's word as opposed to the word of the false prophets.

If we turn to the New Testament we find Jesus uses a much gentler picture for the word of God. It is a seed. (Luke 8:11). The word of God does not always rage like fire. It can be like a secret seed hidden inside and if it is nurtured, it grows secretly. There is no single way in which God speaks, a variety of metaphors are used. But speak he does. Have you heard his voice?

Desperate to hear from God, we may become too anxious to actually listen. That is Elijah's story. Overwhelmed by anxiety he headed for the holy mountain. Arriving there, still craving a word from God to defeat all that disturbed him, he looked for it in the earthquake wind and fire, only to be addressed by a still small voice.

The single most important thing if you want to hear God speak to you is to yearn to do the will of God. Jesus, in obedience went to John to be baptised. In one sense that seems all wrong. According to Matthew, John felt it was wrong. He felt unworthy

to baptise Jesus but Jesus subjected himself to that baptism to fulfil all righteousness in obedience to God.

Maybe we are more likely to hear God speak, if we are intent on putting ourselves in a position to respond to God's call, as Jesus did. He left the hills of Galilee and went down to the valley of the Jordan, expressly to be in a place where God would speak to him. Surely that is also a significant demonstration of how to hear the voice of God speak to us. Putting ourselves in a place where we give God our full attention. We begin to do this by carving out time to read the stories in scripture so that we can understand something of the nature of God. When God speaks we will know it is him, because it will reflect his loving and gentle nature.

So have I heard the voice of God recently? Well, you decide. I went rummaging in a draw on Friday, and happened to find an old journal of mine. I opened it and found myself engrossed in the prayer of Abandonment written by Charles de Foucauld. I had written it in the summer of 1999. The next day, while doing our morning prayers being led by a book of Celtic prayers from the Northumbrian community, I read the same prayer again. Then on Sunday morning during the Radio 4 worship, the prayer was read again. Oh! Was it just a co-incidence, or am I hard of hearing so God repeated something I needed to hear?

I wonder if you can recall times when God has definitely spoken to you. Do you still crave to hear his voice and feel that special sense of peace knowing that all is well? Of course you do, especially in the strange times in which we live. Well make a habit of sitting quietly in God's presence and wait. God will speak in a reassuringly gentle way and you will recognise his voice.

Hymn StF 666 Master speak thy servant heareth

Master, speak! Thy servant heareth,
Waiting for Thy gracious word,
Longing for Thy voice that cheereth
Master, let it now be heard.
I am listening, Lord, for Thee;
What hast Thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master,
Let me know it is to me;
Speak, that I may follow faster,
With a step more firm and free,

Where the Shepherd leads the flock
In the shadow of the Rock!

Master speak! and make me ready,
When Thy voice is truly heard,
With obedience glad and steady,
Still to follow every word
I am listening, Lord, for Thee:
Master, speak, oh, speak to me!

Frances Ridley Havergal (1834-1879)

Prayers of Intercession

We hold in God's light all the people across the globe who yearn for peace and unity. Praying especially for those areas of the world where peace is fragile, or where war rages or human rights denied.

We hold in God's light all who live with anxiety, fear, dread or despair. We pray for those who are struggling with the covid pandemic or those engaged in caring; the people who work in hospitals, care homes, or with families in need.

We hold in God's light our fragile planet. Praying for all who work for creation justice and who demonstrate, educate, or inform on ecological concerns.

We hold in God's light the poor and the persecuted, the migrant labourers and the refugees, praying for all who suffer because they have few physical resources to sustain them.

We hold in God's light those who have been bereaved, asking that they be comforted, and God will be their comforter.

God of light continue to enlighten and instruct your church to do your will so that the world may discern in us the message Jesus came to deliver to humankind.

Lords Prayer

Hymn StF 662 Have you heard God's voice

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?
Are you still prepared to follow?
Have you made a choice to remain and serve?
though the way be rough and narrow?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much?

and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you?
the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?
Will you make a choice to stand your ground?
when the crowds are turning violent?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much?
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you?
the disciples of tomorrow?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?
Will you listen to the voiceless?
Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?

Will you walk the path that will cost you much?
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to you?
the disciples of tomorrow?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith?
and believe it could be different?
Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?
Will you trust in One who entrusts to us?
the disciples of tomorrow.

Jacqueline G Jones

Blessing

Hymn StF 673 - Will you come and follow me

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?

Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known?
will you let my life be grown, in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus, I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

John L. Bell (b;1949) & Graham Maule (b.1958)