

BEING CHURCH



1. Discovering Fellowship



17 MAY, 2020

Good morning and welcome to Sunday worship! With the gentle easing of lock-down restrictions, Alexander Pope's words are like the light at the end of a tunnel: "*Hope springs eternal in the human breast; Man never Is, but always To be blest.*" (in *An Essay on Man*).

We continue our theme on Being Church and discover Fellowship. Listen to **THIS** music to focus on God whom have come to worship.

PRAYER *(inspired by Psalm 65)*

What mighty praise belongs to you O God! What joy for those you have gathered to worship you. We will fulfil our vows, for you answer our prayers; you faithfully answer our prayers with awesome deeds. As spring leads to summer, the grasslands become lush pasture, the valleys are carpeted with grain. Your creation, shouts and sings for joy! May our worship this morning, join in creations chorus of praise, O Lord, our God and our Master! **AMEN**

HYMN **From the Rising of the Sun**

READING **Psalm 61**

David wrote and sang this Psalm with the stringed instrument whose sound he loved so well. Psalm itself is very personal, the prayer of a man who is troubled for himself and his nation, imploring *God's protection forever (7)*.

O God, listen to me! Hear my prayer! For wherever I am, though far away at the ends of the earth, I will cry to you for help. When my heart is faint and overwhelmed, lead me to the mighty, towering Rock of safety. For you are my refuge, a high tower where my enemies can never reach me. I shall live forever in your tabernacle; oh, to be safe beneath the shelter of your wings! For you have heard my vows, O God, to praise you every day, and you have given me the blessings you reserve for those who reverence your name. You will give me added years of life, as rich and full as those of many generations, all packed into one. And I shall live before the Lord forever. Oh, send your loving-kindness and truth to guard and watch over me, and I will praise your name continually, fulfilling my vow of praising you each day.

HYMN **In Heavenly Love Abiding**

READING **Acts 2:36-48**

PRAYER **Let the words of THIS SONG prepare your heart this morning as we prepare to celebrate the life of Christ, by remembering Him in broken bread and poured out wine**

COMMUNION

Please have a slice of (any) bread and cup of juice, or water or wine (the bread, and the container and the drink does not matter because this is a simple ceremony of remembrance of the life of Christ)

Prayer: (read aloud or say together) Eternal God! You purposed in Your heart that we should never be alienated from you. You sent your Son to surrender His body to death, and then to defeat it through His resurrection. We break and eat this bread in memory of His sacrifice on the cross where He surrendered His broken body with the words, "It is finished". Death no longer has any hold on anyone who believes Jesus did this for us! (PAUSE and reflect on the purpose of God).

Loving Father! In You is life, eternal life. Jesus said He would not drink of the Cup until He returns in glory and majesty as King in Your Kingdom on earth. Thank you for this cup of HOPE, a reminder that what you have planned and purposed, will come true. We drink from this cup believing Your word, in anticipation of the day. AMEN

(PAUSE and reflect on the reality of Hope God has given us).

MESSAGE

The late Rev Canon John Stott¹ narrates this story.²

“Some time ago I came upon a fellow on a trip who was carrying a Bible.

‘Are you a believer?’ I asked him. “Yes,” he said excitedly.

I have learned however that you can’t be too careful...so I probed.

“Virgin birth?” I asked.

“I accept it,” was his reply.

“Deity of Jesus?”

“Absolutely!”

“Death of Christ on the cross?” “He died for all people.”

Could it be that I was face to face with a Christian? Perhaps. Nonetheless, I continued my checklist.

“Status of mankind?”

“Sinners in need of grace.”

“Definition of grace?”

“God doing for mankind what mankind can’t do for themselves.”

“Return of Christ?”

“Imminent.”

“Bible?”

“Inspired.”

“The church?”

“The body of Christ.”

I started getting excited.

“Conservative or Liberal?” He was getting interested too. “Conservative.”

My heart began to beat faster.

“Heritage?”

“Southern Congregationalist Holy Son of God
Dispensationalist Triune Convention.”

That was mine too!

“Branch?”

“Pre-millennial, post-tribulation, non-charismatic,
King James version, one-cup communion.”

My eyes began to get teary. I had only one more question.

“Is your pulpit wooden or fibreglass?”

“Fibreglass,” he responded.

I withdrew my hand, stiffened my neck and said, “Heretic!” and walked away.”

¹ Rector of All Souls Church, Langham Place. London (noted theologian and leader of the worldwide evangelical movement)

² taken from Max Lucado’s book, “A Gentle Thunder.”

Amidst the humour of the narrative, some of which might read like mumbo-jumbo, lurks the truth: the path of church history is littered with the wreckage of churches that once were alive & growing, with all the *proper* ingredients: programs, ministries, people & money, who somehow lost sight of their true calling and became mired in, “*if they are not like us, they cannot be part of us*”, which might explain why so many walked away saying, “*Forget Church. Who needs it anyway?*”, and also describe why so many people today say that they can arrive at their own religious views without any connection to a church.

Two years ago we examined “membership” and realised it was inappropriate to use the word in association with “Church”, as it better describes ones’ affiliation with clubs, societies and organisations, best described by American Express in the 1990s, “Membership has its privileges”!

At Pentecost we find the nascent Church discovering *fellowship*. Venturing out from Jerusalem into the Greek-speaking world, they took the word for *fellowship* from the Greek word for *generous* (the emphasis being on contributing or giving something for the benefit of someone else) to describe what was going on in Acts 2:37-47, ten verses which describe *Church*.

The Church started 10 days before Pentecost when the disciples returned to Jerusalem where they gathered and committed themselves to prayer (Acts 1:14 and 24) while waiting for the promised gift from the Father (1:4-5; 8), not knowing when that would be. They were in prayer (2:1) when the Holy Spirit came upon them like tongues of fire (2:3). God’s work begins ***in us*** when we are committed and united in prayer, seeking the will of God. Only then does the Holy Spirit manifests Himself and begins the work of God ***through us***.

Peter then opens the Word of God to the gathered crowds, explaining the historical record and connecting it with their present day events. They listen intently, taking in everything he said, such that “*Peter’s words pierced their hearts*” (2:37) and they responded, “*What shall we do?*”

Peter sets our response to the question: repent of your misunderstanding of God and His Word which led you to live life outside of His ordered world. Get to know God through His Word and *be baptised in the Name of Jesus for the*

forgiveness of sins (2:38), i.e. surrender your past, and embark on a new journey with Christ at your side, and the Holy Spirit as your guide!

Fellowship follows naturally! The foundation of Christ's Church, the invisible part, is a commitment to prayer, reading, listening and understanding the Word of God, and *fellowship* is the visible building blocks, growing on and held together by prayer (2:42).

Fellowship, which is being together and enjoying each other's company based on a common faith, is one side of the coin; it cannot function by itself. *Fellowship* goes hand-in-hand with *hospitality*, which is the sharing of everything we have received from the hand of God. So we learn, the Apostles and all who professed a new life in Christ, met in one place [*fellowship*] and shared everything they had [*hospitality*] (2:44).

During this period of compulsory lockdown, we hear news of God working in the hearts of people, bringing them closer to Him and closer to each other ... ***in that order***. Not only are families discovering things about themselves they never knew before, it is happening in Churches in significant ways: people are having meaningful "God-conversations" and discovering, their understanding of Him was wrong. People are learning, although it is difficult to discern and know why God does, sometimes allows certain things, and what He achieves through it, everything about God gives life, offers light and is bathed by His love!

Recent research conducted by the Christian relief & development agency, Tearfund reveals, "*prayer is a vital part of life for the public, with just under half of UK adults (44%) saying they pray, and among those who pray a third (33%) say that they have prayed since the COVID-19 lockdown because they believe it makes a difference.*"³

What a great and wonderful opportunity for us the Church to open our doors to meet and *fellowship* with such people, and to extend our *hospitality* to them! Everything we have comes from the hand of God. He has blessed us even before we asked Him to! He has blessed us because He first loved us. God wants us to enjoy His blessings, but when His blessings fill our cup, pressed

³ Based on a new nationwide poll of 2,101 UK adults by Savanta ComRes online between 24th and 27th April 2020. Data were weighted to be nationally representative of all UK adults by key demographic characteristics including age, gender, region and social grade.

down, shaken together to make room for more, and overflowing, what a privilege to share the blessings of God in our care (Luke 6:38)

God has blessed us to be a friendly and welcoming Church. Let's take the next step and be the Church He wants us to be, a Church in which every members extends hospitality, sharing the blessings God has given them. Shall we dare to dream and make this come true? **AMEN**

LISTEN

Brother, Sister let me serve you

PRAYER

Loving Father! Thank you for Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Saviour who gathered us as Church, a community of special people whose life is undergirded by Your Kingdom's values. May we be the Church ready and prepared when Christ will return as the Head of Your Kingdom on earth, and discover to our joy, the life we have been living, is the life you want us live in eternity! In the Name of Jesus, whose return we await. **AMEN**

HYMN

Make me a channel of Your peace

BENEDICTION

"The Blessing UK"

PLEASE READ THIS BEFORE PLAYING THE BLESSING

At this unique and challenging time in the United Kingdom over 65 churches and movements, representing hundreds of others, have come together online to sing a blessing over our land. Standing together as one, our desire is that this song will fill you with hope and encourage you.

But the church is not simply singing a blessing, each day we're looking to practically be a blessing. Many of the churches included in this song have assisted with supplying over 400,000 meals to the most vulnerable and isolated in our nation since COVID-19 lockdown began. This alongside phone calls to the isolated, pharmacy delivery drops and hot meals to the NHS frontline hospital staff.

Our buildings may be closed but the church is very much alive!

As you prepare tea/coffee/juice and fellowship together, read the article in Premier Christianity magazine below and be encouraged with God's work in our land.

Opinion - 12th May 2020.

**Here's why The UK Blessing is making everyone so emotional
(see attached sheet)**

From the rising of the sun

To the going down of the same, The name of the Lord shall be praised.
From the rising of the sun, To the going down of the same,
The name of the Lord shall be praised.

Praise ye the Lord! Praise ye the Lord!
From the rising of the sun, To the going down of the same;
The name of the Lord shall be praised.

1 In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear:
and safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here:
the storm may roar around me, my heart may low be laid;
my Father's arms surround me, how can I be afraid?

2 Wherever he may guide me no want shall turn me back;
my shepherd is beside me and nothing can I lack:
his wisdom is for ever, his sight is never dim;
his love deserts me never and I will walk with him.

3 Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will shine with glory where threatening clouds have been:
my hope I cannot measure, my path to life is free;
my saviour has my treasure, and he will walk with me.

Jubilate Hymns version of In heavenly love abiding Anna L Waring (1823 - 1910)

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Make me a channel of Your peace

Where there is hatred, let me bring Your love
Where there is injury, Your pardon Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in You
Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness, ever joy

Oh Master, grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of Your peace
It is pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving to all men that we receive
And in dying that we're born to eternal life

Oh Master, grant that I may never seek

Make me a channel of Your peace
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

Here's why The UK Blessing is making everyone so emotional

The viral worship sensation is moving many to tears. Kate Patterson, author of The Promise of Blessing, explains why she believes the video is having such a profound effect on people

Over two million people have now watched The UK Blessing video. Social media saw streams of comments describing how emotional they became when they saw it. A friend asked, "Why so much sobbing?" Fair question. Why has this resonated so widely?

Is it because we have begun to see how much we need God's blessing? We're living through a global crisis. Too many have lost loved ones. Some have lost jobs or businesses. The future ahead is rocky economically and the threat of Covid-19 still hangs over us.

Perhaps this Blessing song has struck a chord because it reminds us that we can turn to God and that his nature is to bless us – even though we don't deserve it. Many people think God is harsh; they don't know that he longs to make his face shine upon us.

Recently, I was in a long Sainsbury's queue, chatting to a lonely old chap, who asked, "Why did God send coronavirus?" The question of why a good, loving, all powerful God allows suffering is a question which stabs us every time we see a hungry child or a woman enslaved or a refugee drown. It's the question that hit our family when my beloved husband died suddenly of a heart attack a few years ago.

The blessing of Numbers 6 reassures us that God's intent is to bless us. I loved discovering that this is the only Old Testament blessing given directly by God himself. That shows us that blessing is God's idea. After all, his story is a story of blessing. What's the first thing that God does after creating Adam and Eve? What's the last thing that Jesus does before ascending to heaven? It's all about blessing.

Genesis tells us that everything went wrong when we rejected God and threw aside blessing for the curse. Yet still our loving God refused to give up on his

blessing plan! If I was him, I'd have ditched this world and started again. But God loves us. So at inestimable cost, Christ took the curse of sin on the cross, to remove all that separates us from knowing his face shining on us. Now we can know God near, whatever we face. It means that me and my boys can know God is for us in our grief, promising to hold us and bring us through until all is joy.

The very first hearers of the Numbers blessing were God's people in the desert, facing an uncertain journey ahead. God gave them the blessing as his promise that he would see them through it, he would keep them, he would make his face shine upon them and give them peace. As our world faces an uncertain future, that promise is for us.

I was one of those who sobbed when I first saw The UK Blessing. Why? Because I believe that heaven opens when churches unite to pray and align with the heart of God to bless. Look at the news and you despair; pray down God's blessing and you are filled with hope. This blessing is a gift for us to pray - don't worry if you prefer John Rutter's version or no music at all - what matters is that we pray down God's blessing over our homes, our nation and our world.

We need not fear an infectious virus because we have infectious blessing! That excites me because God always blesses us to make us a blessing. Blessing is how he writes his name, his character across his people (Numbers 6:27). He is making us a blessing – not only practically with our neighbours but as we share the ultimate blessing of knowing him.

Secularism offers little comfort in a global crisis. That's why Google searches for "prayer" and online church attendance have rocketed. The word "unprecedented" has been thrown around a lot recently by politicians - we in the Church have an unprecedented opportunity to share Christ. So, let's pray down blessing but let's not stop there. We are called to be God's blessing in a suffering world; we offer an eternal hope which will never fade.

Kate Patterson is a speaker and author of [The Promise of Blessing](#) and [The Gift of Blessing](#). Read more at giftofblessingtrust.org