

Barthol Chapel and Tarves Sunday 1 November 2020

Worship Materials



Introduction

In the Church calendar this Sunday is All Saints Day. In the Bible the followers of Jesus are frequently referred to as the saints. Sainthood in this context is not a “reward” for good living but a status conferred on followers of Jesus who experience God’s blessing as they seek to love God and their neighbours.

Praise CH4 742

1. Rejoice in God’s saints, today and all days
A world without saints forgets how to praise
Their faith in acquiring the habit of prayer
Their depth of adoring, Lord, help us to share.
2. Some march with events to turn them God’s way;
Some need to withdraw the better to pray
Some carry the Gospel through fire and through flood.
Our world is their parish; their purpose is God.
3. Rejoice in those saints, unpraised and unknown
Who bear someone’s cross, or shoulder their own:
They share our complaining, our comfort, our cares:
What patience is ours
What courage is theirs!
4. Rejoice in God’s saints, today and all days
A world without saints forgets how to praise
In living, in loving, they prove it is true:
Their way of self-giving, Lord leads us to you.

Prayer of Approach

Lord's Prayer (You might like to unmute yourself for this and remute afterwards)

The Word of God: Revelation 7:9-17

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, singing, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?' I said to him, 'Sir, you are the one that knows.' Then he said to me, 'These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'

Reflection

For me one of the hardest things about the last few months has been the ban on singing. To the musicians among you, who know that I can barely keep a tune let alone a key that may come as a surprise. But just because I'm a terrible singer that does not mean to say I don't enjoy singing. And that is especially true when it comes to worship. And I know I'm not alone.

When I meet people in the street and they ask me when Sunday services are going to begin again I know that what they mean is not when will the simple masked, physically distanced act of worship that we have on a Wednesday in Tarves Kirk take place on a Sunday. The question that they are really asking is when can we get back to Church as we know it. And that includes singing those great hymns through which we and so many generations before us have expressed our faith. And perhaps even some of the newer hymns too!

In the Church of Scotland we have a hymn book full of songs of worship – from lament to thanksgiving, from adoration to confession – these hymns cover the whole gamut of human emotion. Some of these songs, like the psalms and the old Scottish paraphrases have stood the test of time. They date back centuries, millenia even. Other hymns have come and gone - their imagery and words more fitting to a particular generation or

situation. But at the heart of all these songs is the one song that endures forever and that is the song of God's love and grace. Whether we are lamenting or giving thanks or expressing our adoration or even seeking forgiveness, there is one anthem that runs through all true worship and that is God's song of love for the world.

It is this song which resounds throughout the bible from the dawning of creation in Genesis to the end of time in Revelation. And it encompasses people of all times and all places. From kings to commoners, from prophets to visionaries, from commanders of armies to young migrant workers, from friends to strangers, – the song of God's love and grace touches us all – if we will but hear it.

Earlier in our bible reading from the Book of Revelation we heard this love song expressed in an outpouring of worship in heaven when the author sees a vision of the future. In that vision there is a cast of thousands, a great multitude of saints dressed in white standing before the throne of God. They are waving their palm branches and crying out

Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne and to the Lamb -

And their worship echoes around the vaults of heaven.

The Book of Revelation is different from all the other books of the New Testament. Its author, John, is a visionary. He is not concerned with the careful passing on of oral tradition about Jesus and the significance of his life and mission, as the Gospel writers are. Nor is he making a reasoned argument about some aspect of the Christian faith as Paul and the other New Testament authors do in their letters. The book of Revelation demands that we engage our imaginations when we read it.

That does not mean that we should approach the Book of Revelation with our brains totally out of gear. And the first thing we have to recognise is the context from which this Book comes to us. Much of the imagery of Revelation reflects the people's experience of the cruel and harsh abuse they suffered at the hands of those who held the reins of power. As a result the language is violent and disruptive. Earthquake. Thunder and Lightning. Hail. Fire. War. Blood! Torture! These images are frightening and disorientating. They are meant to be – they flow from, they address, the terrifying experiences of early Christian martyrs.

But what happens in the Book of Revelation is that these grim and terrifying images are interrupted repeatedly by pictures of heaven. And we see the great crowd gathered around the throne of God. And we hear the song of God's love and grace breaking through into the darkest of places. And this song is a song of victory. And this song cannot and will not be silenced. Not even death can end it. Beyond the cross and the empty tomb, God's love song continues. Time and again the author of the Book of Revelation sounds the comforting notes of a deeper hope that endures forever.

But the saints in John's vision are not only singing – they are also listening. If you have ever sung in a choir you will know how important it is to listen – to listen to the music, to listen to those around you, to listen to what you yourself are singing. I was speaking with our own musicians last week and they were saying how difficult it was to sing on their own to record the hymns for our Zoom services. Normally as well as singing they would be listening for the person standing next to them. The listening is as important as the singing.

In John's vision the saints are listening. They are listening as well as singing. And when for any reason their voices just will not or cannot sound they listen – they listen as the choir of angels and elders sings for them

Blessing and glory and wisdom

And thanksgiving and honour

And power and might

Be to our God forever and ever!

Amen

And as the saints sing and as they listen, the harmony of God's song of love lifts them up, unites them in worship and will not let them go. And they are reminded once again that through the One who sits on the throne, the future is secure. And God **is** wiping away every tear from their eyes. Saints may still succumb to hunger and thirst. The scorching sun may still burn. Persecution and poverty, plague and pestilence may come and go, but God's song feeds all the saints with a hope that is eternal, a hope that breaks through even the deathliest of silences with the whisper of life.

Today as we gather to worship we are just as aware as the early Christian saints were of the difference between the world as it is and the world as it should be. We come with our questions and our doubts. We come with all the concerns and sorrows that the week just gone has laid upon our shoulders. We come burdened by our own weaknesses. We come not knowing what challenges lie ahead of us in this new week. But still we come to worship.

Whether we raise our voices in the privacy of our own homes joining our voices to the voices of all God's saints. Or whether feel we can at this time only listen, we still gather to hear the song that breaks into the routine of our lives, offering us forgiveness, promising new life and hope. And when the time comes to leave this sacred space we will leave with God's song in our hearts, ready to engage with the world.

As Christians we have a song with a message. It may not be the most popular. But I believe that it is the most enduring and inspiring and life-transforming song in the world. Because it is God's song of faith and hope and love. May God help us, and all God's saints, to listen to and to sing that song throughout our lives, in word and deed, in sound and silence.

Pointers for Prayer

- Those suffering from or bereaved by the corona virus
- Those who have lost a loved one for other reasons during the pandemic
- The NHS as Covid-19 numbers rise
- The governments in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland and their advisers
- University students and staff
- Businesses struggling and all who are facing redundancy and financial hardship
- Family, friends and neighbours, those most affected by the increased restrictions
- Our friends at Udney Pitmedden as they welcome their new minister Rev Gert Janse van Rensburg
- The United States as they vote in and await the outcome of the presidential elections.

Praise CH4 561 Blessed Assurance

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine
 O what a foretaste of glory divine
 Heir of salvation, purchase of God
 Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood

*This is my story, this is my song
 Praising my Saviour all the day long
 This is my story, this is my song
 Praising my Saviour all the day long*

Perfect submission, perfect delight

Visions of rapture burst on my sight
 Angels descending bring from above
 Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

Perfect submission, all is at rest
 I in my Saviour am happy and blessed
 Watching and waiting, looking above
 Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.

Blessing

Notices

Next Sunday 8 November Remembrance Sunday

9.30am Act of Remembrance at the War Memorial at Barthol Chapel

10.00am Joint Worship on Zoom (Service commences 10.15am) If you would like to be added to the e-mail list for the link to Sunday's live worship gathering on zoom or join in on your land-line please contact: Rob e-mail sessionclerk@bartholchapel.org or Susanna Tel 851345 or e-mail smbichard@aol.com. Please note there will be a different link for this service which will be sent out earlier.

11.00am Join in national silence outside our own doors.

Later this week nets will be erected behind the war memorials and over the weekend people can place a poppy on the net as a mark of respect. During the week too the roll of honour will be read and wreaths laid – we hope to film this for the community facebook page.

Wednesday Worship Tarves Church 2.00pm a short act of worship in the Church.

Wednesday 4 November 7.30pm on Zoom Barthol Chapel Board and Session

Thursday 5 November Community Bible Experience 4.00pm when we will be discussing discoveries we make on reading Obadiah and Ezekiel.

Care in the Community if you are aware of anyone in Tarves who needs help of any kind please contact Ruth 851887. If you are aware of anyone in Barthol Chapel please contact James Hepburn 806611.

Pastoral Care If you would like to speak to the minister please contact Rev Dr Alison Swindells 851295.