

6th September 2020

Sunday Worship

Part 1, Worship

Around the world today there will be millions, indeed billions, of Christians taking part in Worship – but what does that really mean?

A friend of mine, who is not a regular churchgoer, told me that one of the main reasons that he doesn't go is because he struggles with the concept of worship. I think that to him, it conjures up the image of an earthly despot, who expects his subjects to come grovelling at his feet and tell him how wonderful he is.

The author of the 'Every Day with Jesus' bible notes, Selwyn Hughes, recently spent a few days considering what worship is. He mentioned that the word comes from the process of considering the worth of something, assessing its value. In our worship we take time to remind ourselves of the value to us of our relationship with God. We remember all the joy and comfort available to us, in and through that relationship. Selwyn then went on to consider that our worship is actually a two-way process – as well as remembering our love for God, we are also reminded of his love for us.

The words which Selwyn writes are

“There is no receiving without giving, and as we go through the door of giving ourselves to God in worship, we find that God comes through that same door and gives himself to us. The demand which God may appear to make in insisting that we worship Him is not a demand at all but is an offer – an offer to share himself with us in a personal way. It is what Martin Luther described as ‘the joyful exchange’”.

What a wonderful and amazing thing it is that when we come to worship, far from coming as subjects, we come as God's own children. Through our worship, we can receive so much more than we could ever give.

Part 2 – Readings (read by Val)

The Lectionary readings for today include...

1, The Collect - Grant us, O Lord, to trust in you with all our hearts; for, as you always resist the proud who confide in their own strength, so you never forsake those who make their boast of your mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

2, The first few verses of Psalm 149...Praise the Lord!

Sing a new song to the Lord; praise him in the assembly of his faithful people!

Be glad, Israel, because of your Creator; rejoice, people of Zion, because of your king!

Praise his name with dancing; play drums and harps in praise of him

3, A Reading from Romans 18... Loving Others Is the Only Law

You should owe nothing to anyone, except that you will always owe love to each other. The person who loves others has done all that the law commands.

The law says, "You must not commit adultery, you must not murder anyone, you must not steal, you must not want what belongs to someone else." All these commands and all other commands are really only one rule: "Love your neighbour the same as you love yourself."

Love doesn't hurt others. So loving is the same as obeying all the law.

4, and a few verses from Matthew 18...I am there with you

To say it another way, if two of you on earth agree on anything you pray for, my Father in heaven will do what you ask.

Yes, if two or three people are together believing in me, I am there with them."

Part 3 – Relationships

On the fairly infrequent occasions when we go out for meals, there is always that dilemma of what to choose. There are usually so many tempting options to choose from. I'd not expected the same dilemma when looking at the lectionary page for today – but indeed there are several interesting options. Even the Collect is quite interesting with its reminder of how foolish we are if we rely on our own strength, when God is so willing to help those who call upon him.

There are two Old Testament readings, from Exodus and Ezekiel, each with an accompanying Psalm. There are interesting New Testament readings from Paul's letter to the Romans and the Gospel of Matthew.

Hopefully, you will excuse me for choosing a little of each! The Old Testament readings, one from the start and the other from near the end, are very different and yet in both there is the underlying story, which appears so often in the Old Testament, of God trying find a way to establish and maintain a satisfactory relationship with his chosen people. Whatever he tries, they always seem to end up wandering off and doing the wrong things!

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he reminds Jesus' followers of the importance of our relationships with those around us. Our relationship with our neighbours – whether they be our neighbours where we live, or neighbours where we work, or neighbours in the various activities that we get involved in.

You may have seen mention of a piece recently written by a police officer who attended an incident in St Ives where a motorist was taken ill. The recurring theme he uses is 'I Stand In Awe Of You' and it lists the various people who went out of their way to help – the van driver who pulled over to check all was OK and raised the alarm, the passing motorists who stopped and administered CPR, the family who looked after the motorist's young child etc. It was a great example of people behaving caringly to those around them and a reminder of what a better place this world would be if all of us could be relied on to always do the right thing.

In a similar vein - many of us are very grateful to our fellow church members here, who have done such a good job of phoning, visiting and helping others during recent months.

The reading from Romans urges us to "owe nothing to anyone, except that you will always owe love to each other. The person who loves others has done all that the law commands." And it goes on to urge us to love those around us just as much as we love ourselves.

Moving on to the reading from Matthew's gospel, there is the familiar, but still rather startling, statement that when two or three are gathered in my name, there I am amongst them. It surely indicates just how keen God is to get close to all those who want to get close to him.

It does seem that relationships are a very important part of creation – our relationship with God and our relationships with those around us. We are each an individual, with our own individual relationship with God, although, through our church, we also have a shared relationship with God which is also important to him and should be important to us. Through other groups we belong to, we may have other shared relationships with God.

Most relationships go through good times and not such good times. Sometimes it seems so hard to find the time and effort required to keep those relationships strong and healthy. The reading from Psalm 149 urges us to keep our relationship with God fresh and alive.

“Sing a new song to the Lord “ it urges and “Praise his name with dancing “. So how about we try to bring a bit more life, a bit more singing and dancing into our relationship with God!

On the day that I started to think about what I was going to write/say for this service, the Every Day With Jesus reading was from Psalm 42 and the particular verse which was highlighted was ‘As the deer pants for the water so my soul pants after you.’ The short prayer at the end of that day’s notes was

Father God, give me the blessing of a panting heart I pray. I am thirsty to know you better. Take my willingness and lead me into a deeper and more intimate relationship with you than I have ever experienced before. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Is that a prayer which we are willing to pray?

I think there is an obvious song for us to listen to next (and maybe join in with)...

Part 4 – Intercessions (written and read by Chris and Alan)

And we join together as God's body, though physically scattered, we are one in spirit as we offer our prayers of intercession. Let us pray.

By our lives and through our prayers, your kingdom come

In a time of great uncertainty and unrest throughout our world, we pray for those places where fear and uncertainty are even greater than here. Where our brothers and sisters desperately need to feel the touch of a neighbour and the assurance of God's love.

By our lives and through our prayers, your kingdom come

We pray for your church throughout the world and give thanks that technology enables us to keep in touch in difficult times. We pray for all who work and witness in our church as we work towards a smooth reopening so we can once again become that beacon of your light in this town.

By our lives and through our prayers, your kingdom come

We pray for our families and for our wider church community particularly those that are unwell at this time. Give them strength to face each day with the power of your spirit within them.

By our lives and through our prayers, your kingdom come

And finally, we pray for ourselves as we try to live out your gospel in our daily lives and in whatever way we are able. Grant us strength and peace for the journey.

By our lives and through our prayers, your kingdom come

Amen

Part 5 – Blessing (read by Rob)

Heavenly Father, bless each of us today and throughout the coming weeks. Lead us, guide us, protect us and inspire us, we pray.

Bless all the people and activities of our church. Guide our church into the future you want it to have.

Help us to enjoy and to celebrate all the joy and blessings which come from our relationship with you.

In Jesus name, Amen