

Teddington Circuit Worship at Home Sheet

Sunday 28th June 2020

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. If you are well enough why not spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you. With thanks to Vicci Davidson, Joyce Pegg, Lynne Tucker, Jill Harker and the Connexional team for their contributions.

Open by pouring a glass of water:

Here and now
God welcomes us
Welcomes our hands, welcomes our hearts
Welcomes our thoughts, welcomes our voices
Giving us cold water for our thirst
And showering us with blessings

Hymn: Open the eyes of my heart Lord (STF 451)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=do_wLvINO4M

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord,
Open the eyes of my heart;
I want to see you, I want to see you.
Open the eyes of my heart, Lord,
Open the eyes of my heart;
I want to see you, I want to see you.*

To see you high and lifted up,
Shining in the light of your glory.
Pour out your power and love;
As we sing holy, holy, holy.

Refrain

To see you.....

Holy, holy, holy,
Holy, holy, holy,
Holy, holy, holy,
I want to see you.

Let us pray together

Creator God, I praise you for the beauty of the world that you have made, for richness of texture, colour and form in nature, and for the caring communities around me. Forgive me when I fail to be thankful for the good things in my life.

God is full of grace and mercy; I receive his forgiveness and his love. Amen.

Today's Gospel Reading: Matthew 10.40-42

Time to Reflect

Whether we have all had breakfast this morning or not, I am certain we will all have used water in some form or another (*to drink, make a drink, to wash or whatever!*).

Jesus says that a cup of water given in his name will receive its reward. Later in Matthew's gospel in the story we call the "sheep and the goats" we read Jesus berating those who did nothing to help others, but to those who helped their neighbour he says "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." Even a simple thing like the offer of a cup of clean water!

Water, a necessity for our very existence, which is why we still hear today of women and girls walking long distances each day to reach water with which to cook and clean for their families. You only have to go to the Water Aid website to see such pictures, and also to see dreadful pictures of children drinking from rivers where the water is far from safe, probably riddled with disease. Yes water, which we so easily take for granted, is a basic necessity for life. Man can live for many days without food, but not without water.

Water plays a very significant part in many stories in both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament Moses was confronted with how to provide water for the thousands he was leading through the Wilderness. At one point they were desperate and Moses asked God for help. He was told to strike a rock and out gushed enough water sufficient to satisfy the thirsty people, for a while anyway.

Naaman, with leprosy, was sent to Elisha and is shown the healing properties of water. The man, languishing by the Pool of Bethesda, is hoping to access the healing properties of the water when Jesus meets with him and heals him without the need for him to reach the water.

Jesus asks for water from a Samaritan woman and she gets a lesson in what water can truly mean. Jesus says to her, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." As Jesus describes water, it is not just providing basic nourishment and healing, but an enrichment of life, a new life in Christ.

Jesus seems to be saying that offering that cup of water to another is not just a simple act of basic hospitality but a significant offer of a new life in Christ.

Genesis 22:1-14

Although this story is consistently held up as a demonstration of Abraham's extraordinary love for God and preparedness to obey him in everything, however hard, it is difficult to read the story through today's eyes and not feel uncomfortable. We may all perhaps, be able to point to something that God has asked us to sacrifice, but even the rich young man who came to Jesus and was told to sell everything was only asked to sacrifice what was his to give. Isaac did not belong to Abraham; Isaac belonged to Isaac and at the point at which he was prepared to become a follower of God, then yes, he belonged to God but still it would be his decision to obey God and not Abraham's.

There is a conventional reading of this story. It speaks of a love for God that is so great that Abraham is prepared to sacrifice his only son – the one gift he had thought he would never be given. In Abraham's thoughts, God had made Isaac happen and God had the right to request him back. We, with our understanding of what God went on to do in sacrificing his son, might be happy with that interpretation.

Nevertheless, there is a different reading. I wonder if the story could be more truly told something like this:

After these things, Abraham began to question what God might want of him in return. All of the surrounding tribes practised child sacrifice. They worshipped fertility gods and believed that to keep the crops coming they needed to sacrifice the most valuable thing they had – their first-born son. Abraham could not believe that anything less would be required of him and so they went off, father and son and two servants, to the mountains. Isaac kept wondering what was to be sacrificed and Abraham kept saying that God himself would provide a lamb,

because of course, in Abraham's mind, God had. God had given him Isaac and now he was giving Isaac back to God. In the thinking of those days, that was a totally understandable thing to do. In fact later on in Leviticus and Deuteronomy there are a number of laws forbidding child sacrifice and human sacrifice in general. In Psalm 106:37 we see human sacrifice denounced as the barbaric custom of Baal worshippers. None of these laws and diktats would have been necessary if human sacrifice had not been a feature of the understanding of the time.

Every time God spoke into Abraham's heart saying "Don't do this Abraham", Abraham thought he was being tested because of course he didn't want to do it. And in the end the only way God could get through to him was shouting at him.

The Hebrew word for angel means "messenger". We can't know at this distance in time whether that was the Holy Spirit speaking in Abraham's heart and finally being heard, a heavenly angel shouting aloud or a human messenger who was able to make Abraham believe that they were speaking for God. Whichever it was, Abraham needed God to make good on the promise that he has made on God's behalf, that a sacrifice will be provided. The Lord gives him a ram caught in a thicket – not really his to sacrifice, but then neither was Isaac.

Over two thousand years later, God sacrificed his only Son in an echo of verse 8 ("God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son"). The world might have changed, but a child was still the most treasured thing that anyone had. God sacrificed his for us.

The Good News in the Abraham and Isaac story is not that Abraham loved God so much that he was prepared to murder his only child as an indication of that love, but that God, refusing to allow it, nevertheless was prepared to do it himself. "God so loved that world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

There is one fundamental difference though. Abraham was prepared to remove Isaac's agency and treat him as a possession over which he had the right to make such a decision. We cannot condemn him overmuch for this – it is how things were understood in his day. However, this is not how God treated Jesus who was and is God. His agency was never removed, he had a choice until the last moment when he gave his spirit into the hands of the Father. Ultimately,

Abraham's sacrifice was faithful but not his to make, but God's gift was self-sacrificial love for you, for me, for the world.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Let us pray for the church, for the world and for ourselves.

Loving God,
We pray for your guidance and wisdom as your church finds new ways of reaching out into the world with the good news of your generous love and forgiveness. Gift leaders with the innovation and inspiration that comes from your Holy Spirit so that your church may be more effective witnesses of your saving grace.

Lord Jesus, as the world continues to suffer the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic, we pray for compassion and fairness in sharing practical resources and medical expertise so that there might be healing and wholeness for all.

We pray that all those who have influence over the lives of others, might make decisions based on kindness and for the common good. We pray Holy Spirit that you infuse with love the hearts of those who use war as a weapon of power. Hear our prayers for an end to all conflict, and for recognition and support to be given to refugees and displaced people around the world.

Compassionate Christ, we pray for comfort and strength for those who are still isolated, for parents and children, for the elderly and those suffering long term illness. Lord, lift anxiety from those who are worried about the future, their jobs, businesses and their financial situation. May they know that they are not alone, that Jesus is always with them.

Holy Spirit we pray for ourselves, for our plans that have been changed, for the people we have lost and miss still, for our hopes and dreams for the future. Strengthen our faith, deepen our commitment to your ways and help us to better serve God and to see Jesus in everyone we meet.

Thank you Lord that you that your love never fails.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to Amazing Grace

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZoJz2SANTyo

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

Receive these words into your heart.

Jesus opens his arms to welcome and accept you, whoever you are and whatever your circumstances. Open your heart and your hands to receive him now, and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and those whom you love, now and always. Amen.

Original Materials by Claire Hargreaves

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