

Worship Service for Sunday 13th September - Education Sunday

This morning's Service has been prepared by Rev. Tony Barnes who will be preaching at Christchurch Marlborough this morning, but now, as usual, you are invited to switch off your telephone and then, when you are ready, perhaps light a candle, listen to a piece of music and have a moment of silence as you focus on God before using this sheet. Our hope and prayer is that God will bless you as we at Pewsey continue for now to worship him in our own homes, but together. Isolated, but not alone.

We take time to relax and in the quiet to remember our sisters and brothers in Christ, in the fellowship of our own church family, and the wider communion of all the saints.

We rest in God, in a few moments of silence.

This is the day the Lord has made,
God calls the day his own;
let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,
and praise surround the throne.

Today Christ rose and left the dead,
the powers of darkness fell;
today Christ's triumphs now we spread,
and gospel wonders tell.

Today the Spirit came in power
in Pentecostal flame;
today as in that promised hour,
disciples praise God's name.



Isaac watts (1674-1748)

altered, with v. 3 by Norman Wallwork (b. 1946)

Prayers of Adoration, Thanksgiving and Confession

Loving God, beyond all time and closer to us than breathing, we praise you. You came to us in Jesus, revealing the power of your compassion and love, your truth and your nature, which wholly and ceaselessly gives of yourself. You come to us in the presence of the Holy Spirit, leading us to Jesus Christ, realising in us his ministry of compassion, his self-giving on the Cross and Resurrection life in the world, empowering us to serve, granting us precious gifts, producing the fruits of the Spirit, keeping us in your presence, remaining ever faithful to us. We give you thanks. We worship you.

We are sorry for the things we have done and shouldn't have done, for the things we have said and now wish we hadn't, the things we thought and now regret, for the acts of kindness and duty left undone. The damage has been done, the time has passed and it's too late now to make reparation, yet your healing knows no limits of time or space. Thank you that our failures in love do not define us but rather your loving creation of us and mercy towards us. In the knowledge of your forgiveness we step into the future trusting you to make us whole.

Gracious God, like a mother you give us new life, and make us your children in Jesus Christ. Look on us in your love, and bring us to the inheritance which you promised. Grant this through Jesus Christ, your Son. **Amen**

Reading: Psalm 119: 41-48, 64.

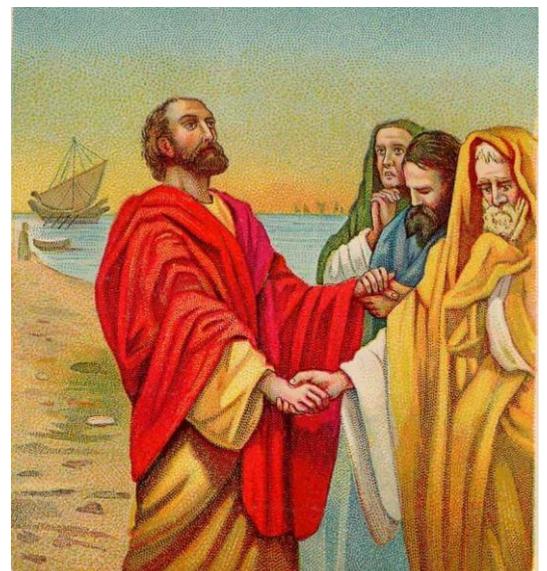
⁴¹ Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord,
your salvation according to your promise.
⁴² Then I shall have an answer for those who taunt me,
for I trust in your word.
⁴³ Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
for my hope is in your ordinances.
⁴⁴ I will keep your law continually,
for ever and ever.
⁴⁵ I shall walk at liberty,
for I have sought your precepts.
⁴⁶ I will also speak of your decrees before kings,
and shall not be put to shame;
⁴⁷ I find my delight in your commandments,
because I love them.
⁴⁸ I revere your commandments, which I love,
and I will meditate on your statutes.
⁴ The earth, O Lord, is full of your steadfast love;
teach me your statutes.

Hymn: Stf 416 There's a Wideness in God's Mercy *Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)*
(Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words)

Reading: Acts 20:17-38

¹⁷ From Miletus Paul sent a message to Ephesus, asking the elders of the church to meet him. ¹⁸When they came to him, he said to them: 'You yourselves know how I lived among you the entire time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, ¹⁹servicing the Lord with all humility and with tears, enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews. ²⁰I did not shrink from doing anything helpful, proclaiming the message to you and teaching you publicly and from house to house, ²¹as I testified to both Jews and Greeks about repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus. ²²And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, ²³except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. ²⁴But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace.

²⁵ 'And now I know that none of you, among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom, will ever see my face again. ²⁶Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, ²⁷for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God* that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.* ²⁹I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. ³¹Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears. ³²And now I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. ³³I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing. ³⁴You know for yourselves that I worked with my own hands to support myself and my companions. ³⁵In all this I have given you an



example that by such work we must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, for he himself said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." '

36 When he had finished speaking, he knelt down with them all and prayed. ³⁷There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, ³⁸grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship.

Hymn: StF 503 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling Charles Wesley (1707–1788)
(Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words)

Reading from the Gospel: Mark 8:27-38

²⁷Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" ²⁸And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."



Reflection:

As I studied the New Testament reading from the Acts of the Apostles, one of those set for this Sunday, a description of a tearful, final farewell, I became conscious of the countless human stories that make up the living, moving picture of these days of the pandemic in which we live. The journalist, Sirin Kale has embarked upon a series of short, biographical articles, about some of the tens of thousands of people in the United Kingdom who have died where Covid19 has clearly been the main cause of death. We are bombarded with statistics which have their critical role to play in the management of the virus, but they do not disclose the fulness of spiritual and physical suffering that threaten at the heart of bodily disintegration, emotional trauma, and the unfathomable grief of all who have to say *Goodbye* and part from loved ones for the final time, in many cases without the comfort of physical presence, loving touch, reassuring words. It is not enough to put on a pedestal those clinicians and other staff in our hospitals, residential and nursing homes who have over and over again provided that reassurance, sometimes at the cost of their own lives. We need as a society to listen to their stories as well, and respond to them with thankfulness that has flesh in real, appropriate, deserved rewards. It is shameful that, for instance, many professional carers earn no more than the bare minimum wage. Tell your MP. Write to her or him. Ask them what they consider to be a suitable response to the sacrifice of these and so many others on the 'front line'.

How deeply heart-engaging is this narrative in the Acts of the Apostles, charged and overflowing with the knowledge that beloved faces will never be seen again, and that there could be

persecution and violent death ahead for a much-loved friend, teacher, guide, pastor! *When he had finished speaking, (Paul) knelt down with them all and prayed. There was much weeping among them all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, grieving especially because of what he had said, that they would not see him again. Then they brought him to the ship. (Acts 20:36-38)*

Paul had spent two years in Ephesus where he came across followers of the Way of Jesus Christ. Supporting himself financially, he had preached and taught the glory and the unconditional love of God for them and the people of that city, the need to respond to that love in the way they lived their lives, and to believe in Jesus as Lord. Such was his involvement in their lives, going from house to house, telling the story of Jesus in arenas of public conversation and debate, giving of himself unstintingly to them, that this ultimate 'Goodbye' must indeed have given rise to profound sorrow among these elders of the Ephesian church, and we imagine, those they represented. It is understandable and alright if we are reminded of the 'taking leave' moments in our own lives when we might have thought our hearts would break. Equally, we may discern and learn the message of Luke to us in giving us this episode in his portrayal of the church after Jesus' Resurrection, the 'Acts of the Apostles' as we know it. This is an ending for Paul. He is moving on from his time spreading the news of Jesus in that whole region, and is about to travel first to Jerusalem and then finally to Rome. These words to his friends in Christ before boarding ship amount to his testament to what he has tried to be and do among them.

Like all Methodist ministers serving local churches I have left for pastures new on several occasions, and never found it easy to find the right words to say to the gracious people with whom I had shared years of worship, fellowship and service. My fear is that I invariably failed adequately to express my gratitude. Paul's attempt may be a model for the person journeying physically and in faith, for at the centre of his testimony we find indeed the essence of the Gospel we seek to proclaim, and which can sustain us. This is what Paul leaves for his people in that town, and what he gives to us as do all those who have tried to be witnesses to God's love in Christ. This is his testament.



1: Paul reminds the Ephesian elders that he stressed the need for *repentance towards God (Acts 20:20)*. That does not involve being consumed by a sense of our own moral rottenness, but becoming aware and acknowledging that God alone is holy. Such consciousness enables us both to own our own failures in love and respect for others and creation, and to be free from the need to believe that we and our ethnic or religious or national group are the centre of the universe, a belief which divides and corrupts human society. God our Creator is all in all.

2: Along with repentance before the one, holy God Paul has taught them to *have faith towards our Lord Jesus (Acts 20:20)*. In our Gospel reading Peter found it difficult to imagine a Messiah, God's earthly representative suffering in weakness and dying like a criminal. But he came to know that the way of humble service focussing on the most vulnerable and despised of the earth, not in order to stress their dependency but rather their worth in God's sight, was how God is known and God's salvation made real in our lives and the life of the world. All the trappings of religion are empty things, futile posturing unless we believe in and endeavour to walk in the way of Jesus.

3: Repentance before God, faith in Jesus, and all of this pointing us to that glorious, sustaining, life-giving truth of God's grace, God's steadfast love that will never cease to search us out or let us go. *And now, Paul says, I commend you to God and to the message of his grace, a message that is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all who are sanctified. (Acts 20:32)*.

Paul was not a delusional fantasist. He knew what was likely awaiting him at the end of his travels. We learn from Luke's narrative that he got as far as Rome and remained there under house arrest, having been charged by some Jews in Jerusalem with rebellion against the Roman Emperor, and facing an uncertain fate at the hands of the Roman authorities. Nor apparently did his preaching in that great centre of empire meet with undiluted praise. Some of the Jews were convinced, others

not, and they argued! (*Acts 28:16-31*) But Paul lived the truth he spoke, knowing that he was not defined by his imprisonment or his success or his failure or his prospects in earthly terms. God's steadfast love defined who he was, as it does us. Reverence God, try to live in Christ's way, believe you are loved, because you are. There is nothing more in life nor finally in death. God is there. This means we admit our own need of affirming love, and that as we can we give that love in speech and in deeds of lavish welcome and compassion. At the last we shall not be overwhelmed by the journey.

Prayers of Intercession

God, hear our prayers.

On this Education Sunday, we pray

For young people and their families as they continue to deal with their exam results;

For the people in exam boards, university admissions offices and schools balancing the requirements of process and the futures of young people;

For everyone involved in the full return to education and in the shifting picture of preparation;

For local schools, teachers, assistants, and all engaging with students in their learning and welfare;

For our Colleges of Further Education and Universities.

God of grace, we hold before you everyone involved in education at this time.

Give peace, righteousness, energy, delight and empathy all in their places.

We offer all our young people into your care.



Dear God, the corona-virus did not respect borders. It spread from place to place and person to person. It has brought grief, fear, hardship, suffering and isolation. Dear God, your love does not respect borders. It flows from place to place and person to person. It brings comfort, hope, justice, wholeness and community. Dear God we pray for all those around the world whose lives have been impacted by coronavirus; for the grieving, the fearful, those working for us in the community and in all workplaces; for those serving on the frontline in places of healing and care; for the vulnerable in our communities.

We pray for our churches as we rediscover community and learn new ways of being.

We remember before you all in our church fellowship and our families, and all our neighbours near and far for whose peace and healing we pray today. Life-giving God, be known to these your children and to us as we journey together in faith, in hope and in love, in the communion of all the saints here and departed to the haven of your perfect realm.

God our Saviour, who called your Church to witness that you were in Christ reconciling the world to yourself: help us so to proclaim the good news of your love that all who hear it may be reconciled to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name,

Your Kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are Yours,

now and for ever.

Amen

Hymn: StF 712 Put Peace Into Each Other's Hands *Fred Kaan (1929-2009)*

(Sing/read/pray/proclaim the words)

Closing Prayer

Lord of our windswept lives, shelter us today in the lee of your presence, still our blustering insecurities, our stormy protests, our billows of indignation, our squalls of regret. Give us harbour-time in the deep, calm, safe water of your grace and love.

May the Blessing of God, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, remain with us now and always. **Amen**



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Prepared by Tony Barnes, and acknowledging material drawn and adapted from the current Methodist Prayer Manual 'The Earth is the Lord's', and the Methodist Church website.

Hymn words can be found online

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