

Fleet & Beacon Hill
United Reformed Churches

A reluctant prophet

Sunday 28th June 2020

Conducted by Rev'd Ruth Dillon & Karen Smith

Opening Prayer

Lord calm our thoughts as we come into your presence to worship you. Open our hearts to welcome you in and to receive the blessing of Jesus' love, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Call to Worship

Sing, sing of God's unalterable love!

We will rejoice as we walk in the light of our God.

Tell everyone around you of God's faithfulness.

We will share the stories of the One who experienced our life in all its fullness.

Shout out loud of God's presence with us, on this day and in all the days to come.

Justice and goodness are God's gifts to us; truth and love walk by our side.

(lectionaryliturgies.blogspot.com/2014/06/liturgy-for-june-29-2014-proper.htm)

Hymn: Let us build a house where love may dwell

Let us build a house where love can dwell
And all can safely live,
A place where saints and children tell
How hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
Rock of faith and vault of grace.
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions
*All are welcome, All are welcome,
All are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak
And words are strong and true.
Where all God's children dare to seek,
To dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness,
As a symbol of God's grace.
Here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.... Refrain

Let us build a house where love is found,
In water, wine and wheat.
A banquet hall on holy ground,
Where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God through Jesus,
Is revealed in time and place.
As we share in Christ the feast that frees us, Refrain

Let us build a house where hands will
Reach beyond the wood and stone.
To heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
And live the word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger,
Bear the image of God's face.
Let us bring an end to fear and danger. Refrain

Let us build a house where all are named
Their songs and visions heard
And loved and treasured, taught and claimed
As words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter
Prayers of faith and songs of grace,
Let this house proclaim from floor to rafter Refrain
© *Words and music* Marty Hauge

Prayers of thanksgiving & confession

God of salvation, we are surprised to discover your desire to have us as your people; we are surprised by the freedoms you have bestowed upon us; and from our surprise we turn in thankfulness to praise you for your trust in the choices we will make.

We are thankful for our freedom; the people who inspire us with the story of faith they tell; the gift of living as a fellowship offering love to the community.

Through Your grace, may we be inspired to live as those who choose your path of light that the darkness of our fears and doubts may be dispelled by Christ's presence.

We 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 us. Forgive us when we fail to be thankful for the good things in our life.

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

(Adapted from <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/17665/28-june-worship-if-you-are-unable-to-attend-church.docx>)

Lord's Prayer

Reading: Jeremiah 28: 5 – 9 read by Alan Tyler

⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the Lord; ⁶and the prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do so; may the Lord fulfil the words that you have prophesied, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house

of the Lord, and all the exiles. ⁷But listen now to this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet."

Reading: Matthew 10: 40 – 42 read by Elizabeth English

⁴⁰"Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward."

Reflection

A reluctant prophet

Have you been in a situation, when you have felt uneasy about speaking to a loved one or a friend and saying what is truly on your mind?

Is it easier to be honest and frank about our thoughts when we know the person, or when they are a stranger?

I suppose it depends what we want to say - whether they are words of comfort and encouragement, or words that will hurt, or whether we fear being judged by the other person.

The two scripture readings today echo what it means to be welcomed, or not welcomed, and how our words speak into each situation.

Let's take the case of Jeremiah first. The task of a prophet was, in general, the hard work of calling the people to come back to God, and to act in obedience to God, rather than predicting the future. Nevertheless, actions have future consequences. In the passage we have just heard Jeremiah is speaking to Hananiah, another prophet, and, like many politicians today, they are having a stand-off.

Jeremiah's visual aid is a yoke, and he told the gathered kings that submitting to it, that is being under the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar, was God's will. But, Hananiah said, 'No, break the yoke – there will be peace.'

Here we have two voices - two prophets who are pitting their wits against one another. Jeremiah, mindful that God had spoken to him, endorsed Nebuchadnezzar, and was aware that he needed confidence and courage to speak against his colleague, another prophet called by God. The prophet Jeremiah is always portrayed as grumpy, reluctant, and never wanting to upset the apple cart. In his humanity we can easily relate to him.

Yet God calls him, and he becomes the most unlikely and well-loved prophet in the Old Testament.

So now, let's look together at the words from Matthew's Gospel. Here Jesus' words talk specifically about being welcomed, and not being welcomed. I can remember many years ago, when I was a Christian Aid collector, knocking on people's doors in my home town on the Fylde Coast. I could see families watching the TV as I peeked through the window. Some would look and wave me away, others would open the door and would tell me in no uncertain terms what they thought of me interrupting their family time, others even hurled coins at me. All the while, I had a smile on my face. But others listened to what I had to say, respecting my voice when I told them about Christian Aid and which church I attended in the area.

We all want to be welcomed, to be affirmed, and to affirm others on life's journey. However prophets emerge from unlikely places to speak truth in the midst of lies, to speak justice when in the midst of injustice and to speak love in the midst of hate. Being a prophet is not just a calling, it is a burning passion that God has set within you, and you cannot stay silent.

Jesus is saying go and take my strength, my courage, my love to everyone person you meet; and if words of truth need to be said, say them with love and justice, not with anger and a sword.

In recent weeks and months prophets have emerged from all sorts of paths: prophets speaking out about racial injustice in Black Lives Matter; LGBT rights, with the heinous murder in Reading; disability rights in the midst of accessibility on social media and access to worship; rights of the child regarding education in the midst of COVID 19; and human rights in the midst of mental health issues during the pandemic.

A prophet is not just about destroying, tearing down and demolishing, but about leading by example, building up and planting new growth, and guiding under God's guidance - and yes, that may mean speaking out about issues that go against God's Kingdom of Justice.

I think we are all reluctant prophets, reluctant to speak out, reluctant to enter homes or conversations where our voices may not be accepted, and yes, reluctant to speak out against our church building being open too quickly!

At the beginning of this service we sang 'All are welcome'. What does that mean when we have no building to worship in? My friends **we** are the church, we are the prophets - the church is not the building and we are a truly scattered church now.

Nevertheless, God calls us as 'reluctant' prophets to be true to our calling, and in the messy world we live in God will continue to raise reluctant prophets; and who knows - it could be you!

Prayers of intercession & concern

In our prayers today, we put all thoughts and worries and hopes into the hands of God. You may like to hold your own hands in front of you as you pray.

We place into the hands of God the life of our churches, the people joining us in worship, and those not here.

We place into the hands of God our difficulties and frustrations, and our hopes and our worries about the future.

We place into the hands of God all people in the world who bring God's love to others, all people who are in danger because they share the love of God.

Loving God, as you have blessed us, make us a blessing to your world.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We place into the hands of God a world that needs peace, a world that needs wisdom, a world that needs healing.

We place into the hands of God the leaders of every nation, the poor of our own and every land, those who live in fear, and all who hold the lives of others in their hands.

Loving God,
You have poured such love into your world.
Show us how to help make it a more loving place.
Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We place into the hands of God our families, our friends, and our
neighbours, those who live and work in our neighbourhoods, in our
shops and local businesses, those who work from home,
those who are unemployed, furloughed.
We place into the hands of God
all those we know who are suffering.
In the silence we share with you, loving God, we think of those for
whom we are concerned

Loving God,
Bless them with your love and comfort and healing.
And show us how to care for them.
Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

We place into the hands of God all those known to us who have died
and those unnamed in the daily figures announced on the News who
have died due to the Covid 19 pandemic.

Lord in your mercy, **Hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father,
Accept these prayers,
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Blessing

Go in the name of Jesus,
to follow the way of Jesus,
to love with the love of Jesus,
and to be sustained by the peace of Jesus.

Amen.