

Virtual Worship: Sunday June 21st 2020

Theme: When the going gets tough

Good morning everyone, and can I welcome you to worship with the churches of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC.

Today our theme is 'When the going gets tough'.

Call to worship

*The steadfast love of the Lord is good.
God's mercy is abundant.
Let us draw near to God's presence.*

Leader O Lord, we enter into your steadfast love,
asking that you will respond to our prayers;

**All we trust in your abundant mercy
and ask that you will come to us.**

Leader O Lord, make your presence known to us;
draw near to us; redeem us, set us free;

All for we seek to be your faithful disciples. Amen.

Hymn of Adoration and praise (sung)

*Father, we love you, we worship and adore you,
Glorify your name in all the earth!
Glorify your name, Glorify your name,
Glorify your name in all the earth!*

*Jesus, we love you, we worship and adore you,
Glorify your name in all the earth!
Glorify your name, Glorify your name,
Glorify your name in all the earth!*

*Spirit, we love you, we worship and adore you,
Glorify your name in all the earth!
Glorify your name, Glorify your name,
Glorify your name in all the earth!*

Prayer of thanksgiving

Lord, you have called us to be your disciples.
Thank you for trusting us with this privilege.
Thank you for empowering us in the ways of service.
Thank you for giving us courage when we are fearful.
Thank you for your strength when we are vulnerable.
Thank you for knowing us, loving us, enhancing our lives.

However, we are sorry for the times we get our priorities wrong;
when we do not put you first;
when we fail to see the needs of our neighbours;
when we lack the courage and faithfulness of true disciples.
Grant us forgiveness;
grant us perseverance;
grant us vision.

In the silence we bring our private prayers ...

We are created anew, blessed by your grace,
that we may serve you as you desire,
and play our part in establishing your kingdom.
You say to each one of us, your sins are truly forgiven;
but you also say.... Come now and follow me.

Lord's prayer

Readings:

*Psalms 69: 13-18, read by Hugh Le Fanu (Beacon Hill URC)
Matthew 10: 24-39, read by Bridget Mitchell (Beacon Hill URC)*

Address

Life is strange with its twists and turns, as my mother used to say, and this passage from Matthew is indeed rich with many images: light and dark, sparrows (lots of sparrows), body and soul, family relationships, seeking and finding and losing and unworthiness.

My theme today is engaging with ***when the going gets tough***, and I would like to explore two verses in this passage from Matthew.

Firstly, verse 27: *'what I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the rooftops.'*

This week I attended a conference on Pandemic Theology and how COVID 19, has affected our understanding of God, and given rise to the meaning of Hope in a period of lament. Lament and suffering are not just about how the viral disease has affected us, but about the loss of independence, the loss of what was, and the difficulty in expressing God's love through the lens of suffering and loneliness.

'Say to you in the dark', really expresses the darkness that some people have found themselves in, the darkness of loneliness and depression, of anxiety, and not being able to continue life as they used to. We are social beings, and for me, the loss of physical contact has been most painful.

Yet do we allow ourselves to lament? Do we allow ourselves to lay before God all our frustrations, our pain, our sadness at not being together as a church, or as family units?

Churches are made up predominantly of women, and women express lamenting in a more open way; but what about the men in our church family, or men of faith? How do men express lamenting without having the sense of being weak? Through our on-line worship, one question I would like to ask

is: are we modelling the life of Christ, and deepening our relationship with God?

It seems to me that this tough period is a rich time for exploring our spiritually, for learning more about the Bible, and discovering the possibility of Prayer. We may feel that we have little guidance on how to worship the God of Love, Promise and Hope in an environment of despair and loneliness. However let us look to the scriptures to aid our thinking: David in his Psalm writing, the prophet Jeremiah, the story of Job, as well as the Gospel writers.

Life is tough, but this is also the incarnational of aspect of God: that God is found in the midst of human suffering, whether it is COVID 19, the effects of lockdown, debt, unemployment, feeling stretched all ways as parents, addictions, mental health issues or abuse. The whispers that God says to us when we are in dark places need to be shared with others, to be proclaimed in the shining light of God and spoken from the rooftops. That does not mean that we have to take a risk assessment and literally climb up to the roof; it means that we need to acknowledge our lament, or pain, and allow God to heal us, to allow God to enable us to move from being fixed and rigid in one spot, to take our first steps of hope in the promise of something better; and that means sharing our faith with others.

Secondly, verse 34: *'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.'*

This difficult verse is often brushed over, but if we are talking about when times get tough, it does not literally mean a sword. The sword represents a state of mind, a challenge that need to be faced. It means peace - but not an easy peace, a peace that is hard won. It means that there could be a tussle before we find our inner peace.

It is interesting to note that Jesus was pierced by a sword on the cross. It was a sword that drained the life blood from him, a sword that laid Jesus in the tomb, in the emptiness of Good Friday and Holy Saturday, and it was the sword that enabled the resurrection to happen, at the dawn of Easter Morning.

For many people who are experiencing tough times, Good Friday and Holy Saturday are their constant companions, and Easter morning seems far off.

However God knows that sometimes we must travel through the tough times to experience the dawn and illuminating light of Love.

Sometimes we must travel through the painful lamenting to experience the Hope of God.

Sometimes we must travel through challenge and change, to experience the Promise of God

Personal prayer (said together)

God of wind and dove and fire,
speak freedom, peace and change
over lands divided by war and by creed.
Speak refreshment, assurance and warmth
over lives afflicted by exhaustion and illness.
Speak integrity, humility and challenge
over churches crippled by fear and finances.
Speak calm, gentleness and comfort
over lives broken by grief and loss.
Speak power, anointing and healing over
each one of us,
that there may be new beginnings,
and a catalyst for change.

Amen.

Prayers of intercession

As we say the prayers of intercession together, I invite you to say the words of response in the bold type.

Lord, we are your disciples: **make us one in you.**

We pray for those whom you have called to service far from their homes – doctors, nurses, teachers, engineers, and many more...

We are your disciples: **make us one in you.**

We pray for those who serve you by telling your story – those who teach, lead on-line services, speak at on-line meetings, preach the gospel, and many more...

We are your disciples: **make us one in you.**

We pray for those who engage in a ministry of prayer – spiritual directors, group/cell leaders, prayer network coordinators, and many more...

We are your disciples: **make us one in you.**

We pray for own discipleship, that we may face our challenges with courage.

We are your disciples: **make us one in you.**

In the silence we bring to you our own prayers.....

May our united discipleship further your work and help to establish your promised kingdom.

In your name, we pray. **Amen.**

Hymn

Christ for the world we sing!
the world to Christ we bring,
with loving zeal;
the poor, and them that mourn,
the faint and overborne,
sin-sick and sorrow worn,
for Christ to heal.

Christ for the world we sing!
The world to Christ we bring
with fervent prayer;
the wayward and the lost,
by restless passions tossed,
redeemed at countless cost
from dark despair.

Christ for the world we sing!
The world to Christ we bring
with one accord;
with us the work to share,
with us reproach to dare,
with us the cross to bear,
for Christ our Lord.

Christ for the world we sing!
The world to Christ we bring
with joyful song;
the new-born souls, whose days,
reclaimed from error's ways,
inspired with hope and praise,
to Christ belong.

Samuel Wolcott (1813-1886)
Tune Moscow

Closing prayer and blessing

May you have discernment to see whom to serve.
May you have wisdom to know how to serve.
May you have strength to serve as a faithful disciple of the
Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

And may the blessing of God
Who is truly beyond all human understanding,
remain with you this day and each day,
Amen