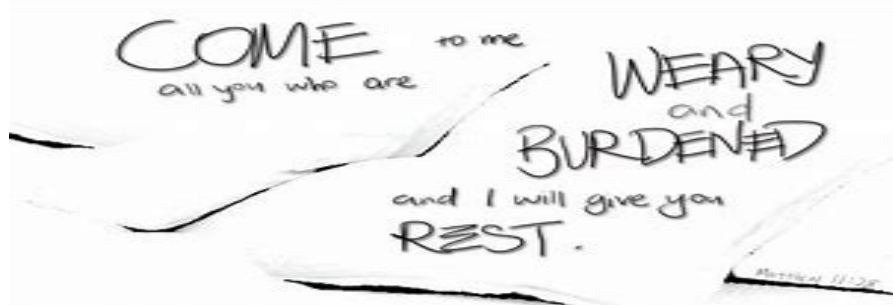


Fleet & Beacon Hill
United Reformed Churches



Sunday 5th July 2020

Conducted by Rev'd Ruth Dillon & Karen Smith

Good morning everyone, and can I welcome you to worship with the churches of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC. My name is Ruth Dillon and I am the minister of Fleet URC and Beacon Hill URC and I shall be leading us in prayer today and Karen Smith a Lay preacher and member of Beacon Hill URC will be leading our reflection, closing prayer and blessing .

Our opening words come from Psalm 91;1,2, and if you are able, please say the words with me:

***You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,
will say to the Lord,
"My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."***

Let us pause and put aside the distraction of the moment,
to be still before our God
to abide in the shadow of God
to be with the God in whom we trust.

Call to Worship

Leader We are here today, Lord, to worship you.

All As we bow our heads before you,
we want to be amazed by your wisdom,
bowled over by your love,
and completely lost in you.

Leader Lord, open our hearts to receive you,

All in ways beyond whatever we could ever ask
or even think. **Amen.**

Prayers of adoration, confession & Lord's Prayer

Holy and most gracious Lord,
we are here today,
to praise you, and to learn from you.
Your wisdom, shown to us through Jesus,
your most precious Son,
is far greater than that of the world.
It has the power to confound all our expectations.

We approach you now as your children,
sitting at your feet,
bathed in your love,
hanging on your every word.
We praise you that we can learn from you,
if we only had ears to listen,
eyes to see
and a heart full of enthusiasm
Speak to us, Lord
still our whole body and help us focus on you alone.

God, our Guide and Goal
it doesn't always sink in
just who we are talking to when we come before you.
We don't fully get it,
that we are in the presence of such a mighty God.

Please, Lord, forgive us for the times
when our picture and understanding of you
are far too small;
when we try to fit you into that tiny box
that we think we can cope with;
when we are frightened
to let your power loose in our lives.
Forgive us, Lord, and make us whole.
And now let us be silent before God as we open our hearts to seek God's forgiveness.

God in whom we live and move and have our being,
Your tenderness and mercy surrounding us,
and making us whole again -
restored, forgiven and free.
In your sight we are new creations,
full of potential and
Vessels of love
In Jesus name we pray Amen

And now we are going to say together a version of the Lord's prayer, that you may not be familiar with. It was written by Brian Brandsmeier

**Holy God, your name is truly sacred.
May your vision for the world be realized,
and may your will be done in our lives as it is in heaven.
Provide us with the goodness of food
and remind us to enjoy it mindfully.
Forgive us for the times that we have rushed through life,
not noticing the small miracles around us.
And please forgive those who haven't had enough time to notice us.**

**Lead us all into abundant life
in the here-and-now of our lives,
and lead us away from the busyness
that makes us live too far in the past or future.
For the here-and-now Kingdom,
here-and-now power,
and here-and-now glory are yours this moment and forever. Amen!**

Reading: Romans 7: 15 -25 read by Tom Dean

15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. 16 And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. 17 As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. 18 For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. 19 For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. 20 Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

21 So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law;

23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? 25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin.

Reading: Matthew 11: 16 – 19, 25 -30 read by Robert Mitchell

Jesus said: 16 "To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 17 " 'We played the pipe for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' 18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.' 19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by her deeds."

25 At that time Jesus said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for this is what you were pleased to do. 27 "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. 28 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Hymn: I heard the voice of Jesus say Tune: Kingsfold

I heard the voice of Jesus say:

'Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, O weary one, lay down
Your head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
Weary and worn and sad,
I found in him a resting place,
And he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:

'Behold I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
And now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say:

'I am this dark world's light;
Look unto Me, the dawn shall rise,
And all your day be bright.'

I looked to Jesus, and I found
In him my Star, my Sun;
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done.

Music: Sung by Westminster Abbey Choir

Reflection

Those readings we've just heard are quite a contrast! The complex language Paul uses to express the contradiction of our humanity & how God is there to make sense of it all (well done, Tom), and then one of the most familiar and loved passages from Scripture - undoubtedly one of the most frequently quoted, painted, etched, and printed reassurances in the Bible. The tone as well as the language are so different, but each point us to the hope and grace in walking through life with Jesus as our salvation.

There have been a lot of contrasts and changes for us all recently. It's been a long 3 months since we started the lockdown, now easing for many. I expect you too have heard of people, or may number yourself as one, who have become weary of the restrictions, the limits on meeting friends and family, and the enforced time spent in a more loose and unstructured way of living. Others are concerned about the pace of lifting restrictions. It's strange though, isn't it, because there's another contrast there; if anyone had said there would be 3 months when you would be able to spend time at home many people might well have thought: Rest. A break from all the bustle and activity. Rest. A chance to renew, to stop, to slow. Rest. An end of work, of jobs, of expectations, if only for a little while. Rest. An opportunity to stop doing, so that you may simply be. Rest. But it's been a time for a great number of worry about jobs, money, feeding the family and when will things be back to 'normal'. It's a forced rhythm of life.

I'm sure many of us thought we would be able to achieve a great deal while at home. I know a lot of gardens have received loving care and development. But, in talking with friends and family, as the weeks passed, it also seems that the motivation lessened and there are still lots of things not done. I still have a pile of books I thought I would read....

Amongst these contrasting rhythms of life, as Christians we have adapted and changed how we worship together, how we keep in touch & care for one another. I wonder how the lockdown experience has had an impact on each of us & our daily Christian living? Perhaps you intended to read your Bible more or spend time quietly with God, but the demands of working from home, or home schooling children, or keeping in touch with those you are concerned for and navigating the changing situation and the demands that came with it have meant that didn't happen as you hoped. "For what I want to do I do not do".....

Paul's words from the letter to the Romans initially appear pretty negative in tone, but by talking about our humanity as they do, the contrasts he draws lead me to believe we should have some degree of compassion for ourself and others, recognising that we all fall well short of the standards we should strive for. His point is that before he came to know Christ, he felt caught in the conflict between the part of him that knew clearly what was good and that part of him that kept him from doing the good. We are, after all, works in progress. The good news is that God is at work in us, for us and through us all the time.

His words should encourage us to nourish our faith and trust in the love and saving actions of God, and if lockdown hasn't been the time for that nourishment, then as we move in to a new stage of our 'new normal' then perhaps this is the time to think about how it could be. And Matthew points us to how we can do that.

He highlights God's commitment to a relationship with humanity and a promise that we will be supported and given rest and peace if we accept the offer being made. But what is this offer? It's a different way of engaging life, under his teaching and direction. It is an invitation to learn from Jesus and to be supported by him, by following His way – and spending time in His creation, the beautiful world He has given us, to be gentle and humble, so that we may accept that His way brings rest. Jesus urges us into a relationship with him that is easy. The Message translation calls this an invitation to learn "the unforced rhythms of grace." Breathe. Rest. Share your burdens. It is good to rest our soul by immersing ourselves in our faith, in prayer and learning more about that rhythm of grace each day. It invites a chance to step back and stand apart from all the things that usually drive and consume us – to delight in God's law - so that we might sense God's presence and blessing; experience a whisper of contentment. And as we rest in His presence we can hear our soul sing & reaffirm Paul's words: Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

Prayers of Intercession & Concern

Lord God, we lift your children before you.

May they find rest for their souls.

We pray for all in authority,
that they will be respectfully
conscious of the weight on their shoulders,
and that they will act
responsibly for the people they serve.

We pray for them in their
personal lives, with the worries and cares
that only they see.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.

May they find rest for their souls.

We pray for our friends, family, colleagues.
We pray that as we walk alongside them,
you will use us to bring them close to you,
and they will learn of your love.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.
May they find rest for their souls.

We pray that we might be sensitive
to the needs of those around us –
the people we see every day,
perhaps as fleetingly as at the shops,
or in the bus queue.
We have no idea what burdens they are carrying,
or if they need a kind word from you
that only we can give.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.
May they find rest for their souls.

Now in the silence let us bring our private and personal prayers before God

We pray that we will see the positive in people,
even when it's hard, and reach out to encourage them.

Lord God, we lift your children before you.
May they find rest for their souls. Amen.

Closing Prayer & Blessing

God of the quiet times, **speak peacefully to our souls.**

God of the noisy times, **share our shouts of joy.**

God of the sad times, **comfort and console us.**

God of the happy times, **smile and laugh with us.**

God of all people, young or old, silent or loud, weighed down or untroubled,
may we find peace in your presence and rest in your love.

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The Grace, said together, for and to one another:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.

(2 Cor 13:14)