Worship: Sunday 2nd August 2020

**Introductory music: There’s a quiet understanding**

**God’s abundant Grace**

**Opening words & prayer**

It’s good to be with you once again this morning. You are most welcome to this service. I am Karen Smith, and I will be leading us all in prayer this morning. I am pleased to welcome the Rev’d John Mackerness who joins us to lead our reflection and blessing. Let’s prepare ourselves to worship together, wherever you may be, with a few moments of silence.

We thank you for this day to live, another day to love  
and one more day to forgive.  
Make us a light and blessing to one another as we acknowledge you. <https://worshipwords.co.uk/thank-you-for-this-day-sharon-paul-uk/>

**Call to worship**

Gracious God,

We have come here to meet for worship.

We have come with all who are trying to love and serve you, and hold to your ways.

**We are here together, and we are joyful!**

Faithful God,

You have been with your people through the ages,

And we remember that we are called to be family –

Here, where we are, and just as we are.

**We are here together, and we are joyful! Amen**

**Prayers of Adoration, confession and Lord’s Prayer**

We have gathered here to meet with our God in worship. Let us pray to him now.

Thank you, Lord God, for the opportunity of worship,  
for the freedom to be amongst your family  
meeting together in your house,  
and in the warmth of your embrace.

Thank you that in worship we can put aside  
the uncertainties of this world and rest upon the certainties of the Kingdom,  
for your promises are not changeable as those of the world might be, but immovable and eternal.

Thank you that we can bring to your feet  
all the hurts and fears that trouble us, and leave them there,knowing that your strength and assurance   
are all that we require

Thank you that as we draw near in worship,   
we are transported from a world of concerns and fears,  
to a place where we can be at peace in your presence,  
find healing, wholeness and refreshment.

Thank you, Lord God, for the opportunity of worship

[*http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers\_Praise.htm#ixzz5MGTMzp7k*](http://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Praise.htm#ixzz5MGTMzp7k) *Under Creative Commons License:* [*Attribution*](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0)

We worship you, O Christ.

You nourish us. You comfort us.

When we are hungry, you are near.

When we are afraid, you come to us.

You meet us at our most vulnerable.

You transform our experience by your presence.

Your actions are beyond words. Your love is without limits.

In humility and wonder we turn to you.

We are ready to be fed once more.

*URC Prayer Handbook 2012 Rachel Poolman*

Listen! Here is Good News. God pardons those who humbly repent and truly believe the gospel.  
Since Jesus died for us, we have peace with God,  
to whom be praise and honour for ever. Amen.

*An Australian Prayer Boo*k (modified).

The Lord Jesus Christ gave us the pattern for all prayer, and so we gladly say together:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy name;**

**thy kingdom come;**

**thy will be done,**

**in earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread.**

**And forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those that trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation;**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**the power, and the glory,**

**for ever and ever. Amen**

**Hymn:** Christ be our light (Bernadette Farrell)

1 Longing for light, we wait in darkness.

Longing for truth, we turn to you.

Make us your own, your holy people,

Light for the world to see.

Chorus:

Christ, be our light!

Shine in our hearts.

Shine through the darkness

Christ, be our light!

Shine in your church gathered today.

2 Longing for peace, our world is troubled.

Longing for hope, many despair.

Your word alone has pow’r to save us.

Make us your living voice.

Chorus

3 Longing for food many are hungry.

Longing for water, many still thirst.

Make us your bread, broken for others,

Shared until all are fed.

Chorus

4 Many the gifts, many the people,

many the hearts that yearn to belong.

Let us be servants to one another,

making your kingdom come.

Chorus

Sung by the Virtual Choir Project , Newcastle Cathedral, by permission

**Readings:**

Isaiah 55: 1 -5 read by Tom Dean

**1** “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. **2** Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. **3** Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David. **4** See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples. **5** Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.”

Matthew 14: 13 -21 read by Mike Walters

**13** When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. **14** When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. **15** As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.” **16** Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.” **17** “We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered. **18** “Bring them here to me,” he said. **19** And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. **20** They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. **21** The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

**Reflection:**

Hello and it’s good to be back sharing worship with you again.

I think that the Covid crisis became real for me when I went to the supermarket for the first-time post lockdown and found lots of empty shelves that were normally full. Today things are getting back to normal but I’m willing to bet that the first sign of a second wave will bring out the worst in some people.

But imagine what it would be like if, even in the bad times, you went into the supermarket and the manager was there to greet you and he made you that offer that we heard in our reading from Isaiah?

Come and eat and drink even if you have no money.

And he’s offering more than just water, he’s offering wine or milk, and it’s all free. Then he says, ‘don’t spend your money on food that’s no good.’ We do that all the time don’t we and we call them treats. Free food, free drink, things that are good for us. We like that idea, don’t we? Of course we do. But now comes the twist.

‘Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food. Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen and you will find life.’

Now we have moved on from food for the body to food for the soul. What we watch, read, and hear makes a difference to us. If it didn’t then people wouldn’t spend so much money on advertising, would they? Just as what we eat makes a difference to us physically so what we listen to, watch, or read makes a difference to us spiritually and emotionally. If we only ever have what’s bad for us, then we will pay the price. We must have a balanced diet. God gives us the best things of all and it’s free. The price has been paid in full. Not only is it free but there is more than enough to go around and too much of it won’t make us sick, or fat, but lovely, generous, Christ like people who want to share what God has given us with everyone.

The feeding of the five thousand or the miracle of the loaves and fishes as it is sometimes called is one of the top ten best known bible stories. But I wonder how well we really know the story.

It begins, ‘as soon as Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to a remote area to be alone.’ What news? Why did Jesus want to be alone?

Jesus had just heard that his cousin John the Baptist had been executed by King Herod. Like many of us when faced by bad news, Jesus wanted to be alone to grieve for John and to be with his father God, to pray, to recharge his batteries, and to discover what God wanted him to do next. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed him on foot.

Now there may have been many reasons why the crowd set out after Jesus. Some wanted to see if Jesus matched up to what they had been told about him. Some came looking to be healed, some came looking for a miracle. Perhaps having heard how John died some wanted to see what Jesus would do next. But I’m willing to bet that most of them were there out of idle curiosity because that’s how we’re made and most of them weren’t expecting to be out long enough to have to feed themselves.

Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. He could have got back in the boat and sailed off somewhere else. That’s what many a famous person would have done. He could have grudgingly given an interview and signed a few autographs before leaving. But Jesus doesn’t do either of those things.

When faced with an unwanted crowd of people, when dealing with his own grief and sorrow, he has compassion on the people and heals them. This is God’s grace in action. Grace in abundance, grace shown time and time again to the people then and to us now; grace that showed itself when, in the agony of death on the cross, Jesus forgives the sinner who repented and promises him a place in paradise with Jesus.

That evening the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves.” The people want to be with Jesus, perhaps they want to know more about God. But a tired, hungry crowd far from home can turn nasty and you can have a riot on your hands and there were no ice cream vans or falafel stalls in sight.

The disciples don’t know what to do and Jesus isn’t much help. You feed them; he says. God has given the disciples gifts and talents; he has given them the chance of a new start with Jesus. They have spent time being taught by God’s own son for goodness sake. But feeding five thousand people is beyond them.

“But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!” they answered, and they belonged to a boy in the crowd. But what the boy has, all that he has, he offers to Jesus. The people sit down, and you just know that something special is going to happen. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward heaven, and blessed them. Jesus knows just how abundant God’s love is. Jesus knows that God will provide for his people just as God had done in the past. Here is free food, here is life and the confirmation of God’s promise made to his people of old. All it takes is God’s blessing.

Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, Jesus gave the bread to the disciples, who distributed it to the people. Jesus doesn’t feed everyone directly; he gives the bread to the disciples and they distribute it to the people. So the bread is passed around, so the good news of Jesus Christ is spread around from person to person. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. God is generous, there is enough and more to go around.

About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children! Only the men are counted. The women and children aren’t counted but God sees that no one goes hungry. God’s abundant grace hasn’t changed. God is still as generous as ever to all his people. The good news is still the same. The love of God is still the same.

Our challenge is to go to where people are, feed them, share the good news with them and let God heal them, change them. There’s enough food to go around in the world but people store it up against a rainy day, so it is wasted. Or they sell it at grossly inflated prices, and the women and children go hungry even if the men are fed.

Herod gave a magnificent party for his daughter, lots of wine and good food, sexy dancing and John’s head on a platter was the price for the entertainment!

Jesus spoke to people on the hillside, a boy gave all he had, and people were fed – no charge. Which event would you have rather gone to? God takes what we offer, blesses it, and gives it back over and over again. As we are fed by God in word and spirit, we give thanks to God for all God’s blessings to us and we remember all those who have neither food nor drink this day. We hear God’s call to us; ‘listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food. Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen and you will find life.’

Thanks be to God. Amen.

**Prayers of Intercession**

Let us pray for the world and thank God for his abundant grace and goodness.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, you promised through your son, Jesus Christ, to hear us when we pray in faith.

We pray for your church today, gathering all around the world in such different ways to those we normally have experienced, in services such as this, or using Zoom or Facebook as platforms to worship with others, to praise you, to hear your holy word, and to meet you in bread and wine. Give us a sense of expectation as we come, and inspiration as we go. Help us to put our differences behind us and unite behind the great commission of Jesus, to make disciples of all nations.

*Pause*

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for a world which struggles to live justly and in peace. We pray for those who have to search for daily food or walk long distances for clean water. We remember with sadness those whose lives have been cut short by Covid 19, by other diseases or violence, and those who have fled their home in fear. We pray for those who meet persecution and torture with dignity and courage. May your kingdom come and your wil be done on earth as it is in the heavenly places.

*Pause*

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

We thank you for those people who sustain us by their love and forgiveness. Thank you for the network of people with whom our lives are inextricably linked and who make up the fabric of our family and community life. Make us alert to one anothers needs and quick to serve and encourage one another. May our gentleness with each other reflect your gentleness with us.

*Pause*

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

We pray for those who are laid low by suffering and those who are experiencing the outrageous assault of pain. We trust your love for us and for all people, and your deep desire for our well - being. As we name in our hearts those who are in the grip of suffering, help us so to pray and to act that they may know your comfort and healing, both now and in the coming days.

*Pause*

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

Rejoicing in the fellowship of all your disciples, we commend ourselves and all people to your unfailing love and abundant grace.

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

**Closing prayer and blessing:**

Lord, a new week lies ahead of us and we don’t really know what it will bring.  
Help us to be aware of people around us who are struggling in any way.  
May we be sensitive to their needs and seek your wisdom as we come alongside them.  
We want to be there for them, Lord, bearing your blessing, the blessing of God, life-giver, pain-bearer, love-maker, that is with us all, now and always. Amen.

Hymns reproduced & streamed under CCLI 6025 & CCLI 21997 respectively

Video recording produced by Anna & Karen Smith August 2020