

URC Daily Devotions Service for
Sunday 23rd August 2020



The Rev'd Phil Nevard

Introduction

Welcome. My name is Rev'd Phil Nevard and today's service comes to you from my (tidier) half of the study that I share with Lythan. In my heart I will be leading this worship with my lovely congregation at Kingsteignton URC in South Devon. We are delighted that you are joining us today.

Call to Worship

One: To all who are imprisoned,
Many: **God says, "Come out."**

One: To all who are living in darkness,

Many: God says, “Show yourselves”

One: To all who hunger and thirst,

Many: God gives food and springs of water.

One: To all who are far away,

Many: God makes smooth the way home.

**God will not forget us, we are inscribed
on the palms of His hands.**

Hymn: *I Lift My Eyes to the Quiet Hills*

I lift my eyes
to the quiet hills
in the press of a busy day;
as green hills stand
in a dusty land
so God is my strength and stay.

3: I lift my eyes
to the quiet hills
with a prayer as I turn to sleep;
by day, by night,
through the dark and light
my Shepherd will guard his sheep.

2: I lift my eyes
to the quiet hills
to a calm that is mine to share;
secure and still
in the Father's will
and kept by the Father's care.

4: I lift my eyes
to the quiet hills
and my heart to the Father's throne;
in all my ways
to the end of days
the Lord will preserve his own.

Prayer of Approach

I lift my eyes to the quiet hills

There's something solid and permanent about the hills
They have stood the test of time
They live to a different rhythm

So often my life is pressed around with busyness
So often my life is simply running to catch up
So often I feel overwhelmed by a thousand and one little things

Help me to lift my eyes as we worship today
That I might see you God, my strength and stay

I lift my eyes to the quiet hills

There's something peaceful and restful about the hills
They offer me a new perspective
They inspire patience

So often I fill the silence with unnecessary words
So often I ruin the stillness with worthless activity
So often I shatter the calmness with worry about tomorrow

Help me to lift my eyes as we worship today
That I might share that calm as I am kept in my Father's care.

I lift my eyes to the quiet hills

There's something comforting and protective about the hills
They're always there – rain or shine
They're a constant presence – through the changing seasons

So often my life swings from hope to despair
So often I allow small setbacks to shatter my dreams
So often I allow fear of the unknown to limit my horizons

Help me to lift my eyes as we worship today
That I might see you God, the shepherd who will guard his sheep

I lift my eyes to the quiet hills

There's something deep and mysterious about the hills
Beyond human understanding
Inspiring awe and wonder

So often my life is petty and shallow
So often I merely scratch the surface of what God has in store for me
So often I let moments of awe and mystery pass by unacknowledged

Help me to lift my eyes as we worship today
That I might see you God, enthroned in splendour.

Prayer of Confession

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just, will forgive us our sins. Jesus says: have come to call not the righteous but sinners. Let us confess our sins together and seek God's forgiveness:

**Almighty God,
we confess before you our own sin,
the sin of the Church and the sin of the world,
in which we share.
We have not loved you with our whole being;
we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves.
In your mercy, forgive us when we turn from you;
release us from the burden of our past,
and remake us in your image and likeness
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

May the God of mercy who forgives you all your sins through Jesus Christ strengthen you in all goodness by the power of the Holy Spirit and keep you in eternal life. **Amen.**

Our Father....

We limit not the truth of God: George Rawson (1807-1889)
Recording: Organist, Mr Rob Charles, All Saints Church, Oystermouth, Swansea Singers: Phil & Lythan Nevard

Rock of Ages The Rev'd Augustus Montague Toplady recording: Amy Grant, UMPG Publishing, Music Services, Inc. (Publishing), BMI - Broadcast Music Inc., BMG Rights Management (US), LLC, AMRA, Kobalt Music Publishing, LatinAutor, and 5 music rights societies

Turning the World Upside Down Patrick Appleford ©1965 Josef Weinberger performed by: Seraphim Choir, Church of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Singapore. (The Seraphim Choir that sings at the 9.15am Sunday Mass was formed in February 2008 and its name was suggested by Fr Siew, to refer to the many angelic voices of its young members. The initial aim was to provide formation for the children, encouraging their commitment to the service of God in a church ministry. It has now evolved into a choir comprising families from many nationalities, where parents and children serve together.)

Thanks to Phil, Lythan & Carys Nevard for reading the spoken parts of the service, to the choir of Barrhead URC for recording the Our Father and to Kathleen & Callum Haynes, Elfreda Tealby-Watson & Greg Watson, David & Christine Shimmin, Elizabeth Kemp, Marion Thomas, Tina Wheeler and Myra Rose for recording, virtually, the Call to Worship and Affirmation of Faith.

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Have you turned to me today, for strength, guidance, wisdom?
Have you changed course today
because my presence has pointed you to the Christ-like?
Try again...

Who do you say that I am?
Do you say I am Lord?
Have you thought about what that means for your life today?
Have you given me your voice to speak out
against injustice and prejudice today?
Have you given me your hands for acts of selfless service today?
Have you given me your feet today that I might take you across
boundaries to new places?
Try again...

Who do you say that I am?

Blessing

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:13) Go in peace to love and serve the Lord, in the name of Christ. Amen.

Sources and Copyright

Call to Worship from *Feasting on the Word Year A*

Affirmation of Faith from the Reformed Church of France.

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Prayer of Illumination

After our readings we will mark this in the words of a hymn. In July 1620 John Robinson preached a farewell sermon to members of his congregation setting sail in the *Speedwell*, preparing to join the *Mayflower* and start new lives in what they called the "New World". In that sermon he reassured them, "For I am very confident the Lord hath more truth and light yet to break forth out of His holy Word." May that be true for us today as we listen for God's Word in Isaiah and Matthew.

Readings

Isaiah 51:1-6 (NRSV)

Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many. For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Listen to me, my people, and give heed to me, my nation; for a teaching will go out from me, and my justice for a light to the peoples. I will bring near my deliverance swiftly, my salvation has gone out and my arms will rule the peoples; the coastlands wait for me, and for my arm they hope. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look at the earth beneath; for the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment, and those who live on it will die like gnats; but my salvation will be forever, and my deliverance will never be ended.

Matthew 16:13-20 (NRSV)

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said,

“Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Hymn: *We Limit Not the Truth of God*

We limit not the truth of God
to our poor reach of mind,
by notions of our day and sect,
crude, partial and confined.
Now let a new and better hope
within our hearts be stirred:
the Lord hath yet more light and truth
to break forth from His Word.

2: Darkling our great forefathers went
The first steps of the way;
'twas but the dawning yet to grow
into the perfect day;
and grow it shall, our glorious Sun
more fervid rays afford:
the Lord hath yet more light and truth
to break forth from His Word.

3: The valleys past, ascending still,
our souls would higher climb,

4: The world wants
the wealth to live in state,
but You show a new way
to be great:
like a servant You came,
and if we do the same,
we'll be turning
the world upside down.

5: O Lord, all the world
belongs to You
and You are always making
all things new.
What is wrong, You forgive,
and the new life You give
is what's turning
the world upside down.

Who do you say that I am? (Meditation)

Who do you say that I am?
Do you say I am the one who redeems,
sanctifies, justifies, glorifies?
Have you jargonised me into obscurity?
Have you encased me in impenetrable dogma?
Have you codified me
and placed me in the filing cabinet of belief?
Have you serialised me into a 4-step program for salvation?
Try again...

Who do you say that I am?
Do you say I am fully God and fully human,
historical yet eternal, both beginning and end?
Have you wrapped me in a pea-soup fog of mystery?
Have you set me outside the bounds of possibility?
Have you left me at the mercy of arcane philosophers
debating the meaning of reality?
Have you declared me too big to be understood or known?
Try again...

Who do you say that I am?
Do you say I am Immanuel, God with us?
Have you noticed me with you today – have you looked?
Have you acknowledged me today, spoken to me, listened to me?

Hear my neighbour's cry; hear my neighbour's delight.

Somewhere nearby, maybe in one of those bigger, expensive houses I have often envied, someone is anxiously scouring the bank statements. He has lost his job. He was furloughed, but now he's redundant. It was like a long slow torture. He knew it was coming, but hoped it wouldn't, and now he has no idea how they will afford the mortgage.

Somewhere nearby, someone is celebrating. They've weathered the storm and now life is opening up again. She can open her business again, and rediscover some sense of normality. During lockdown she's had all sorts of new ideas and can't wait to get started.

*God of hope, you bring joy and gladness from the wilderness,
you bring thanksgiving and the voice of song from desert places.
Hear my neighbour's cry; hear my neighbour's delight.*

Hymn: *O Lord All the World Belongs To You*
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O Lord, all the world
belongs to You
and You are always
making all things new.
What is wrong, You forgive,
and the new life You give
is what's turning
the world upside down.

2: The world's only loving
to its friends,
but Your way of loving
never ends,
loving enemies too;
and this loving with You
is what's turning
the world upside down.

3: The world lives divided and apart,
You draw folk together, and we start
in our friendship to see that in harmony we
can be turning the world upside down.

and look down from supernal heights,
on all the bygone times;
upward we press, the air is clear,
and the sphere-music heard!
the Lord hath yet more light and truth
to break forth from His Word.

4: O Father, Son and Spirit, send
us increase from above;
enlarge, expand all Christian hearts
to comprehend Thy love;
and make us all go on to know
with nobler powers conferred:
The Lord hath yet more light and truth
to break forth from His Word.

Sermon

As I said at the beginning of this service, I minister in Kinstington. Since the mid eighteenth century and right into the present day, the Ball Clay industry has been a major source of employment for Newton Abbot and the surrounding area. It is said that it has its origins in the sixteenth century when Sir Walter Raleigh introduced tobacco to Britain. Clay from Devon, was deemed suitable in the manufacture of smoking pipes. I often wonder if I should take clay pipe-smoking as a tribute to my town... Lythan says not!

Ball clay is quite rare and the deposits found in Devon are of worldwide importance. It is white, or close to it, and very pliable so that when fired at high temperature the end result is ceramic clay of the highest quality. The famous potteries of Spode, Wedgwood and Astbury all use ball clay from Devon.

Before I moved here, I pictured a bustling town of working miners rolling huge balls of clay down the lanes towards the docks, like human dung beetles. Sadly, that's not quite how it works!

Up above Kingsteignton you have a good view of Haytor – one of the more touristy tors of Dartmoor – largely so because it is so easily accessible from Bovey Tracey. Around Haytor you can find clear traces of the old Granite Tramway where quarried granite began its journey across the world. Quite a lot of it went on the building of the old London Bridge (which is now in the Arizona Desert!) If you know where to look you can find a big stack of huge unused bridge corbels – shaped and carved and ready to go. They miscalculated and ordered too many – they have rested there for over 100 years...

So, when both Isaiah and Matthew pen words about quarries and rock, my ears prick up!

Isaiah is speaking to the returned exiles – they are standing in the overgrown rubble of their formerly glorious temple wondering how on earth they could even BEGIN to rebuild their lives after the crushing years of exile and then return to such desolation. And he says to them:

51:1 Listen to me, you that pursue righteousness, you that seek the LORD. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

51:2 Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, but I blessed him and made him many.

51:3 For the LORD will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places, and will make her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn and the quarry from which you were dug.

And then we heard that famous passage from Matthew's gospel:

Pictures and Skype will do for now, but they long for the day when they can hold her for the first time.

*God of hope, you bring joy and gladness from the wilderness,
you bring thanksgiving and the voice of song from desert places.
Hear my neighbour's cry; hear my neighbour's delight.*

Somewhere nearby, maybe in one of those houses that we moan about with the dog outside barking all the time, someone is at their wit's end. Life is too much, everything is too much. He knows the bottle's solution will not last, but it might numb things for now.

Somewhere nearby, maybe in one of those houses with a cheery rainbow in the window, someone is enjoying the space and the time that lockdown has given xem. Xe has really flourished through new opportunities online and has benefited from the chance to renew and refresh xemself.

*God of hope, you bring joy and gladness from the wilderness,
you bring thanksgiving and the voice of song from desert places.
Hear my neighbour's cry; hear my neighbour's delight.*

Somewhere nearby, maybe in one of those really tired and unkempt houses, garden overgrown, weeds along the path, someone is fearful for her safety. The bruises don't always show but she dare not go out now. She feels totally trapped, escape routes totally cut off. Her partner still works but she will be home early today and she'll be angry as usual.

Somewhere nearby, maybe in one of the new houses on the new-build bit, a family is excitedly planning a holiday. It's been touch and go, but they have been given the green light, they CAN go and the tensions of home-schooling seem already to be melting away.

*God of hope, you bring joy and gladness from the wilderness,
you bring thanksgiving and the voice of song from desert places.*

Affirmation of Faith

**We believe in God, creator of all,
whose word sustains the life of humanity,
and directs our history. God is our life.**

**We believe in God's Son,
born amongst the poor, light in our night,
first-born from the dead. He is alive.**

**We believe in the Holy Spirit,
who gives birth to the new life of God,
who breathes life into the struggle for justice,
who leads us to hope. Who is a living force.**

**We believe in the holy universal Church,
herald of the Good News
which frees people and brings new life.
We believe in the coming of a new world
where Jesus Christ, our Lord, will be all in all. Amen.**

Prayers of intercession

Circumstances have conspired to keep us in our homes for worship on Sundays, which brings us closer to our neighbours and our neighbourhoods as we pray. Isaiah's words about the God of hope bringing new life from the rubble of exile and new growth in the arid desert is for them as well as for you and for me.

Somewhere nearby, maybe in a house I pass when I go out to walk, someone is grieving. She has been unable to travel and share her grief with friends and family, she is grieving alone and not coping well.

Somewhere nearby, maybe in a house I can see from my bedroom window, a couple is celebrating new life, grandparents for the first time.

16:13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?"

16:14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

16:15 He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

16:16 Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

16:17 And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven.

16:18 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Peter blurts it out – probably not really grasping or fully understanding what he is saying – but in a moment of epiphany: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

And Jesus says, "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church."

Of course, in the centuries since, the Church has disagreed fairly fundamentally about what Jesus meant! To put it crudely and bluntly, the Catholic Church has maintained that "this rock" on which Jesus will build his church is the actual person of Peter – and so we get the succession of popes. Our tradition has maintained that "this rock" on which Jesus will build his church is the confession of faith that Peter made – the community of the church will be built and shaped by that confession: "Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Actually, it is quite an important disagreement!

There is potential for a similar disagreement in Isaiah's words: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug."

Returned exiles might have taken those words and assumed that Isaiah was telling them to find a new Abraham and a new Sarah. If only you can find them, everything will be fine and this wilderness that you stand in will bloom again.

Yet, I believe Isaiah is saying something a whole lot more significant. He is saying to these bedraggled exiles, "YOU are hewn from the SAME quarry that Abraham and Sarah were hewn from. You are chips from the same block. As God worked mightily through their faithfulness, so will God work mightily through your faithfulness.

The source of the granite is not the old London Bridge, it's Dartmoor.

The source of the hope that will replenish this broken and downhearted people is not a new Abraham or a new Sarah, it is faithfulness in the God of all hope.

"This rock" on which the Church will be built is not Peter or even a whole succession of Peters, but the confession of faith that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.

Not Abraham, not Sarah, not even Peter – but the same quarry they were dug from – the chosen and loved people of God leaning on the unfailing love of the same God, living lives of faithfulness in response to the confession that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

I wonder where the desolate rubble is in your life at the moment? You don't need me to make one of those annoying preachers' lists of all the

possibilities, do you! As you stand in that rubble, where is your hope?

I wonder if you feel like the people of Jesus' day, hoping that one of your favourite prophets come back to life – the new John the Baptist, the new Elijah – that's what we need. For you it might not be those particular characters – but we all put our faith in all kinds of saviours... if only we had a minister like the really good one we had in 1972... if only we had a different government... if only...

Jesus' words might be the ones we need to hear: "Who do you say that I am?"

and alongside them, Isaiah's words: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug."

Jesus is the rock of salvation from whom you are hewn. You share in his life and he in yours. Whatever rubble and desolation plagues your life, this is the only sure foundation for your hope, it is the very foundation on which the church is built. Amen.

Hymn: *Rock of Ages Cleft for Me*

Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee
Rock of ages, cleft for me
Let me hide myself in Thee

3: Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling
Nothing in my hand I bring
Simply to Thy cross I cling

2: Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed
Be of sin the double cure
Cleanse me from
it's guilt and pow'r

4: Naked, come to Thee for dress
Helpless, look to Thee for grace
Vile, I to the fountain fly
Wash me, saviour, or I die

5: Rock of ages, cleft for me let me hide myself in Thee
Rock of ages, cleft for me let me hide myself in Thee