On Line Worship: Sunday 30th August 2020

Good morning everyone, and welcome 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 worship. You are all most welcome.

Our opening words are taken from Psalm 26 1-8.

*Vindicate me, O Lord,*

*for I have walked in my integrity,*

*and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering.*

*Prove me, O Lord, and try me;*

*test my heart and mind.*

*For your steadfast love is before my eyes,*

*and I walk in faithfulness to you.*

*I do not sit with the worthless,*

*nor do I consort with hypocrites;*

*I hate the company of evildoers,*

*and will not sit with the wicked.*

*I wash my hands in innocence,*

*go around your altar, O Lord,*

*singing aloud a song of thanksgiving,*

*and telling all your wondrous deeds.*

*O Lord, I love the house in which you dwell,*

*and the place where your glory abides.*

The theme for today’s service is, ***Take up your Cross,*** where we are invited by Jesus to share in his story, which is as tough as it is good.

However, 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.

**Opening music** Organ Music

 Nessie Black, Fleet URC

**Call to worship**

For our call to worship, can I invite you to say the words in the bold type on your service sheet

Leader: God calls us to worship in spirit and in truth,
 in deep sadness and indescribable hope,
 As we reflect on all that Jesus went through for us,
 praise God who goes beyond all expectations.

**All: You do not ask us to go anywhere you haven’t been.
 You call us to take up our cross,
 and we come to you with fear and trembling,
 but knowing that ultimately your way is the best.
 Be with us, Lord, and help us to understand. Amen**

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

As we say our opening prayers, there is a response within our prayers of confession, and they are written on the order of service. When I say the words*,* ‘**Forgive me, Lord’,** can you respond by saying after the first section ‘**and set me on your path’,** the second section, **‘and help me to take up my cross’,** and the third section, **‘and help me follow you’*.***

Lord God, you invite us to come in and share your story.
We stand amazed in your presence, Lord.
We wait on you, lost in wonder
that the Son of Man is going to come
in his Father’s glory, with his angels.
And you want us, too.
We adore you, Lord above all.

Lord, I acknowledge before you
that often I can be like Peter:
hearing your word, but going off on my own track,
not wanting to see your path, especially if it looks rough.
**Forgive me, Lord, and set me on your path.**

Lord, I acknowledge before you
that there are times when I want the world,
but don’t give much thought to my soul.
**Forgive me, Lord, and help me to take up my cross.**

Lord, I acknowledge before you
that there are times when
I am a stumbling block to others – and to myself;
times when I look for complications
instead of just following you.
**Forgive me, Lord, and help me to follow you.**

***………………………………..***

*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.

You say to each one of us, your sins are truly forgiven.

Yet you also say these words, come now and follow me.

And now let us say the prayer that Jesus taught his friends to say:

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.

**Readings:** Now we shall hear today’s readings

They are:

**Jeremiah 15:15-21,** read by Robert Mitchell

**Matthew 16: 21-28,** read by Bridgett Mitchell

**Reflection**

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts here this morning be acceptable to you, O Lord and our strength, Amen*

Hearing the stories of Jesus can be so encouraging.

Which is your favourite I wonder?

Is it the infancy narratives we hear at Christmas; the Easter resurrection account, or the many stories where Jesus is talking to ordinary people?

Stories hook us and immerse us into the context – as in the miraculous healing accounts, and the change of heart in Zacchaeus he climbs down a tree. It’s as if we become part of the scene; however in the Gospel of Matthew we hear a different kind of story.

Jesus is speaking directly to his disciples, and it makes uncomfortable reading. Events must have been going really well, and the disciples were doing all the right things, learning from Jesus’ teachings, feeling confident and witnessing people gathering in large crowds, where Jesus used metaphors of vines, shepherds and food to represent the images of the Kingdom of God.

A few verses before today’s lectionary reading, Peter has even declared Jesus as being the Messiah, Son of the Living God, and Jesus praises him; however three verses later we read that Peter rebukes Jesus for talking about the great suffering that he must endure.

Peter recognized immediately that Jesus was not the warrior revolutionary King he expected, but a messiah who would suffer, and this was all too human for Peter.

There are two areas of this passage that we must take seriously.

* The first is **suffering…** it is the one area that all we disciples must endure if we are to follow Jesus. Here Jesus is suggesting that his Kingship is born of suffering, and its glory is seen in that suffering on behalf of the world, a world that needs a story more powerful than another one of a conqueror on a white charger. It needs a story of one who liberates and overcomes all the odds through suffering, through the cross.
* And the second is **Hope…** Hope of finding the only true reward in Life. It is not by clinging to the things that matter to us, the insights we have, or even that place we have carved out in the world. All these things can be lost, and Jesus says that it is only when we lose everything that we find what we long for.

Therefore this passage is really saying to us, as Jesus’ disciples, be patient in your suffering, for in your patience Hope will spring eternal.

In recent months, I have been humbled to witness the courage and strength of people who are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Some may have a strong belief that God is present and are aware of God’s presence surrounding them in love, and it is this belief that sustains them. But others find it difficult to acknowledge and even articulate.

It is natural that we and our family and friends protect ourselves from pain and suffering. I am sure many people watching and listening to this worship service have experienced both of these distresses. However, if we protect ourselves from pain, we make our own prisons as we begin to die spiritually and emotionally.

In Matthew, Jesus speaks to the disciples about carrying their cross. I am sure we can recall people who seem to have had their fair share of trials and tribulations, and yes, we too may ask God ‘why’?

However some individuals may want to encourage a person in an unhelpful manner. So be cautious when a friend who is trying to protect you says innocently, ‘*Surely God doesn’t want you to face this*?’ No, God does not want us to face this but, like it or not, pain and suffering are part of our humanity.

What is interesting is that when, as followers of Jesus we suffer, or people we know suffer, we turn to God in prayer.

I have thought and reflected on prayer, and it seems to me there is something deep inside every person that requires us to commune with the source of Life. It is a presence that calls us into wholeness. It is something that nudges us into community and caring for others. Prayer is the offering of our life and love through the simple action of sharing our friendship and our acceptance. It is being present, sharing God’s love with another human being.

* Hope, it seems to me, is the essence of our Christian faith.
* Hope that events will stabilize, relationships will improve;
* Hope that the injustice in the world will be addressed.
* Hope that the burden is not too heavy.
* Hope that in God, strength can be found.
* Hope that God uses people to do his work on this earth.
* Hope that God will use each one of us.
* Hope that through our suffering a deep sense of transformation will occur, and that the cross stands as witness to the transformative power of Jesus.

And Jesus said, ‘*If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and follow me’*.

And the Spirit within us replies, ‘*All of you be ardent in Spirit, Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. These things will bring glory to the kingdom of God’.*

**Prayers**

God - the source of life

Who calls us to live fully

God - the source of love,

Calls us to love wastefully

God - the ground of being,

Calls us to have the courage to be ourselves,

So when we love, live and have the courage to be

We are expanding our humanity,

And to the call you have given us.

Enable us always to be aware of your presence,

so our relationship with you can become deeper, and all enriching,

A life given in service to others.

We ask this through Jesus, a human portrait of the meaning of God. Amen

**Hymn**

Lord, for the years

your love has kept and guided,

urged and inspired us,

cheered us on our way,

sought us and saved us,

pardoned and provided:

Lord of the years,

we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word,

the word of life which fires us,

speaks to our hearts

and sets our souls ablaze,

teaches and trains,

rebukes us and inspires us:

Lord of the word,

receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land

in this our generation,

spirits oppressed by

pleasure, wealth and care:

for young and old,

for commonwealth and nation,

Lord of our land,

be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, of our world

where men disown and doubt you,

loveless in strength,

and comfortless in pain,

hungry and helpless,

lost indeed without you;

Lord of the world,

we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, of ourselves,

in living power remake us

self on the cross

and Christ upon the throne,

past put behind us,

for the future take us;

Lord of our lives,

to live for Christ alone.

*Words Timothy Dudley Smith*

*Tune Lord of the Years*

**Prayers of intercession**

There is a response to our prayers of intercession today.

When I say ‘**Merciful God’**, could you respond by saying ‘**hear our prayer’.**

…………….

Lord God,
you reproached Peter because he had only human concerns;
but Peter just wanted to protect the one he loved.
We pray for people the world over
who find themselves in difficult situations.
We pray that they would all have someone
to care for them and lift them before you.
**Merciful God, hear our prayer.**

We pray for all who are persecuted for their faith:
for all who are misunderstood,
for asylum seekers who flee real danger in their homeland.
We pray for those who work tirelessly to address wrongs.
**Merciful God, hear our prayer.**

We pray for people whose lives don’t always work out right,
through their fault, or through no fault of their own.
**Merciful God, hear our prayer.**

We pray for the people in our lives
who need your protection, Lord,
that we will always be faithful in prayer for them.
**Merciful God, hear our prayer.**

*In the silence Lord, we pray for people and situations that we are aware of that are needing our prayers.*

Finally we pray for ourselves, Lord.

That we may never be fearful of taking up our cross, knowing that your strength will guide us and help us focus on the path ahead. Amen

**Closing prayer**

Lord God, you knew what was going to happen to you.
You didn’t flinch, or back away.
You calmly told the disciples – and us – what to expect.
As we go out now,

remind us constantly to look to you

in the good and the tough times.
Guide us as we go in your name.**Amen.**

**Blessing**

**May the blessing of God**

**that is truly beyond all human understanding**

**with us now and forever more. Amen**

**Closing music Organ Music**

 **Nessie Black, Fleet URC**