

Worship: Sunday 9th August 2020

Jesus: our bridge over troubled water

Introductory music: Dear Lord and Father of Mankind

Opening words & prayer

Morning everyone, and welcome to this morning's service; an opportunity for us to come together wherever we may be – to share in words, music and prayer as we worship God, be it as members of Fleet URC or Beacon Hill URC or regular or new visitors to this service. We are gathered as God's Church, whoever and wherever we may be, so let us bring our worship joyfully knowing this.

Let us pray. God, we are busy people. We need reminders. We need help remembering what is important. In this time of preparation for worship we will try to slow down our thoughts and be present with you, Loving God. We will be still and be with our God.

Quietly playing: excerpt from Here are my thoughts, Lord (Singing the Faith 144)

Faithful God, you stay with us through all the difficult parts of life. You have been with us in our silent prayers. For your faithfulness and love, for this opportunity to join with others in worship, we are grateful. Amen.

Adapted by Karen Smith from <https://teaandtheology.com/worship-words-prayer-of-confession-and-assurance-of-forgiveness/>

Call to worship

based on Psalm 105: 1-6, 16-22, 45b

We join with your people in ancient times,
to sing together with exuberant delight and joy:
We praise and glorify our unchanging God!

Since time began, people have praised God—
and we join their chorus of thanks and praise:
How awesome are your deeds, O God!

Let all people reverently join in a chorus of praise—
as they gather together in the worship of God.

Bless the Lord our God, whose mercy is beyond our understanding, and whose steadfast love endures for ever and ever! Amen.

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Prayers of Adoration, confession and Lord's Prayer

Faithful God,
We gather this morning in Your presence:
Those of us who come here often and those who have not been here before.
Those who are full of faith and those who don't know what we believe.
Those who can hardly keep from singing, and those who can barely face the day.
We gather because You have called us, because You love us, because You are our God.
We gather, not because we are good or pure or holy, but because of our need.
We gather, knowing that again and again we have failed to live as You would have us live, that we have not loved one another, that we have not loved Your creation, that we have not loved You, that we have not loved ourselves.
Forgive us, God, and renew us to be Your people. Make us one, and reassure us in our true identity as children of the One who is above all things.
For we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,
Our faithful and forgiving friend. Amen

Before the world began, You loved us.
Before You had created us, You were faithful to us.

And we, as Your people, are thankful for Your great and abiding love, shown again and again down the ages.

You have never abandoned us, even when we have abandoned you.

You have never forgotten us, even when we have strayed far from the path.

We praise You, faithful God, for the steadfast love which has always guided us, for the promise which has never faltered, for the light which has lightened our way, for the story which has reminded us of those who came before us.

For Your steadfast love and mercies new with each morning,
We join with one voice to give You praise and thanks.

Adapted from <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/weekly-worship/monthly/august-2020>

Our good news is this:

The steadfast love of God never ceases. God's mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is God's faithfulness. (Lamentations 3: 22-23).

Jesus shared words of prayer with his disciples which His Church has continued to say throughout the ages. Let us, as have Christians down the years, pray together those words he entrusted to us, His 21st century disciples:

**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:

- 1 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,
when the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

Chorus

*We have an anchor that keeps the soul
steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
fastened to the Rock which cannot move,
grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!*

- 2 Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear,
when the breakers roar and the reef is near?
While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow,
shall the angry waves then your boat o'erflow?
Chorus.

- 3 Will your anchor hold in the floods of death,
when the waters cold chill your latest breath?
On the rising tide you can never fail,
while your anchor holds you will still prevail.
Chorus.

- 4 Will your eyes behold through the morning light
the city of gold and the harbour bright?
Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore,
when life's storms are past for evermore?
Chorus.

*Priscilla Jane Owens (1829-1907)
10 10 10 10 with refrain*

Readings:

1 Kings 19:9-18 read by Matthew Dumbleton

9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" **10** He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

11 He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; **12** and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" **14** He answered, "I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."

15 Then the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. **16** Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. **17** Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. **18** Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

Matthew 14:22-33 read by Rebecca Dumbleton

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. **23** And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, **24** but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.

25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. **26** But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out in fear. **27** But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, "Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid." **28** Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water."

29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. **30** But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" **31** Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" **32** When they got into the boat, the wind ceased.

33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Reflection:

Bridge over troubled water

Many years ago, I used to be involved in Pantomimes. I usually played the comedy role, and once I even played the Dame's sister! In one scene, we - that is, the dame and myself - had to both climb into a single bed, in the haunted house of Baron Chuckles (I can't remember his stage name as it was so long ago, but I think you get my meaning). The audience was made up of children, lots of them, and parents and grandparents, and when it came to the haunted scene, the audience would shout out, "It's behind you!" or cheer if we managed to shoo the ghost away.

Pantomimes are real entertainment narratives, and here in the Gospel reading today, we are also treated to one of the great entertainment stories of the Synoptic gospels: Peter inviting Jesus to tell him to get out of the boat, doing so, and almost immediately sinking and crying out for a rescue.

As in the pantomime story, the disciples also think they see a ghost on the water, alerting everyone (and I would expect very loudly) to the perceived ghost on the water, which is in fact Jesus. You can almost hear the anguish of the disciples, shouting with such voracity, *“Don’t try and walk on the water... come back in the boat!!”*

At first one can see the comical picture unfolding, but in fact this story has many layers.

1. Some preachers have seen it as a resurrection narrative – and many biblical scholars would take that view. The disciples glimpse the resurrected Jesus in his true identity as the Messiah, the Son of God.

2. Some preachers may feel it is centred on the character of Peter, following Jesus wherever he went, and the developing story of his faith.

3. Some preachers may even focus on the disciples, chiding Peter for even contemplating following Jesus on the water, for all they can see is a ghost, something not from this world.

4. Yet many preachers may take the image of the storm, which reflects the chaotic world we live in, and how our faith can be nurtured through such testing times.

The story of the disciples at sea battered by wind and wave is surely a story which speaks to our circumstance today. The possibility of being swamped by doubt and fear as much as ‘wind and waves’ seems to be as real these days as I have ever known it to be in the place I am called to serve.

I hardly need to list the reasons why, for we all find ourselves in similar places now. Who would have thought that something as small, at first invisible, as unknown as a virus would take hold as a pandemic and threaten to toss us off the boat in the way it has?

A boat will usually keep you safe, but in fact, if one thinks of the ‘boat’ as the ‘church’, as our ‘community of faith’, one might suggest that in our inability to be ‘all together in the boat’ we are all like Peter, not necessarily having stepped out willingly at all, but rather tossed overboard, sinking step by step.

Then we see Jesus coming to us in the storm. Not a ghost but Jesus, just as real and calm, and holding out a hand.

Yes, the storm tosses us around and may plunge us into the sea, yet the boat is also being tossed around, and we must stay focused on the face and presence of Jesus coming towards us to help us bridge these troubled waters.

For the present time, our boat, the church building, is not safe to enter, just as the disciples’ waterlogged boat was only safe when Jesus entered it and calmed the storm.

Yes, we can fondly remember when we shook hands freely, wrapped our arms around one another with abandon, regularly stepped aside to allow small ones to run freely in our midst, gathered close over coffee and biscuits on a Sunday morning, and sang out to our heart’s content.

And yes, I am afraid that that Church will never be the same as I remember. The church is, and has mostly always been, a place of community and kindness and nurturing for me. I certainly share the fear that church will never be the same again. That some will not come back, having now experienced the gift of leisure on Sunday morning, tuning in to worship in pyjamas and with a favourite morning beverage, if at all.

I am also afraid that the Church will attempt just to return to normal as quickly as humanly possible. That we will not allow ourselves to

be changed by all that has been, and will not acknowledge that God has been revealed in new ways through our Digital spirituality and our experience of being church in a new, creative way,

As Elders we are reviewing the situation monthly and checking whether it is safe, and you will be getting a newsletter this month keeping you up to date with developments. However, seeing the boat we need to climb into is one thing, but we may need a different boat to carry us over the troubled water, and we need to stay focussed on Jesus as the bridge that will take us to safety.

So it is in these days that I recognize the deadly power of this storm.

For me, at least, it's to recognise Jesus at work in a time which is, by so many measures, marked by storm. This is most pressing because, as I am able to somehow see Jesus, all the rest will follow.

Surely, we are being shaped for all the places Jesus calls us to, enabling us to walk and not to sink, and to be ready and willing for all that comes next...in the next phase of discipleship. As in the pantomime, I know there will be a good and hopeful outcome, where we will be full of joy again... but until then I will keep my eyes focussed on the one who brings hope, truth and love, the one who can calm the troubled waters, and the one who is the bridge to calmer seas - and that is Jesus .

Prayers of Intercession

(Interspersed with music - *Here are my thoughts, Lord* (Singing the Faith 144 v.1))

Here are my thoughts, Lord, here is my mind,

Here are my deeds, Lord, help me unwind.

Here is my strength, Lord, here is my will,

Here is my life, Lord, help me be still. David Adam b.1936

We join together now to pray for those things that concern us & for those we wish to bring before God, trusting in His loving care and concern. Let us pray.

Faithful God, we pray for the gift of deeper faith in you,

So that we trust you in a way that alters our dependence on everything else, and allows us clearer vision as to the direction and role of your church.

Remind us that it is your church: your work, your power and your kingdom.

Music plays

Lord our God, let only your will be done.

Faithful God, as we call to mind the stormy areas of our world,
The raging and the insecurity, the confusion and the bewilderment,
The restlessness and the fear,

Let your calming and reassuring presence be sensed and recognised,

Bringing peace and goodness, righteousness and hope.

Music plays

Lord our God, let only your will be done

Faithful God, come to us in the storms of life,

When we let each other down, mishandle opportunities,

And come to the end of our strength and patience;

And bless us with the love that never lets us down.

Music plays

Lord our God, let only your will be done

Faithful God, come to us in the stillness, as we bring to you

Those for whom we are concerned,

The things, big and small, going on in our lives that are worrying us

The moments when we find it hard to trust in you and your limitless mercy.

Help us to come across the waters of our troubles to you.

Music plays

Lord our God, let only your will be done

Faithful God, whose promises stand sure for ever, accept these prayers in the name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Adapted by Karen Smith from Prayers of Intercession by Susan Sayers Aug . 2020

Closing prayer:

Jesus who calms the storms,
enable us to see the way ahead,
to carry us safely over the bridge
and set us on a firm footing.

Jesus who calms the storms,
enable us to see the vision you lay before us,
to capture your delight
as we are caught by the Spirit's breath.

Jesus who calms the storm,
Enable us to keep focused on you
with our body, mind and soul,
to rejoice with you and others
when we arrive at our destination. Amen

Blessing

May the blessing of God that is truly beyond all human understanding,

Remain in our hearts and minds this day and each day,

Amen.

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Video recording produced by Anna & Karen Smith August 2020