

## URC Daily Devotions Worship

Sunday 18th October 2020



**The Rev'd Angela Rigby**

### **Introduction**

Hello Church! My name is Rev Angela Rigby, and I'm currently serving at Christ Church URC in Tonbridge and St Johns Hill URC in Sevenoaks. These two towns are in the home county called Kent, also known as the Garden of England. In some ways, where I am now is very different from St Helens in Merseyside, where I lived for twenty years prior to moving to Tonbridge. However in some ways, Tonbridge and St Helens are very similar. God is still God. And I am blessed to be part of the body of Christ, co-labouring with others for God's kingdom community in this part of England.

As you may hear from my accent, I am originally from Tennessee in the United States, and in my sermon, I will be drawing from my culture and

history a little bit. Hopefully I will do this in a way that helps you consider God's word and how you might apply it in your life, wherever you find yourself today. Now let us approach God together in worship as we share in our Call to Worship.

### **Call to Worship**

The wisdom of God calls to us, from the heights, along the paths, and at the crossroads. Come into God's presence to worship, sing, and pray.

**From our scattered places we come. Let us worship God.**

**Hymn:** *Be Thou My Vision*  
Irish Traditional

Be Thou my vision,  
O Lord of my heart;  
be all else but naught to me,  
save that Thou art  
be Thou my best thought,  
in the day and the night;  
both waking and sleeping,  
Thy presence my light.

2: Be Thou my wisdom,  
be Thou my true word;  
Be Thou ever with thee  
and I with thee, Lord.  
be Thou my great Father;  
and I Thy true child,  
be Thou in me dwelling  
and I with Thee one.

3: Be Thou my breastplate  
my sword for the fight  
be Thou my whole armour  
be Thou my true might  
be Thou my storm's shelter  
be Thou my strong tower.  
O raise thou me heavenward  
great Power of my power.

4: High king of heaven,  
thou Heaven's bright sun!  
O grant me its joys  
after victory is won  
great Heart of my own heart,  
whatever befall,  
Still be my vision,  
O Ruler of all.

## **Prayers of Approach, Confession and Forgiveness**

Holy God, this world is Your creation: **Let the nations take note**

You created people to help each other and to share what You had created: **Let the nations take note**

In Your kindness God, You created places to make homes, food to eat, and people to share them with: **God we thank You.**

In Your righteousness, You created justice and peace and laid plans for how we should live together in community. **God we thank You.**

In your holiness, You created the world in an ordered way, yet we have polluted Your world. **God we are sorry**

We polluted Your world with violence and war. We polluted Your world with racism and nationalism. We polluted Your world with economic greed and injustice.

**God we are sorry. God help us to live together in community, so that when people look at us, they see You. Amen.**

“The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah... No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.” *Hebrews 8:8, 11-12 NIV*

### **Prayer of illumination**

God, as we listen to today’s Bible reading, by Your Spirit, speak to us we pray. Help us to receive your word and to respond in a way that honours

You and helps build Your Kingdom community on earth as in heaven.  
Amen.

**Reading: Matthew 22:15-22 (NIV UK)**

Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the poll-tax to Caesar or not?’ But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.’ They brought him a denarius, and he asked them, ‘Whose image is this? And whose inscription?’ ‘Caesar’s,’ they replied. Then he said to them, ‘So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.’ When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away.

**Hymn:** *Keep Your Eyes on the Prize*  
Adapted from an old African American Spiritual by Alilce Wine in 1956.

Paul and Silas bound in jail had no money for to go their bail.  
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.

*Hold on, hold on. Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on*

Paul and Silas began to shout. Jail door opened and they walked out  
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.

I got my hand on the gospel plough;  
wouldn't take nothing for my journey now  
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.

Well the only thing we did wrong –  
stayed in the wilderness a day too long

**Sources and Thanks**

*Call To Worship* from Worship Aids for the Revised Common Lectionary  
from the Presbyterian Church of the USA

*Affirmation of Faith* from selected sections of the Belhar Confession of  
Faith.

*Offertory* adapted from the Rev'd Phil Nevard's used on 29 March 2020  
with permission.

All other prayers by Angela Rigby

*Be Thou My Vision* from BBC's Songs of Praise

*Keep Your Eyes on the Prize*, sung by Sweet Honey in the Rock

*Jesus Be the Centre* Ingrid DuMosch, The London Fox Singers, Shout! -  
Top 100 Praise & Worship Songs Volume 1

*How Can I Keep From Singing* by the New York City Virtual Choir.

Opening Organ Piece *Ach Gott Von Himmel Sieh Darein* (“O God from  
heaven see this”) by Johann Pachelbel (organ of The Spire Church,  
Farnham – 2020). Closing: *Toccata in Seven* by John Rutter (organ of All  
Saints', Odiham – 2020) Both played by Brian Cotterill.

<http://briancotterill.webs.com>

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recording other spoken parts of the service.

**Hymn**    *How Can I keep from Singing*  
(adapted from an American Shaker Hymn)

My life goes on in endless song  
above earth's lamentation.  
I hear the real,  
though far-off hymn  
that hails a new creation.

2: While though the tempest  
round me roars,  
I know the Truth, it liveth.  
And though the darkness  
round me close,  
songs in the night it giveth.

*No storm can shake  
my inmost calm,  
while to that Rock, I'm clinging.  
Since Love prevails  
in heaven and earth,  
how can I keep from singing?*

3: I lift my eyes.  
The cloud grows thin;  
I see the blue above it.  
And day by day,  
this pathway smooths,  
since first I learned to love it.

*No storm can shake my inmost calm, I hear the music ringing.  
It sounds an echo in my soul. How can I keep from singing?*

**Blessing**

Go now – back to your home, school, university or workplace.  
Go – back to family, friends, and colleagues.  
Take God's spirit with you and share the word you heard God speak to  
you today.

Let us share the words of the Grace together.  
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the  
fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen

Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on.  
The only thing that we did right was the day we started to fight.  
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on

We met jail and violence too but God's love will see us through.  
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on

Only chain that we can stand is the chain o' hand to hand.  
Keep your eyes on the prize, hold on, hold on

**Sermon**

In the United States during the 1950's and 1960's, the song "Keep Your  
Eyes on the Prize" became the unofficial anthem of the Civil Rights  
Movement. The song is an evolution of the hymn "Gospel Plough." Both  
the hymn and the song are about staying focussed on the goal.

When times get tough – and times will get tough when you start to get  
resistance to change – and there will be resistance to change.

Stay focussed. Remember why you are there. Don't let whoever or  
whatever knock you off course.

Staying focussed was important, especially in a movement of nonviolent  
resistance such as the one Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr led.

It was the 1950s and 1960s, and in the Southern states especially, there  
was a lot of resistance to change from legal authorities – police, state  
troopers, local mayors, city councils, and state governors. Many white  
people in power wanted African-Americans to "stay in their place," and  
they wanted to be the ones to define where that place was. That is after  
all the heart of segregation and the lie of "separate but equal."

Most police officers are different now, but back then in the Southern  
states, the police officer or state trooper that showed up at any

nonviolent protest most likely had two thoughts in mind. Either, the protesting African-American needed to submit to the legal authorities and go back to “his or her place”, or the protesting African-American needed to lose their temper. In my opinion, the tactics by the legal authorities were to elicit one response or another. If the African-American lost their temper, then the police or state trooper would have felt justified in beating, arresting or even killing the protestor.

To sing a song like “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize” when you are face to face with state troopers, Alsatians, and water cannons is to be reminded to stay focussed. The nonviolent resistance movement only works if it stays nonviolent. Once the protestors become violent, they’ve lost. So – “Keep Your Eyes on the Prize.” Stay focussed on the goal. The goal isn’t being better than the state troopers in front of you. The goal is freedom for an entire people, which for that generation started with voting rights and the end to segregation.

I was reminded of this song and the American Civil Rights movement as I read today’s passage.

In His response to the question being asked by the Pharisees via the Herodians, Jesus demonstrates that He remains focussed on His goal – the kingdom community of God.

The first line of our reading today was: “Then, the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Jesus in his words.”

This whole conversation was a lie. The Pharisees really didn’t care what Jesus’ thoughts on the Poll Tax were. They laid a trap to stop Jesus. “Let’s see if we can get Jesus to say something that will get him in trouble with the Roman Empire,” they thought. “Or, even better, let’s see if he will say something that will cause him to lose favour with the people following him around.”

## Intercessions

God, we bring to You our prayers.

We pray for those who are feeling lonely or isolated. God, comfort them with Your presence. May people reach out to them in Covid safe ways. Help us to create community, safe spaces of comfort in these difficult times.

We pray for those who are anxious. God, comfort them with Your peace. May they hear words of calm and not chaos. May they hear words of gentleness and not confusion.

We pray for those who mourn. God, comfort them with Your love. May memories comfort and console.

We pray for those who celebrate love. We thank You for those able to finally begin married life together. May these couples have strong loving marriages with You at the centre.

And in this moment of quiet, we bring to You our own concerns and prayers...

God of justice, righteousness, and kindness, we pray together the words of Amos 5:24:

**“May justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream”**

Amen

Let us we pray together the prayer Jesus taught his disciples to pray.

Our Father

## Affirmation of Faith

Do you believe in the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, who gathers, protects, and cares for the Church through Word and Spirit. This God has done since the beginning of the world and will do to the end.

### **We do**

Do you believe that God is the One who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people. **We do.**

Do you believe that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor, and the wronged? **We do.** This is the faith of the Church! We are proud to confess it in Jesus Christ, our Lord. **Amen.**

## Offertory

The offertory is an important part of our tradition of worship. And although we won't be passing an offertory plate at your home – or even in church buildings these days! – you might want to take this moment to put some cash into your freewill offering envelope and put it somewhere safe until it can be collected by your local church. You might also want to remember any local charities that are special to you. Many are struggling as the events where they raised money or collected donations in 2020 were cancelled. Many of them find themselves with less money, more work and fewer workers to do that work. You might want to think about how you might reach out to them with some support.

### *Prayer*

Loving God, you give to us beyond measure, you give to us without counting the cost. Accept whatever giving I can offer and use it that life may flourish and your Kingdom community come. Amen.

The Pharisees hated Roman rule and would have hated the Poll Tax, along with most of the people to be fair. The Herodians on the other hand worked with the Roman Empire in support of King Herod. Their obedience in regards to taxes helped them preserve what little power and status Rome allowed them to have. The two were unlikely friends. So for the Pharisees to ask the Herodians to ask this question was part of the trap.

It was a simple enough question: “Is it right to pay the poll-tax to Caesar or not? Yes or no, Jesus?” Either answer would have had signalled something to someone.

“Yes” would have signalled to the Jewish people that Jesus was out of touch with them. You can almost hear the comments. “Jesus is sympathetic to the Roman Empire? How on earth can he possibly be the Messiah then? Everybody hates the Poll Tax! Surely if Jesus is our Messiah, he would too?”

The answer “no” would have signalled to the Herodians and to the Roman Empire that Jesus was leading a rebellion. “He is inciting the people against Caesar,” they would think as they arrested him. Either answer would have landed Jesus into a mess. But Jesus isn't phased by the question. His hand is on the gospel plough. His eyes are on the prize.

He ponders the question and gives a witty answer. An answer that is neither yes nor no. An answer that neatly sits on the fence, but could come down on either side quite easily depending on who was listening. A fellow Jew would hear, “Too right, Jesus. Give to God what is God's, and it is all God's.”

A listening Roman soldier would hear, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and since it is all Caesar's that works out well for the Empire.”

I suppose a good preacher would point out the civic lesson here: we do have a responsibility to live responsibly. Obey the laws. Pay our taxes. Etcetera, etcetera...

But for me today – this whole Q&A session isn't the point. This whole conversation is a lie. It's a trap. It's a state trooper with an Alsatian and a water cannon.

I want to focus on how Jesus dealt with this trap.

Clearly, he saw it coming. But rather than get entangled in their word trap, Jesus refocuses the conversation back to what Jesus is interested in – the Kingdom community of God. That's His prize. And for Jesus, the Kingdom community of God is not limited to some place and somewhere else in time. It isn't some celestial parallel world.

For Jesus, the Kingdom community of God was "at hand" and "among you". It was both to come and yet breaking forth right now wherever they were. It was to be a lived experience now (at least in part), as well as an experience to be fully realised one day.

I admire Jesus' focus. Jesus knows what he is about. Jesus doesn't get entangled in the political jostling of the day, but He doesn't ignore it either. In His answer, He rose above it.

In 2016, First Lady Michelle Obama famously said, "When they go low, we go high." In her speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2020, she said that many people have asked her if going high still works when so many people are going low and using inhumane tactics. She responded by saying, "Going high is the only thing that works, because when we go low, when we use those same tactics of degrading and dehumanising others, we just become part of the ugly noise that is drowning out everything else. We degrade ourselves and we degrade the very causes for which we fight...going high means taking the harder

path...standing fierce against hatred...going high means unblocking the shackles of lies and mistrust..."

It's the same with the Kingdom community of God. A community that is to reflect the character of God needs to be formed of people who also reflect the character of God. Jeremiah 9:24 tells us that God's character is just, righteous and kind. We know from Galatians 5:22-23 that if the Spirit of God is at work among us, we will see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. How we co-labour with Christ matters.

Every day the trap is set – by tweets, arguments on social media, or something a politician or presenter says on a talk show. It's up to us to stay focussed on the kingdom community of God. To stand up for the character and qualities that drew each of us to God in the first place. It's up to us to advocate for those in the places we find ourselves every day. Instead of getting distracted by words, let's keep our hands on the gospel plough and our eyes on the prize.

Siblings in Christ, hold on.

**Hymn**     *Jesus be the Centre*  
Michael Frye © Vineyard

Jesus, be the centre; be my source, be my light, Jesus.

Jesus, be the centre; be my hope, be my song, Jesus.

Be the fire in my heart. Be the wind in these sails.  
Be the reason that I live, Jesus, Jesus.

Jesus, be my vision, be my path, be my guide, Jesus,