



**Christ Church United Reformed Church, Rayleigh**  
**Service, Sunday 23 July 2023**

**Call to Worship:-** Come to worship God, you who are heavy laden, for His Son will lighten the load, come those who mourn for His Son will give you peace,

Come those who are worried for his Son will share your burden, come those who fear for the future for His Son will quell your fears; come everyone young and old,

Male and female for His Holy Spirit will sustain and strengthen you.

**Hymn WF 7 “ Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Saviour”**

Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Saviour,  
I know for sure, all of my days  
Are held in your hand,  
Crafted into your perfect plan.  
You gently call me into Your presence,  
guiding me by Your Holy Spirit,  
Teaching me dear Lord, to live all my life through your eyes.  
I'm captured by your Holy calling,  
Set me apart,  
I know You're drawing me to Yourself:  
Lead me Lord I pray.

Take me, use me, fill me;  
I give my life to the Potter's hand,  
Call me, guide me, lead me, walk beside me;  
I give my life to the Potter's hand.

Children's time – Sandy Brown

Heavenly father, you are beyond belief  
You love us a Father loves his child,  
Not a child that is perfect,  
But with all our faults and imperfections.  
Heavenly Father, you are our Shepherd,  
A Shepherd who seeks us out,  
A Shepherd who shows us the way,  
And a Shepherd who rejoices in one lost sheep who returns to you.  
Heavenly Father, we have been Yours in the past,  
Heavenly Father, we are Yours now,  
Heavenly Father we shall be yours forever,  
Heavenly Father, we welcome your love  
And will serve you always,  
Secure in the knowledge that you are with us always

Secure in the knowledge that your Son, Jesus Christ lights our way  
And secure in the knowledge that Your Holy Spirit continues  
To strengthen us and sustain us.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father,  
who art in Heaven,  
hallowed be your name;  
Your kingdom come thy will be done on earth  
As it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us  
And lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil,  
For thine is the kingdom, the power  
and the glory  
Forever and ever. AMEN.

### **Hymn WF 6 "As the deer pants for water"**

As the deer pants for water,  
So my soul longs after you.  
You alone are my heart's desire  
And I long to worship you.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,  
To You alone may my spirit yield,  
You alone are my heart's desire,  
And I long to worship you.*

I want you more than gold or silver,  
Only You can satisfy  
You alone are the real joy-giver ng,  
And the apple of my eye.

*You alone etc.*

You're my friend and You are my brother,  
Even though you are a King  
I love you more than any other,  
So much more than anything  
*You alone etc.*

As the children leave us let us say the Grace to them:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
The love of God  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
Be with you all evermore. AMEN

**Reading; *Isaiah* CH 44 vv 6-8**

This reading is part of a much longer passage, namely Isaiah Chapter 42 through to Chapter 44 verse 22.

The background to all of this is the Babylonian Exile and although its end is near Israel is not aware of that. Some of the Israelites saw the destruction of Jerusalem and have suffered through decades of exile. Indeed most have been born in Babylon and know nothing but subservience to this great power. Understandably, perhaps it has been difficult for the Israelites to keep believing that God will redeem them. However, unbeknown to Israel, Cyrus is waiting in the wings to assume power and when he does, he will permit the Israelites to return to Jerusalem. So the prophet's purpose here is to encourage Israel to continue to have faith at this critical time in their history.

Although short, these three verses follow on from a description of God's power and tells of Israel's disobedience, but also of God's identity and power. It is clear that God, through Isaiah, is telling the Israelites that if He had the power to exile Israel, equally he has the power to restore Israel and that is what he promises to do in the previous chapter.

Having given you some idea of the background to the reading we now look at the verses in detail, where God has a few chosen words to say to Israel. It is clear that the Lord Almighty Rules and protects Israel and he has something to say to his people. In verse 6 "I am the first, the last, the only God and there is no other God but him, thus reinforcing God's commandments given to Moses. He goes on to ask a rhetorical question – "Could anyone else have done what I did? Who could have predicted all that would happen from the very beginning to the end of time?" Perhaps you might think that to us the answer is obvious because the answer is no-one could have made that prediction but God, but of course Isaiah wanted to ram home that particular message. In the final verse of our reading the tone changes, "Do not be afraid my people! You know that from ancient times until now I have predicted all that would happen." He even tells Israel that they are his witnesses! Yet another rhetorical question: "Is there any other God? Is there some more powerful God I never heard of?" Yet again the purpose of what seems on the surface to be a stupid question is to ram home God's power and abilities to a people who, through circumstances of feeling abandoned, may well have forgotten the basics!

When I read this passage and a bit of additional reading round it, I began to wonder if this message is not just for Israel, but also for us. So often we become drowned in the minutiae of everyday living and forget the basics as laid out in our opening prayer – God is our Father and He is our loving shepherd. We'll come back to this idea later.

### **Hymn WF 14 “Bless the Lord O my soul”**

*Bless the Lord O my soul; and You're slow  
O my soul, worship his His holy name.  
Sing like never before, o my soul.  
I'll worship your holy name.*

The sun comes up, it's a new day dawning;  
It's time to sing Your song again.  
Whatever may pass and whatever lies before me,  
Let me be singing when the evening comes.

*Bless the Lord O my soul etc.*

You're rich in love and you're slow to anger,  
Your name is great and Your heart is kind.  
For all Your goodness, I will keep on singing;  
Ten thousand reasons for my heart to find.

*Bless the lord, O my soul etc*

And on that day When my strength is failing,  
The end draws near and my time has come,  
Still my soul will sing Your praise unending;  
Ten thousand years and then forever more.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
O my soul worship His holy name.  
Sing like never before, O my soul,  
I'll worship Your holy name.  
I'll worship Your holy name.  
Yes, I'll worship your holy name.*

### **Reading: Matthew Ch 13 vv 24-30 and 44-52**

Some commentators have said that in its lessons this is one of the most practical parables that Jesus ever told. Why?

Well, firstly it teaches us that there is always a hostile power in the world, seeking and waiting to destroy the good seed – think of the Babylonians in our old testament reading. Our experience is that both kinds of influence act upon our lives-the influence that helps the seed of the word to flourish and to grow, and the influence

which seeks to destroy the good seed before it can produce fruit at all. The lesson is that we must forever be on our guard.

Secondly, it teaches us how hard it is to distinguish between those who are in the kingdom and those who are not. Some people may appear to be good and may in fact be bad and others may appear to be bad and may yet be good. We are much too quick to classify people, we rush to label them good or bad without knowing all the facts – think of the lesson put across brilliantly by Sandy earlier

Thirdly it teaches us not to be so quick with our judgements. If the reapers had had their way, they would have tried to tear out the darnel and they would have ended up tearing out the wheat as well. Judgement had to wait until it was time to harvest the crop. In the end, we will be judged, not by any single act or stage in our lives, but by our whole lives. Judgement cannot come until the end and that is probably just as well as it is possible to redeem ourselves, if we make a great mistake, and by God's grace, atone for it by making the rest of our lives a lovely thing. Equally, it is also possible to live an honourable life and then wreck it all by a sudden collapse into sin. No one who only sees part of a thing can judge the whole; and no one who knows only a part of an individual's life, can judge the whole person, and sometimes that lesson is very hard to take on board as time and again we make snap judgements about people and events.

Fourthly, it teaches us that judgement does come in the end, for example God's action of exiling the Israelites to Babylon because of their failures, but equally in his decision to end that long exile and allow the return to Jerusalem. Judgement, especially if it is God's judgement, is not hasty, but it does come, eventually. It may be that humanly speaking, in this life the sinner seems to escape the consequences- but always remember that there is a life to come. It may also be that, from a human perspective, goodness never seems to enter into its reward, but again remember there is a new world, that redresses the balance of the old.

Lastly, it teaches us That the only person with the right to judge is God. It is God alone who can see the good and the bad, it is God alone who sees all of an individual and all of a person's life. It is God alone who judges.

So this parable is two things – a warning not to judge people at all and it is a warning that in the end there comes the judgement of God. Let us remember the final questions that were posed in our reading from Isaiah. "Is there any other God? Is there some powerful god I never heard of?" As Christians, wherever we are, always let our answer be "No!" and let it resound loudly around the world, reminding the world that God is supreme and eventually victorious over all things.

### **Hymn WF 16 "Christ triumphant ever reigning"**

Christ triumphant, ever reigning,  
Saviour, Master, King,  
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining  
Here us as we sing;

*Yours the glory and the crown,  
The high renown, the eternal name*

Word incarnate, truth revealing,  
Son of Man on earth!  
Power and majesty concealing  
By your humble birth  
*Yours the glory etc.,*

Suffering Servant, scorned, ill treated,  
Victim crucified!  
Death is through the cross defeated,  
Sinners justified.  
*Yours the glory etc*

Priestly King, enthroned forever  
High in heaven above  
Sin and death and hell shall never  
Stifle hymns of love,  
*Yours the glory etc.,*

So, our hearts and voices raising  
Through the ages long,  
Ceaselessly upon You gazing  
This shall be our song:  
*Yours the glory etc.*

Preparation for Prayers of Intercession: Purcell "Thou knowest Lord the secret of our hearts" (CD)

## **Prayers of Intercession**

### **Hymn R&S 663 "Love divine all loves excelling"**

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down,  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
All thy faithful mercies crown.  
Jesus thou art all compassion,  
pure, unbounded love thou art;  
visit it us with thy salvation,  
enter every trembling heart.

Come, almighty to deliver,  
Let us all thy life receive,  
Suddenly return, and never,  
Never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing  
Serve thee as thy hosts above,  
Pray, and praise thee without ceasing,  
Glory in thy perfect love.

Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see thy great salvation,  
Perfectly restored in thee.  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee  
lost in wonder, love and praise.

### **Dismissal and Blessing**

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