

Worshipping Together - The Church at Carrs Lane, 22nd November 2020

Led by Deacon Ruth Yorke

Welcome – welcome to worship together – God welcomes us each and all to worship together, to be loved, to be cherished, to listen, to pray, to be community. Who you are is who you were made to be. You are God's beloved, and so am I. We worship Together.

Call to worship: Please join in the words in dark type

We join to worship God: **we worship God, source of all life, ground of our being**

We join with people around the world: **we worship God, giver of all life to all**

We come as we are with our sorrows and joys, concerns and thanksgivings: **we worship God who loves us deeply and forever**

We worship God who is with us: **we worship God shown in Jesus, Immanuel, the God who is beside us, with us, in our lives.** We worship God together: **we worship God together**

*Hymn: Give thanks with a grateful heart, give thanks to the Holy one.

Give thanks because he's given Jesus Christ, his Son.

And now, let the weak say 'I am strong', let the poor say, 'I am rich,

because of what the Lord has done for us'... (Henry Smith, Singing the Faith 78)

Prayers:

Faithful God, we praise you. Living God, we praise you. Immanuel, the 'with us God', we praise you.

You God are above all things and yet alongside us, with us, within us. We do not fully understand but we thank you and praise you that it's true.

We confess the times when we do wrong or do things that distance us from you and from other people.

We ask your forgiveness.

Thank you that when we are truly sorry, you forgive us and help us to start again. Thank you for your forgiveness and for the help of your Spirit.

Thank you too for the help of those who show us what your love is like. We thank you for those who have died who have shown us what your love is like, and for those still with us on earth. Thank you.

We thank you for this church, this community, which even in these strange dispersed times, gives us strength and support in different ways. We thank you that we can still worship together.

We thank you for this day and for this time together.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Transgender Day of Remembrance:

Friday was Transgender day of Remembrance. This is an internationally held day each year when we particularly call to mind people who are transgender who have suffered violence because of their gender identity. From 1st October 2019 – 30th September 2020, 350 people around the world have been killed because of they were transgender or gender diverse, and every day, including in the UK, transgender people suffer insults, abuse and violence. This includes people I know – who are shouted at in the street, verbally abused, physically attacked, because of their gender identity. We need so much to change. You can find out more on www.stonewall.org.uk and www.transrespect.org

We light this candle as a mark of respect and remembrance.

We thank God for every person God has created. Each is special, important, unique and loved.

Loving God, help us to be part of the change that makes life safe for people of every gender identity. Amen.

Sarah:

*"do not fear, for I am with you,
Do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand"*

Isaiah 41.10

Coming in the second book of Isaiah, this verse appears in what the rabbis call The Book of Consolation. The prophet, probably writing as he was living amongst fellow Jewish exiles in Babylonia in the sixth century, was able to encourage the exiles that they would be able to go back home “soon” because Cyrus would be raised up to destroy Babylon, and they would be released. As good as that might have sounded, they knew that their homes and Temple would need rebuilding. Quite demoralised, this verse and others offer God’s encouragement and exhortation. It is offered to us still today in these words of comfort and solid reassurance. We are reminded of the divine presence: “I am with you” and of the divine commitment: “I am your God” The verbs in the verse are in a particular grammatical construction which means that they intensify in passion as they go on: “Yes, I will strengthen you! Indeed, I will keep you! Why, I will uphold you!”

The President and Vice-President of the Methodist Conference, Richard and Carolyn, have taken Wesley’s last words as their theme for the year, “best of all – God is with us” and for me that is certainly true.

God has been the underpinning of my life for the last 35 years, and I don’t see that changing! God’s grace towards me has been apparent so many times: for the mistakes I have made, the things I have done or said that I have regretted afterwards. Throughout the challenges of several significant bereavements, a couple of huge house moves from one end of the country to the other, the uncertainty of my late husband’s heart transplant, the worries of a stepson in prison for a couple of months – God has been constant and enabling of me to bring me through these challenges. To God I turned time and time again, when I knew that no earthly friends would cope with the depth of my emotions – I knew that my God could hear my words of anger or lament and give me comfort, bring me some peace. I know that I have been greatly blessed by God too – God has been faithful in providing for my needs one way or another.

The presence of God in my life makes the difference between hope and despair, between perseverance and giving up, and between abundant life and mere existence. My ability to express gratitude has been a significant gift from God, which has enabled me to look for God’s blessings each day and to become more and more aware of the ways in which God shows me that I am loved, cherished and known. That blows my mind, several times over! But whatever happens, yes, best of all – God IS with us.

*a pause, with thoughtful music

Bible reading: Ephesians 3: 14-21

Sermon:

It is very easy to compare ourselves to others. In covid times, to be thinking, ‘I wish I’d done as much as...’ or ‘I wish I was as clever/inspired/good as...’. Are we enough? Could we ever be enough?

Our earlier reading reminded us that God is with us, and our recent reading reminds us that we are loved more than we can comprehend – God’s love is deeper, wider, higher, greater than we can fathom.

Although it’s true that some people seem to have done amazing things in lockdown and since and I wonder in awe at them, the truth is that I am called to be me and to live out my vocation in God, and you are called to be you and live out your vocation in God.

Sometimes that means doing something very obvious, public and where we may be praised and acclaimed. Sometimes it means doing little things which will never catch the public eye, but are important nonetheless. Sometimes living out our vocation in God means learning to stop and rest, learning to balance life and not overdo it, and certainly not trying to be someone else.

It may be actually true that there are cleverer people than you or me, more gifted, more inspiring, people who have done amazing things I will never manage and would never have even thought of. But you know what? That’s fine – you are not called to be that person, and nor am I. You and I are the people who are right here, right now, in our lives with the contacts and knowledge and experience and outlook we have, and God values us and loves us, as we are, more than we can even fathom.

We are all loved immeasurably just as we are. I would make a rubbish job of being you, and you may not do too well if you tried to be me!

There is space for us all in the love of God, which is higher, deeper, wider, bigger and more immense than we could possibly work out or understand.

This is why 'you are enough'. Not because there's nothing we could do to be nicer, kinder, more...whatever, but we are enough because we are loved. Just as we are.

And God is enough because it is that love of God which transforms, roots and enables our lives.
(quiet moment)

*Songs:

Faithful God, so unchanging. Ageless one, you're my rock of Peace. Lord of all, I depend on you. I call out to you, again and again. I call out to you, again and again. You are my rock in times of trouble; you lift me up when I fall down. All through the storm, your love is the anchor. My hope is in your alone. (Brian Doerkson, vineyard Songs, Singing the Faith 628)

Faithful God, Faithful God, All sufficient one, I worship you. Shalom, my Peace – my strong deliverer. I lift you up, Faithful God. (Christopher Alan Bowater, Singing the Faith 47)

Intercessions - written by Pat, led by Christine

Loving Heavenly Father

We bring to You our prayers, as Your community in the city centre of Birmingham, on the anniversary of the pub bombings so long ago.

We pray for all Health Service workers in hospitals, care homes and the community doing their work day after day to keep us fit and well.

We remember the staff and clergy at Carrs Lane, coping with extra problems imposed on them because of Covid restrictions. Help us to support those making decisions on our behalf for the future use of our building and resources.

We pray for those working at Aston and Nechells Food Bank and the work of Trussell Trust, supporting those in particular need at a difficult moment in their lives.

At Carrs Lane we ask for Your Guidance in our discussions about Traidcraft and our community's continued support through Fair Trade for our brothers and sisters around the world.

In our congregation we pray for all who are affected or worried by the current health crisis in the UK and worldwide. May we support each other with Your Lovingkindness, as Jesus taught us to pray....

Our Father...

*Hymn: I need thee every hour, most Gracious God, no tender voice like thine can peace afford:

I need thee, O I need thee, every hour I need thee, O bless me now my Saviour, I come to thee.

I need thee every hour, stay thou nearby; temptations lose their power when thou art nigh:

I need thee every hour, in joy or pain. Come quickly and abide or life is vain:

I need thee every hour; teach me thy will, and thy rich promises in me fulfil:
(Annie Sherwood Hawks, singing the Faith 467)

Blessing

May God who is with us and who is all sufficient, fill your life with God's boundless, endless faithful Love – that you may live in it, sure of God's love and able to share it in the way you live. Amen.

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