

27th September 2020 – Morning Service

Rev Michael Payne

StF 455 – All my hope on God is founded

- 1) All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
Only good and only true.
God unknown, He alone
Calls my heart to be his own.
- 2) Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil we fashion,
Tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.
- 3) God's great goodness aye endureth,
Deep his wisdom passing thought;
Splendour, light, and life attend him,
Beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, from his store
New-born worlds rise and adore.
- 4) Daily doth the almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
Pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand, at his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command.
- 5) Still from earth to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
For the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call, one and all;
Ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Praise and Confession

Lord we Praise you that in Christ our “ends” becomes his “new beginning” as we put ourselves aside for your purpose.

Lord we Praise you that in Christ our times of emptiness can be times of refreshment.

Lord we Praise you that in Christ your damaged world can be restored and damaged lives can find healing.

Lord we Praise you that in Christ our lives receive a purpose and direction, hope and peace.

Lord we Praise you that in Christ we can come before you and confess our need of forgiveness and grace.

We pause and bring to mind the times we have damaged your world and damaged our neighbour....

We pause and bring to mind the times we have complained about our lives and questioned your presence..

We pause and receive your grace and forgiveness.....

For we ask our prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray, saying,

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name; thy 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 for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. The people quarrelled with Moses, and said, 'Give us water to drink.' Moses said to them, 'Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?' But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, 'Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?' So Moses cried out to the Lord, 'What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.' The Lord said to Moses, 'Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.' Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarrelled and tested the Lord, saying, 'Is the Lord among us or not?'

Meditation

Can you remember a time you've been thirsty? Really, really thirsty? Parched. Desperate for water. How does it feel? It's not pleasant, is it?

In the desert, we are thirsty, Lord.

Can you remember a time when you've really appreciated a drink? Perhaps after a long day, perhaps in the hot sun, perhaps after going for a run or doing some exercise. How does it feel?

The cool, refreshing feeling of water on a dry, parched tongue. The way a long drink gives you energy and renews your strength.

In the desert, we are thirsty, Lord.

Imagine a rock. A large, hard, dry rock. It's not really the place we'd expect water to come from, is it? It doesn't look much like a tap. Then, in this story from Exodus, the rock becomes the place where thirst is quenched, where water flows, where refreshment reaches the people of Israel.

In the desert, Lord, you provide water.

Has this happened for you? Have you ever found something you needed in an unexpected place?

Have you, in the midst of a really difficult time, found someone being extra-especially kind to you?

In the hard times, God is still with us, God is looking out for us.

In the desert, Lord, you provide water. May your refreshing, cooling, inspiring water flow through me today, Lord God. Amen. *(Reflection written by Tim Baker)*

StF 465 – Guide me, O thou great Jehovah

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| 1) Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,
Feed me now and evermore.
Feed me now and evermore. | 3) When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs of praises, Songs of praises
I will ever give to thee.
I will ever give to thee. |
| 2) Open thou the crystal fountain,
Whence the healing stream shall flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer,
Be thou still my strength and shield.
Be thou still my strength and shield. | |

Sermon - "The whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages." Exodus 17:1

The image of journey is a regular theme or image when speaking of faith. Without that image I wonder what we would do as preachers?

This one verse makes three points easily available. – Whole – Journeyed – Stages.

1 - The **whole** congregation journeyed by stages.

A few weeks ago I came across a proverb – "If you want to go fast go alone; if you want to go far go together." There are times when a small group, or an individual, within a congregation wish to hurry along but travelling with the whole congregation can aid the long-term effectiveness of a venture.

I have shared the following image with a number of people in recent weeks. A former deacon colleague of mine was asked by the Circuit Leadership Team to review how things had gone in her first year and how she saw the Church she was working with. She drew a picture of an octopus. She described how there were many groups within the Church working hard. There was great activity, there was the waving of tentacles but the octopus was not moving. The collective result of the effort was keeping the Octopus (Church) in the same place. There was a need to engage all parts of the Church seeking to move in the same direction.

This idea of the whole congregation does not mean all are doing the same thing, at the same time but that all are involved in the same purpose, pressing towards the same goal, and expelling energy in the same direction. Taking the octopus analogy a little further there needs to be no one tentacle gripping on to the current situation so that the rest cannot move. During Lockdown it has not been easy to keep all informed all of the time about what is going on but in some areas perhaps we have done better than in normal times as we have made a concerted effort to keep in touch.

When I was ministering in Newport I had pastoral charge of a small congregation in a country chapel. They were a delight to look after for they truly were one congregation. Being a small congregation made it easier, perhaps, for each realized their own importance to the **whole**. If one person was not going to be in Chapel on a Sunday, for any reason, they would always let someone else know. If there was a need it could be prayed for and if possible met. If it was due to a celebration all could share in their joy.

In a larger congregation all are still important, each to be playing their part in the whole, but it does not always appear to be that way. There are those who are visibly active, some active but not noticed and others not realising they have a part to play.

2 - The **whole** congregation journeyed by stages.

How many journeys have you been on? "Every journey begins with one step" is a good old cliché. (Well you can't have a new cliché – can you?)

Over the last few months I have walked many a mile. From the beginning of May until now I have walked over 550 miles. Anita asks "well why are you still here then?" The answer is simple I keep finishing my walk where I started it, at home. I have journeyed, but always arrived back at the start.

Some days I have gone out with a specific route worked out to deliver letters and information sheets. Other times I set off and whilst walking choose which way to go and at times I choose to take a longer route as I feel I have the energy to do it but I have always ended up where I started.

Where are we traveling to rather than just expelling energy getting back to where we started? As churches on a journey how are we to discern what is the route to take? How do we discover the direction of travel? How can we overcome the obstacles and difficulties in the way?

The easy answer is to seek God's guidance; doing it can be harder.

On a journey there are times to stop and rest; to take in the view, to look at where we are, where we have been, and where we are going. Over the last few months we have been made to stop and look and think. Even on a journey there are pause points; you only truly stop at the end.

3 - The congregation of Israelites journeyed by stages.

I was listening to the radio a few days ago and there had been some conversation about an old film – “Bill and Ted’s Excellent Adventure.” Apparently it was about a time travelling telephone booth (American). People were contacting the programme about where they would travel to in time and place in history if they had access to the phone box..

Unless we can get in a phone box (the Tardis) and end up in a different place and time in an instant or teleport as in Star Trek all journeys are made up of parts, stages and require effort.

Hidden in the depths of the Methodist Church Website is a toolkit to help Churches review their mission and it consists of 8 stages; -

<https://www.methodist.org.uk/our-work/our-work-in-britain/evangelism-growth/leading-churches-into-growth/write-a-great-mission-plan/>

I know that link is not helpful for those who do not “do computers”. So the 8 stages are; - Decide the process; Audit the Community; conduct a Church review; dream together; choose priorities; Identify actions; consider the fruit; set a date for a review.

At this time of reopening our places of worship there are many parts of our traditional Church life that have not happened for 6 months. Do they all need to recommence? Can some be left behind as we journey on? Are there new ventures we should undertake as we move on? These are some of the questions we could perhaps address.

To write a mission plan is to go through a process of **stages**. At the Circuit meeting last week our Superintendent, Rev Alan, spoke of the need to review where we are and to plan for how we journey on. There will be stages in this journey.

Over the years I have been on a number of multi day treks. At the end of each day there is a rest as that stage is completed but it was only after 5 or 6 days that we arrived at a place many miles from where the group had started. It was then that was a feeling of great achievement “I have done it”, “we have done it”. On the way to that end point **stages** were gone through, some being very tough and painful days; ultimately every step was worth it to complete the journey. We endured the pain and the rain, the wind and the blisters, the ups and the downs and arrived feeling exhausted but delighted.

As Church Congregations and as a Circuit of Congregations we need to recognise that our journey is one of stages; some stages are easy, others are tough. Are we walking round in circles or are we getting somewhere? Are we following where God is leading or setting our own agenda? Are we travelling together or as individuals?

In the wilderness the Israelites walked around for many years not getting very far, not taking the direct route and at least once walking in a large circle despite God’s guidance.

Where are we going and how are we going to get there and what are we going to do on the way?

We may well want to ask “Is the Lord among us or not?” and of course the answer is “yes” but to know his presence is a different thing. When the water from the rock refreshed them, the Israelites, knew God was with them. Let us make sure we drink and are refreshed and be aware that the water of refreshment may come from a very unexpected place – a dry rock?

StF 518 – Father, hear the prayer we offer

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| 1) Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously. | 3) Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would strike the living fountains
From the rocks along our way. |
| 2) Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly. | 4) Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be there at our side. |

Love Maria Willis CCL No. 515642

Prayers of Intercession

Thirsty for God, let us pray to him now, in the knowledge that he will provide for us in the way that is best. Father, wherever the Church is dry and parched may the water of your Spirit well up to refresh and renew, to bring life, and strong new growth.

Lord make us more aware of our thirst for you, so that we come to you ready and eager to receive your living water.

Silence

L: Living God **R: Satisfy our thirst**

Father, from the conflicting needs and agendas of the world we cry for mercy, for a deeper understanding of one another and a greater desire for cooperation and peace.

We pray for sensitivity in handling difficult negotiations, wherever they are, and the wisdom which respects and listens

Silence

L: Living God **R: Satisfy our thirst**

We pray that in all our relationships you will make us effective channels of your love and forgiveness. Make us awash with your living water so that our homes and places of work, our shopping and leisure centres, our conversation and actions are always in touch with your renewing power.

Silence

L: Living God **R: Satisfy our thirst**

We stand alongside all those who are suffering whether in body, mind or spirit and long for your healing and comfort, your strength for perseverance and your patience in the dark times; we long for your living Spirit to envelop and sustain them.

Silence

L: Living God **R: Satisfy our thirst**

We pray for those who have come to the end of their earthly life; have mercy upon them, and strengthen those who are unable to be with loved ones at a time of parting.

Silence

L: Living God **R: Satisfy our thirst**

O God, how we need you! We thank you for supplying our needs and coaxing us forward with your tenderness and mercy on the path you desire us to take. Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

StF 478 – Thank you, O God, for the time that is now

- 1) Thank you, O God, for the time that is now,
For all the newness your minutes allow,
Make us alert with your presence of mind
To fears and longings that move humankind.
- 2) Thank you, O God, for the time that is past,
For all the values and thoughts that will last.
May we all stagnant tradition ignore,
Leaving behind things that matter no more.
- 3) Thank you for hopes of the day that will
come,
For all the change that will happen in time;
God, for the future our spirits prepare,
Hallow our doubts and redeem us from fear.
- 4) Make us afraid of the thoughts that delay,
Faithful in all the affairs of today;
Keep us, Creator, from playing it safe,
Thank you that now is the time of our life!

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Dismissal

Lord, the journey can be hard and we do not know the turnings. The path can be difficult and we can easily lose our way. Give us your peace, courage and guidance and an assurance of your living presence to the end and beyond for we are truly blessed by you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **Amen**