

4th October 2020 – Morning Service

The Cornerstone

Rev Chris Watson

Call to Worship

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – calls us to set our sights on the goal of following and living in the way of Christ. God calls to us follow now.

StF 455 - All my hope on God is founded

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| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | 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. |
| 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. | |

Robert Bridges CCL No. 515642

Opening Prayers

Lord God, as we journey towards the goal you set before us, we see glimpses of who you are, often too deep and unimaginable to grasp fully the depth of your being. What we see and feel spurs us on in our journey to discover more of you.

God of the journey of life, the mystery of our very being, we confess that the journey we take gets disrupted and we get sidetracked. We go off on wild goose chases that lead us nowhere, up blind alleys and into bad and barren places. We find our way back to you in sorrow for our failings and in penitence for our wanderings. May we be enriched by your welcome, relieved by your forgiveness and comforted by your all-embracing love.

Lord God, we are all so different, each our own being; and yet you love and care for us all, you nurture and protect us. How can we not be thankful to you for all that the journey with you offers!

We thank you that you guide us, in unexpected ways, to find the right way in life.

We thank you that when we wander, you draw us back to you, give us new direction and encourage us to follow where you lead.

We thank you that you know our individual needs and quirks, and yearn for us to be on the journey of life with you.

We thank you that the pains of life can be overshadowed by the joy of walking with you.

For all these blessings and more, we give you thanks and praise. **Amen.**

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.**

Song – God sent his Son

- 1) God sent His Son, they called Him Jesus;
He came to love, heal and forgive.
He lived and died, to buy my pardon.
An empty grave is there to prove
My Saviour lives!
- 2) How sweet to hold our new-born baby
And feel the pride and joy he gives;
But greater still the calm assurance,
This child can face uncertain days
Because He lives!
- Ch) *Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.
Because He lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know He holds the future,
And life is worth the living,
Just because He lives!*
- 3) And then one day I'll cross that river,
I'll fight life's final war with pain.
And then as death gives way to vict'ry,
I'll see the lights of glory
And I'll know He reigns.

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Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

“Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” “He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,” they replied, “and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.” Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvellous in our eyes’? Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.” When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Reflection

Our reading from Matthew comes in the chapter which starts with the entry into Jerusalem, the cleansing of the Temple, the cursed fig tree, and the parable of the two sons. This parable of the vineyard carries on from there. If we were to read this story in the newspaper or to hear it on the news perhaps we would find the tale of fraud, gang violence and multiply murders shocking. We are so familiar with this story that the details pass us by, but imagine for a moment, how the chief priests and scribes felt as they listened and were cleverly forced by Jesus to condemn themselves and their own actions. The vineyard is the nation of Israel which should be producing good fruit, the prophets have been sent throughout the ages and have met with violence, now the owner has sent his son, Jesus, who again is being treated with contempt

instead of the respect he is entitled to. There are various ways we can view this parable and its meaning for us today. We are coming to the time of year when we give thanks for the harvest and celebrate the gift of creation so we are admonished to consider the way we care for the vineyard which is our planet. Perhaps we should be considering all the implications of climate change. David Attenborough recently in a programme called Extinction sounded a warning bell on the way human actions affect this vineyard of which we are the stewards. This planet, this vineyard is not our playground but is entrusted into our care, we are the stewards, the keepers of the vineyard, the tenants. Another way to view this parable is to say that we as individual members of God's Kingdom, of branches of the true vine are expected to bear good fruit. Before the final warning to his hearers Jesus quotes Psalm 118 saying that the stone the builders rejected became the key foundation stone, again indicating the topsy turvy nature of the Kingdom. Jesus is the cornerstone on which Matthew invites us to build our lives.

STF 351 – In Christ alone

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| 1) In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand. | 3) There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine-
Bought with the precious blood of Christ. |
| 2) In Christ alone! who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe!
The gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The word of God was satisfied -
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live. | 4) No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand! |

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Reading: Philippians 3:4b-14

If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless. But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.

Reflection

Our second reading today was from the letter written to the church in Phillipi. It was originally a Greek city, refounded by the Romans after the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC, largely by Roman veterans. According to Latin inscriptions found there, it was a prosperous place. During the time of the letter to the Philippians – somewhere around AD 60 – it had been extensively remodelled, and was considered to be a 'miniature

Rome'. Paul was writing to a group of people he knew and was fond of. The letter was written after several visits perhaps around AD 60, and perhaps from Rome or Ephesus. Letters would normally be read aloud to the community, because a lot of people would not have been able to read. Those listening would probably be from the lower classes of society. Paul sets out his credentials rather like a CV applying for the right to speak and teach. If his rights were based on birth, he qualified, if based on religious observance, he qualified, if based on zeal for the law, he qualified. He had done all that any of the laws required of him and done it well but he had come to realise that all of it was not enough. In fact he came to see it all as rubbish. He realised that by his own efforts he could not gain perfection, he could not change, he could not win. Like Matthew he came to see that everything had to be built on the cornerstone, on Jesus. Paul says that now he is striving to gain perfection through knowing Jesus, to become more like him so that eventually he can join him in eternal life, everything else is meaningless, his focus is on the Kingdom. Recently I have been watching the Tour de France where the cyclists ride for team glory as well as for individual honours. Many of the team are there to provide help and assistance for their team leader who may win stages, or points, or standings at the end. They help by collecting supplies from the support vehicles, by giving up their bikes if the leader has a puncture, they pace back to a main group, they surround the leader to protect from other teams, from the winds, they help by an encouraging word or pat on the back. Perhaps that is how we should be as churches, each of us is both a team leader and a servant of the others, each of us should be striving to follow Jesus aided and abetted by our fellow cyclists, straining together up the mountains, protecting each other, encouraging, taking the brunt of the winds, relaxing at times so others can take the strain, all striving to reach the end goal of knowing Jesus better and being part of his Kingdom, his vineyard producing the best possible fruit. Amen

Prayers of Concern

Loving God, like so many we can fall into the trap of seeking fulfilment in what fails to satisfy. We strive to fill our lives with good things yet are uneasily aware that something is lacking, not as it should be, our hearts being restless until we recognise afresh our need of you. Help us each day to make you more fully a part of our lives, to place you first in all we do. And hear our prayer for those who have not found you, those who, for all their striving, feel that something is missing from their lives. Reach out to them and help them to find what they seek: that elusive final piece in the jigsaw that completes the picture and satisfies their inner hunger, giving meaning to all. We pray as well for all who are finding the new restrictions in our lives particularly difficult, we pray for the NHS staff as they face the uncertain future, we pray for everyone across the world who have lost or will lose people in the pandemic. Teach us to rely on you, Lord Jesus, to make you the cornerstone, the foundation of our lives. **Amen.**

STF 489 – All I once held dear

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| 1) All I once held dear, built my life upon,
All this world reveres, and wars to own,
All I once thought gain, I have counted loss;
Spent and worthless now, compared to this. | 2) Now my heart's desire is to know You more,
To be found in You and known as Yours.
To possess by faith what I could not earn,
All surpassing gift of righteousness. |
| Ch) <i>Knowing you, Jesus, knowing You
There is no greater thing
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord.</i> | 3) Oh to know the power of Your risen life,
And to know You in Your sufferings.
To become like You in Your death, my Lord
So with You to live and never die. |

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The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. **Amen**