

6th November 2022 – Morning Service

The Destruction of the Temple

Megan Ashmore

Call to Worship - Isaiah 12: 5 – 6

Sing to the Lord; shout and sing! Israel's holy God is great, and he lives among his people.

StF 25 – God is here

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| 1) God is here! As we his people
Meet to offer praise and prayer,
May we find in fuller measure
What it is in Christ we share.
Here, as in the world around us,
All our varied skills and arts
Wait the coming of his Spirit
Into open minds and hearts. | 3) Here our children find a welcome
In the Shepherd's flock and fold;
Here as bread and wine are taken,
Christ sustains us, as of old;
Here the servants of the Servant
Seek in worship to explore
What it means in daily living
To believe and to adore. |
| 2) Here are symbols to remind us
Of our lifelong need of grace;
Here are table, font, and pulpit;
Here the cross has central place.
Here in honesty of preaching,
Here in silence, as in speech,
Here, in newness and renewal,
God the Spirit comes to each. | 4) Lord of all, of Church and Kingdom,
In an age of change and doubt,
Keep us faithful to the gospel,
Help us work your purpose out.
Here, in this day's dedication,
All we have to give, receive:
We, who cannot live without you,
We adore you! We believe! |

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Prayer of Thanks

Thank you, Lord God, for the opportunity to worship you today; for the freedom to be amongst your family meeting together in the warmth of your embrace.

Thank you that in worship we can put aside the uncertainties of this world and rest upon the certainties of the Kingdom, for your promises are not changeable but immovable and eternal.

Thank you that we can bring to your feet all the hurts and fears that trouble us, and leave them there, knowing that your strength and assurance are all that we require.

Thank you that as we draw near in worship, we are brought into a place where we can be at peace in your presence, find healing, wholeness and refreshment.

Thank you, Lord God, for the opportunity of worship.¹

Loving Father, today is marked as a day of prayer for those persecuted for their faith. And so we pray for those who are imprisoned for sharing the good news of the gospel; that they will find strength in your unfailing love and will continue to trust in your word. We bring before you their families and church communities. Grant them your peace and comfort, that their faith will remain strong. We pray for church leaders faced with the threat of interrogation and arrest. Give them the words to speak and the courage to stand firm on every promise of your word. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ – God give us compassion to learn their stories, to commit to praying for them, to write to them if possible, and to speak up on their behalf. **Amen.**

We continue in prayer as we sing:

StF 161 – Speak O Lord

- 1) Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All your purposes, for your glory.
- 2) Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
- 3) Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
And the earth is filled with your glory.

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Introduction to reading

“Remember, remember the fifth of November, gunpowder, treason and plot.
I see of no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot.”

How many of you have been able to forget that it was bonfire night last night? Shops have been selling fireworks for the last few weeks; displays have been advertised; Classic Fm has been playing music especially to calm pets, and untimely fireworks have been going off since the middle of October. Now, don't get me wrong – I enjoy Bonfire night from the warmth and comfort of my own home, but one night is quite enough! And it just seems a strange thing to make a celebration of – the failed attempt to blow someone up! But I suppose the celebration is that evil did not win out! And that's always good news. “Murder, mystery and mayhem” – sounds like a trailer for a Midsomer Murders episode. But those three words can sum up the assassination attempt of 1605. Today, it could sadly be a news headline on a daily basis. And from our gospel reading of Luke 21 we note that even in the time of Jesus these buzzwords caused a great deal of intrigue and speculation.

Reading: Luke 21: 5 - 19

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, “As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.” “Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” He replied: “Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and, ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.” Then he said to them: “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. “But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict.

You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.

Reflection

It was April and the Aboriginals in a remote part of Northern Australia asked the new minister at their small church to ask God if the coming winter was going to be cold or mild. The minister did not want to lose their confidence as he had only just arrived, but when he prayed and looked at the sky he had frankly no idea what the winter ahead would be like. To be on the safe side he told his congregation that the winter was indeed going to be cold and that members of the tribe should collect firewood to be prepared.

But after several days he had an idea. He called the Bureau of Meteorology and asked if the coming winter in his area was going to be cold. The meteorologist responded, "Yes, it looks like this winter is going to be cold." So, the minister went back to his people and told them to collect even more wood in order to be prepared. A week later he called the Bureau of Meteorology again to ask if it still looked like it was going to be a cold winter. "Yes, it's going to be a very cold winter" the meteorologist replied.

So, the minister went back to his community and ordered them to collect every scrap of firewood they could find. Two weeks later and still concerned; the minister called the bureau again. "Are you absolutely sure that the winter is going to be very cold?" he asked. "Absolutely" the meteorologist replied. "In fact, it's looking more and more like it is going to be one of the coldest winters ever." "How can you be so sure?" the minister asked. The sky didn't look any different to him. The weatherman replied, "Our satellites have reported that the Aboriginals in the north are collecting firewood like crazy, and that's always a sure sign!!"

I have a weather app on my phone and at the time of writing it says that the weather today will be showery (make of that what you will!). Much money, business and entertainment has been made from supposedly predicting the future; but no-one can know what the future holds as it is commanded by God and held firmly in His protective grasp.

In our reading from Luke, the disciples "were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God." Ever the teacher, Jesus used every opportunity to share the good news of God's love and care for His people; but also ensured that they were aware of what it meant to follow him. And so, in response, he directed their thoughts away from the splendours of earth and led them into a conversation about the future. Unsurprisingly Jesus's comments about the temple sent shockwaves through the listeners who sought some clarification as to when this would be and what they should look out for in order to prepare for the things that were to come. What Luke records as Jesus's response is not a list of warning signs that will herald in the end times, but guidance as to how best the followers of Christ then, and now, should prepare for future events.

In effect Jesus outlines some key facts:

- Everything in this world will pass away.
- There will be false teachers.
- There will be calamities.
- Following me will put you at odds with the folks that run this world, and even your own family.
- There will come a time when you will have to account for why you are my disciple.

Jesus doesn't promise us an easy life. Instead, he tells us the truth. But he promises us that the truth will set us free: Free to live knowing that we are cared for. Verse 3 of my favourite psalm, 121, reminds us that "He will not let your foot slip - He who watches over you will not slumber." How good it is to know that God is watching over us. The truth means we are free to live knowing that we can trust God. "So do not fear," says the Lord, "for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10)

Last week at Kingswinford we were thinking about the armour of God. Remember, when God is on our side, there is no battle we cannot face in this world. The truth means we are free to live knowing that all is in God's safe keeping. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." A comforting verse from Jeremiah 29.

In the last few weeks our foundations have been shaken. We have lamented the death of Queen Elizabeth II – a faithful servant of God and our monarch of seventy years; and we have sought to navigate our way through the changing political scene in Downing Street. All while we still cautiously begin to explore living in a Post-Covid world. Temples that we thought secure do fall. On the night of 14th November 1940, Coventry was bombed. An estimated 568 people were killed and 4,300 homes destroyed, along with St Michael's Cathedral. The morning after, a decision was made to rebuild the cathedral. Rebuilding would not be an act of defiance, but rather a sign of faith, trust and hope for the future of the world. The cathedral stonemason, Jock Forbes, noticed that two of the charred medieval roof timbers had fallen in the shape of a cross. He set them up in the ruins where they were later placed on an altar of rubble with the moving words 'Father Forgive'. Another cross was fashioned from three medieval nails by local priest, the Revd Arthur Wales. Today, Coventry Cathedral is part of a worldwide network of some 250 churches, charities, chaplaincies, peace-building and retreat centres, schools and other educational and training organisations all inspired by the Coventry story of destruction, rebuilding and renewal, which is active in reconciliation and known as the "Community of the Cross of Nails." Their principles are Healing the wounds of history; Learning to live with difference and celebrate diversity; and Building a culture of peace. They are guided by the words 'Father Forgive'. (Cathedral website)

We cannot know what the future holds, but we do know that God loves us so much that he sent His only son to be our salvation: to sort out the mess of the past; teach us the way of the present and lead us into a future glory safe in His everlasting arms.

Remember, remember, this day in November, Jesus is Lord over all.
He is the Alpha, he is Omega, the kingdom of God shall not fall.

StF 350 – I cannot tell

- 1) I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship,
Should set his love upon us, now or then,
Or why, as Shepherd, he should seek
the wanderers,
To bring them back, they know not how or when.
But this I know, that he was born of Mary
When Bethlem's manger was his only home,
And that he lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.
- 2) I cannot tell how silently he suffered,
As with his peace he graced this place of tears,
Or how his heart upon the cross was broken,
The crown of pain to three-and-thirty years.
But this I know, he heals the broken-hearted,
And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy-laden,
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.
- 3) I cannot tell how he will win the nations,
How he will claim his earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations
Of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see his glory,
And he shall reap the harvest he has sown,
And some glad day his sun shall shine
in splendour,
When he the Saviour, Saviour of the world,
is known.
- 4) I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship,
When at his bidding every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation
When every human heart with love is filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture,
And myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heav'n, and heav'n to earth,
will answer:
'At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King!'

William Young Fullerton

Reading: Isaiah 65: 17 – 25

“See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; the one who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere child; the one who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. They will build houses and dwell in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. No longer will they build houses and others live in them, or plant and others eat. For as the days of a tree, so will be the days of my people; my chosen ones will long enjoy the work of their hands. They will not labour in vain, nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune; for they will be a people blessed by the Lord, they and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,” says the Lord.

Prayer of Confession

O God, still creating, we hear your promises of a new day of joy and peace, and we are sceptical. We expect things to go on the same as they always have, from bad to worse. The past will keep us guilty; the future will make us afraid; and the present will burden us with too little time and too much to do. Forgive our lack of faith, our quickness to believe that you do not hear us, and our pessimism about tomorrow. Do a new thing in our hearts and let us be glad and rejoice in your abundant care; through Christ we pray. **Amen.**²

Intercessions and offertory prayer

Creator God, we pray for this broken, troubled world – a world far from the one you originally created, and yet one which you love and sustain through your grace and mercy.

We pray for all those who are weeping and crying – may we be the ones to offer words of comfort and strength through the power of your healing Spirit.

We pray for all those who are ill or injured – may we be the ones to offer help in whatever ways we can through the power of your healing Spirit.

We pray for the homeless; the oppressed; those who don’t receive a fair price for their work or who work in unfavourable conditions – may we be the ones who seek justice for all through the power of your healing Spirit.

We pray for those for whom the cost of living is forcing them to make difficult decisions – may we be the ones who reassess our situations and see how we might best serve our neighbours and communities through the power of your healing Spirit.

We pray for your children throughout the world, where war, famine, changing climates and natural disasters prevent them from living at peace with one another – may we be the ones who commit to support them by praying and learning through the power of your healing Spirit.

Lord you spoke “Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear.”

Hear O Lord the prayers spoken and unspoken and give us the grace to accept the way you answer them. With our prayers we offer our monetary gifts that they may be used to share the good news of the gospel with all in this church circuit and local community. **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.**

StF 503 – Love Divine

- 1) Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love thou art;
Visit us with thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.
- 2) 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.
- 3) 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!

Charles Wesley

Blessing

Let us go from here with the love of God in our hearts; the truth of Jesus's words on our lips; and the strength of the Holy Spirit in our step. And the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. Amen.

¹ Faith and worship

² by Dr. Tom Cheatham, a minister in the Presbyterian Church (USA)