

Sunday, 20th September 2020

A service from Edward Street URC by Liz and Mary

God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love. God is ever present, around us and within us, though separate let us worship together in God. © Heather Whyte

Suggested Hymn: Praise my soul, the King of heaven

1. Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To His feet thy tribute bring;
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee His praise should sing?
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise the everlasting King.

2. Praise Him for His grace and favour
To our fathers in distress;
Praise Him still the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Glorious in His faithfulness.

3. Father-like He tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame He knows;
In His hands He gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Widely as His mercy flows.

.Angels help us to adore Him;
Ye behold Him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before Him;
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise Him! Praise Him!
Praise with us the God of grace.

H F Lyte (1793-1847)

Prayers (using Psalm 145: 1-8)

Eternal God, we come to be together in Your presence this morning. Wherever we have been this week, wherever we may be next week, here, now, we are at one with each other and with You.

Creator God, Your greatness is beyond our understanding. From one generation to the next, You have remained constant and loving and we offer You our thanks and praise. Through Your power, You created the wonders of this world - the strength of the oceans, the gentleness of the breeze, the majesty of the mountains, the delicacy of the flowers. We have watched, perhaps more closely this year, the changing of the seasons, the growth from bud to flower, flower to fruit, the turning of the colours - all part of the rich tapestry of our amazing world. We offer You our thanks and praise.

Loving God, Your goodness and kindness are beyond compare. You have given us the opportunities and the openings to be the people You would have us be. We have witnessed the generosity of our families, friends and neighbours through challenging times. We have recognised You at work in the smiles and cheery greetings of strangers, in the helping hands of those known and unknown to us. We offer You our thanks and praise.

Merciful God, You have picked us up when we have fallen, when we have felt low in mind, body or spirit. You are ever present, around us, beside us, behind us and holding us. When we stray from Your ways, you gently guide us back, showing us mercy, forgiveness and the chance to start again. We offer You our thanks and praise.

Constant God, You allow us to be ourselves, giving us freedom of choice, freedom to choose our own way, freedom to respond as we wish. As we offer You our thanks and praise today, may we always seek to choose Your way and to respond with Your love and compassion. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

Introduction

Are you a control freak? Perhaps you can't answer that for yourself, but someone else could - and you could answer it for them! Who's in charge in your household? If you're on your own, or you've been in a stable grouping for some time, that's probably easy to answer. And that answer may vary according to the activity. As relationships develop there may be conflict over who is in charge - whether that's in a team at work or Church, or in a family as children grow. The smallest ones cannot be allowed to be 'in charge' or to rule the roost even if most things, at least in waking hours, revolve round them! Teenagers certainly are

not 'in charge' but must be allowed to develop areas of responsibility if they are to become independent adults.

Most of us try to organise our lives to have control over our circumstances - and then something happens which upends all our organisation. It may be redundancy, bereavement, illness, lockdown or any other shattering event - but we have to re-assess our plans and our planning.

In our readings today, Jonah and the farm hands have to re-assess who is in charge, who is calling the shots.

Jonah 3:10 - 4:11 (from The Message)

3¹⁰ God saw what they had done, that they had turned away from their evil lives. He *did* change his mind about them. What he said he would do to them he didn't do.

4¹⁻² Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at GOD, "GOD! I knew it—when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness!

³ "So, GOD, if you won't kill them, kill *me!* I'm better off dead!"

⁴ GOD said, "What do you have to be angry about?"

⁵ But Jonah just left. He went out of the city to the east and sat down in a sulk. He put together a makeshift shelter of leafy branches and sat there in the shade to see what would happen to the city.

⁶ GOD arranged for a broad-leafed tree to spring up. It grew over Jonah to cool him off and get him out of his angry sulk. Jonah was pleased and enjoyed the shade. Life was looking up.

⁷⁻⁸ But then God sent a worm. By dawn of the next day, the worm had bored into the shade tree and it withered away. The sun came up and God sent a hot, blistering wind from the east. The sun beat down on Jonah's head and he started to faint. He prayed to die: "I'm better off dead!"

⁹ Then God said to Jonah, "What right do you have to get angry about this shade tree?"

Jonah said, "Plenty of right. It's made me angry enough to die!"

¹⁰⁻¹¹ GOD said, "What's this? How is it that you can change your feelings from pleasure to anger overnight about a mere shade tree that you did nothing to get? You neither planted nor watered it. It grew up one night and died the next night. So, why can't I likewise change what I feel about Nineveh from anger to pleasure, this big city of more than 120,000 childlike people who don't yet know right from wrong, to say nothing of all the innocent animals?"

Hymn: Teach me Thy way (Tune The Path Divine)

1. Teach me Thy way, O Lord,
teach me Thy way!
Thy gracious aid afford,
teach me thy way!
Help me to walk aright,
more by faith, less by sight;
lead me with heavenly light:
teach me Thy way.

2. When doubts and fears arise,
teach me Thy way!
When storms o'erspread the skies,
teach me Thy way!
Shine through the cloud and rain,
through sorrow, toil, and pain;
make Thou my pathway plain:
teach me thy way!

3. Long as my life shall last,
teach me Thy way!
Where'er my lot be cast,
teach me Thy way!
Until the race is run,
until the journey's done,
until the crown is won,
teach me Thy way!

B Mansell Ramsey (1849-1923)

Matthew 20: 1-16

Reflection

Jonah has already tried to hide from God by not going to Ninevah and ending up in the belly of the fish, or whale. Hiding from God didn't work of course, and he does go to Ninevah and tell the people they are behaving wrongly. God forgives the people, and Jonah sulks! "I told you so!" is Jonah's response - and it's often ours. He knew God would forgive the people. Jonah interpreted that forgiveness as making him look foolish for preaching their destruction. He sulks. He didn't want to be the prophet God directed him to be, eventually complied, then sulked when God didn't destroy the city. How petulant he was. What a strange insult - "I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love." We'd be happy - and blessed - if that were the worst insult ever hurled at us, wouldn't we? And how fickle was Jonah - wanting to die, grateful and complacent under the shade, wanting to die when that is no longer there. How quickly Jonah, and we, can change our minds.

Jonah started his diatribe with "I told you so." God never says this. God just carries on being God, sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love.

The workers in the field who had worked all day were angry - and it's easy for us to understand that anger and to sympathise, but the landowner wants all to be able to feed their families. The latecomers hadn't gone away; they had stayed in the market place and they were fully rewarded for their work, their patience and their persistence in waiting in the market place.

We all have ideas, often fixed or rigid, about what is right. Often our ideas may be slightly biased or moulded so that what is right is in our best interests. We may get frustrated or angry if circumstances don't fit our ideas of what is right. That is what happened with the men who had worked all day - not only had they worked all day through the heat, they had to stand in line until the others had been paid, so they were the last to go home. No wonder they felt hard done by. But who was in charge? In this case, the landowner. He was in charge, and his methods held power.

How many folk get angry about stuff that it's not their place to be angry about? That's not to say we shouldn't be angry about injustice, poverty, prejudice or abuse of power, but if we don't know the full circumstances, or something is completely out of our environment, we may have no reason and no right to be angry.

We are not, however hard we may try, in full control of everything. The current situation in which we find ourselves is not of our making, but we cannot change it. What we can influence - as was written in the URC Daily Devotions on 10th September - is our RESPONSE to it. We can control our frame of mind.

Whatever our circumstance, wherever we find ourselves, we can control our response and our frame of mind. In essence, we must ask ourselves, "Who is in charge here?" "What is the best way to respond and go forward?" Whatever may befall, as Jonah found out, God never says, "I told you so." As the workers in the vineyard discovered, you can reach a positive outcome even if you start late. Whatever may happen, wherever we may be and however we may be, we can choose our approach to the situation and we can influence our response to the God who just, and justly, carries on being God - sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love. AMEN

Prayers

Loving God, we come to You now with our prayers for the world, for the situations which trouble and concern us, for the people who need our understanding and support.

Gracious and merciful God, **may our attitude be one of generosity and love.**

We pray for those who are not free to choose their own path because they are persecuted, imprisoned or abused. May they know Your love and strength to maintain hope and faith in the darkest of places.

Gracious and merciful God, **may our attitude be one of generosity and love.**

We pray for those who live in poverty, the homeless and the hungry - who do not have the choice of where to live or what to eat. May they experience Your compassion and support in the people they meet and be encouraged to look forward with hope.

Gracious and merciful God, **may our attitude be one of generosity and love.**

We pray for those who are suffering in mind, body and spirit - those who have lost control of their lives through illness or loss. May they know the comfort of Your love and healing to give them the strength and determination to cope with the challenges they face.

Gracious and merciful God, **may our attitude be one of generosity and love.**

We pray for those who suffer injustice, discrimination or marginalisation - those who have their opportunities limited or blocked through lack of understanding, prejudice and hate. May they experience Your tolerance and openness in the people they meet to give them courage to speak out and be heard.

Gracious and merciful God, **may our attitude be one of generosity and love.**

We pray for ourselves, that we might choose to follow Your way, that we might choose to respond with Your heart and mind, that our attitude might remain positive and open to whatever we face wherever we are.

Gracious and merciful God, **may our attitude be one of generosity and love. Amen**

Our offering to God

As we continue to worship apart but together, let us pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church by continuing to send our offering and exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know God's blessing on all we do. Amen

Hymn: Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us (Tune - Mannheim)

1 Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
o'er the world's tempestuous sea;
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us
for we have no help but thee;
yet possessing every blessing,
if our God our Father be.

2 Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
all our weakness thou dost know;
thou didst tread this earth before us,
thou didst feel its keenest woe;
lone and dreary, faint and weary,
through the desert thou didst go.

3 Spirit of our God, descending,
fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
love with every passion blending,
pleasure that can never cloy:
thus provided, pardoned, guided,
nothing can our peace destroy.

James Edmeston (1791-1867)

Blessing

We go out as the people of God to walk the path of the week ahead.
As we respond to God, to God's people and to one another,
We are loved, cherished and accompanied by the God who never leaves us. Amen