

Sunday 14th March 2021

Worship prepared by Liz And Mary from Edward Street URC

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

Call from Psalm 107: 1-3

'Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good; his love is eternal!' Repeat these words in praise to the Lord, all you whom he has saved. He has rescued you from your enemies and has brought you back from foreign countries, from east and west, from north and south.'

So wherever we have been with God this week, let us join together to give praise and thanks for his eternal love.

Suggested Hymn: To God be the glory, great things He has done!
Listen [here](#)

Prayers

Eternal God, you are the source of all being; you are within us and around us no matter where we are, what we do, what we say. We bring our thanks and praise for all that you are to us, for all that you give to us and for all the hope that we have through your love.

We see you in the golden glow of the sun, in the silver hue of the moon and the twinkling light of the stars. You are there in the glistening of the rain, the reflections on the water and the brightness of the rainbow. We bring you our thanks and praise.

We see you in the smile of a passer by, hear you in the laughter of children, feel you in the warmth of a friendly word. We bring you our thanks and praise.

As we have been forced to slow down, take stock, look around us, we know that your eternal love and hope are constantly with us as we watch the seasons turn and the cycle of life renew. Your gifts to us are as constant and as certain as the night turning into the day. We bring you our thanks and praise.

But we know that sometimes we remain in the night. We do not think or speak or act as you would have us do. We hide our wrong doings - our failures, our neglect - under the cover of darkness, because we know that what we are doing does not follow your way. Forgive us, make us open to the light.

We grumble and complain; we lack appreciation and remain complacent, choosing to close our minds and shut out the opportunities to work for you or to show your love. Forgive us, draw us out into the light to respond and walk openly with you.

Thankfully, you are a generous, loving God, who does forgive. You gave us your Son, who came to be the light of the world and to redeem our faults. In Jesus' name we offer our prayers and join together in the words he taught us to say together:

The Lord's Prayer

Introduction

The Call - Charlotte Mew (1869 - 1928)

From our low seat beside the fire
Where we have dozed and dreamed and watched
the glow
Or raked the ashes, stopping so
We scarcely saw the sun or rain
Above, or looked much higher
Than this same quiet red or burned-out fire.
To-night we heard a call,
A rattle on the window-pane,
A voice on the sharp air,
And felt a breath stirring our hair,
A flame within us: Something swift and tall
Swept in and out and that was all.

Was it a bright or a dark angel? Who can know?
It left no mark upon the snow,
But suddenly it snapped the chain
Unbarred, flung wide the door
Which will not shut again;
And so we cannot sit here any more.
We must arise and go:
The world is cold without
And dark and hedged about
With mystery and enmity and doubt,
But we must go
Though yet we do not know
Who called, or what marks we shall leave upon
the snow.

Through Heather, I have been introduced to two collections of poetry: one for Advent, 'Haphazard by Starlight' and one for Lent, 'The Heart's Time'. Each contains a daily poem with a commentary and reflection by Janet Morley, who compiled them, and both are to be recommended if you enjoy poetry. Charlotte Mew, who wrote 'The Call', was the eldest of seven, but the family was struck by considerable tragedy involving the early deaths of three brothers, the mental illness of two other siblings, hardship and sickness. Sadly Charlotte herself suffered mentally in her final year and in fact committed suicide.

When I read this poem last week, it struck a chord with our current situation and forged a link to the ideas for the service which we had already begun to consider. The opening words paint a picture of retreat, of sitting rather lazily and complacently by the fire, not really taking much account of anything other than what is immediately around. Suddenly comes 'a rattle', 'a voice', 'a breath', which relights 'a flame within us'. The chains are broken, the doors are opened and the world is revealed - a cold, dark, strange place. Yet the poet knows that it is time to venture forth, to step out into the unknown, a leap of faith, not knowing 'who called, or what marks we shall leave upon the snow.'

Perhaps over the last year we too have been in retreat, trying to keep safe from the fears brought on by the pandemic. Perhaps we have become comfortable with a smaller world, complacent about what we are able to do within our own little haven. What rattle or voice will stir the flame and encourage us to venture forth again into the world? What will shake us and give us the confidence to step out in faith? To emerge from the darkness of the past year into the light? Are we ready to hear God's call, to follow and make new marks upon the snow?

Reading: Numbers 21: 4-9

Suggested Hymn: Longing for light, we wait in darkness.
Listen [here](#)

Reading: John 3:14-21

Reflection

Do we talk of the 'Good Old Days' - or of better days to come?

The people following Moses and God through the desert have done a fair bit of complaining - of looking back to the 'Good Old Days' in Egypt. I don't think so - they were days of captivity, enslavement and mistreatment. The journeying through the desert was long and tedious - it would have been the only life the younger folk would have known. The people were heartened when they made progress, but became quickly disillusioned in the 'groundhog days' of wandering. The detour around Edomite territory taking them back towards the Red Sea was the 'final straw'. God's solution seems drastic - a plague of snakes. The Israelites were quick to repent - they would recognise the snake or serpent as a tempter who succeeded in persuading Adam and Eve to rely on themselves rather than on God, so they repented, asked Moses to intercede and were happy - at least for the time being - to turn again and to look to God for their wellbeing. Rather than looking back, they turned to God to lead them on in hope.

For once, the link to the Gospel reading is clear - the serpent. This passage is part of Jesus' reply to Nicodemus who came under cover of darkness to ask questions of Jesus. He didn't come out in the open, in the light, and he struggled to understand Jesus' answers although he was an educated man well versed in the Scriptures. The Israelites in the desert could look up to a bronze snake and be cured of the poison of the bite. Jesus, too, will be lifted up so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. God's people can look to Jesus to find escape from troubles, misunderstanding and 'darkness'. This is God at work in the world. It is so much more than 'a rattle' or 'a breath'. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life. Through Jesus, light has come into the world. Jesus is the light, the raised torch that brings order to chaos and hope to despair. If we walk the way of Jesus, we walk in the light and, if we walk in the light, we live by truth.

Perhaps we should ask ourselves the extent to which we are like the wandering Israelites? Our days are long, the weeks go by with little variation, and we become weary. But rather than look back, we must look forward in hope and in faith to the living which lies ahead for us. How like Nicodemus we are, concerned with our current situation and understanding, when we should and can look to Jesus for order out of disarray and hope out of despair.

This is, of course, not just lockdown, but also Lent. Jesus talks of light coming into darkness so we should not hide in shame in the dark, but walk forgiven in the light. Just as vaccines offer real hope for healthier and freer futures, they are of no use unless people have them - and not just people like us - people in other parts of the world less able to commission and buy the research and manufacturing capability and the vaccines themselves. Just as doctors cannot heal us if we don't or can't explain or show what the problem is, so Jesus cannot transform us unless we open up in prayer about our human condition and allow the light of love, forgiveness and hope to wash over us and transform us to start afresh to become the people God would have us be.

The year is turning - the daylight is returning, the green shoots and buds are well formed and ready to burst, the vaccines are working and there is real promise of a freer future. Now is the time, now is our time to look forward with God to a hopeful future - a forgiven future of love and life as we journey together, walking in the light that is the way of Jesus.



It is customary at Edward Street to give flowers on Mothers' Day. Equally, in the Edward Street fashion, flowers are shared with everyone - mothers, sisters, fathers, brothers, daughters, sons and friends. We share this picture today in memory of our friend, Janet, who prepared the flowers for many, many years.

Prayers

We come now to God in prayer; it is a time for thanks, a time for consideration of the needs of others, a time to draw close to God as we seek a hopeful and well lit future.

Today, we give thanks for mothers and all those who have shown, and still show caring and cherishing love. We pray that they will find rest, enjoyment and hope in their relationships. This year especially we remember those who are no longer physically here, those for whom our grief is still raw, those who are separated from us whether by many miles or just around the corner. We all pray in hope and confidence for the days when we can again share, face to face, the love of family and friends.

Loving God, **send us out with love and let there be light.**

We give thanks for carers, medical staff and researchers; may they know appreciation, support and the hope of respite from the overwork of the past months.

We give thanks for the letter writers, the e-mailers, the telephone callers and all the befrienders; may they too know friendship and share the hope and comfort that springs when friends are together apart and together side by side.

Loving God, **send us out with love and let there be light.**

We give thanks for key workers at home and abroad and for their families enabling them to continue going out. May they be safe, accorded respect and find positivity in their work.

We give thanks for food, friends, families and safe homes. We pray for those who do not have those things and pray that they may find justice, fair treatment and safety. May we be generous when we can in sharing what we have.

Loving God, **send us out with love and let there be light.**

We give thanks that we live in spaces that are free from war, our schools are places of learning not refuges from bombing or venues for kidnap and abduction. We pray that we will value our peace and pray for resolution, peace-making and respect in troubled places.

And today, in our worship such as this, we give thanks for the IT whizz kids, the technological brains and the companies making this possible. May they know that they too are building and supporting community and contact in these difficult days. We pray that those who defraud, scam and promote cyber attack may turn to positive actions and use their knowledge to build up rather than destroy.

Loving God, **send us out with love and let there be light.**

We bring our prayers in Jesus' name, knowing that he too lived in challenging times. As we seek to follow Jesus, we walk in his light. Amen

Our offering to God

As we have dedicated ourselves to you and your service and as we bring our prayers, we pledge to give of ourselves and our resources to your work through our Churches. Amen

Hymn: Lord, the light of your love is shining;

Listen [here](#)

Blessing

We leave this time together to go out in love;
We turn in hope to face the future;
We are stirred to walk in the light that is the way of Jesus,
and God's many blessings are upon us. Amen

Words to hymns printed under CCLI