

CIRCUIT SERVICE FOR 18th JULY 2021-Rev. David Jenkins

Call to Worship

As worship begins, we hear words from the beginning of Paul's Second letter to the Corinthians- (1:3-4)
"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who consoles us in all our affliction, so that we will be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God".

The words create a beautiful picture of the deeply caring God, fully understanding what we have been through, providing healing, comfort and strength. Because we have received so much from God we are in a position to be comforters, understanding, healing and strengthening others who are experiencing stressful times in their lives. There is, for example, an instinctual understanding that those who are bereaved have towards others who are bereaved. It is not to do with any words of explanation, so much as the profound understanding of people who have been where we are.

What are we receiving from God in the hard times of our lives that we may be able to offer to other people?

[Hymn 248 Singing the Faith \(136 Hymns and Psalms\) "I heard the voice of Jesus say"](#)

1 I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest.
Lay down, O weary one,
lay down your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn, and sad.
I found in him a resting place,
and he has made me glad.

2 I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream.

My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

3 I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's light.
Look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun,
and in that light of life I'll
walk

till travelling days are done.

(Horatius N. Bonar)

Prayer

Living God, your greatness is unsearchable, your understanding is beyond measure, and your love as wide as the universe. In you we live and move and have our being. You are the inspiration and strength and joy of our lives. You are God in the depths of our being.

Creator of all life, Origin of all love, Source of all goodness we praise you for all you are.

We thank you for your presence within our lives- confronting negativity; challenging selfishness; empowering loving; enabling giving ; energising living; focusing thinking.

We thank you for this week and the gift of each day of life. Help us to live life well, Clarify its priorities with us..... Deepen our understanding ; Extend our compassion; Inspire our imagination.

Draw us nearer to you through this act of worship today, through Jesus Christ our Lord, 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.

All-Age Talk-"Changing"

Let me ask you a personal question or two-When was the last time you changed your socks or your underwear? I hope the answer isn't, "About a month ago"! There are some things we need to change frequently for our own sake and the sake of people around us! In our lives it's likely that there lots of things which get changed pretty frequently-from clothes and bed sheets to food and the basic things that crop up on our shopping lists. There are

areas where advertisers encourage us to upgrade our mobile phones, computers and cars. "Upgrade" means "to improve, make more efficient; to increase the possibilities of what you can do."

Here's some more personal questions-When was the last time you changed the way you thought about something? "I've changed my mind about that-I see it differently now". When was the last time you changed the way you spoke about someone or spoke to them? When you began to realise how speaking in a certain way was unnecessarily thoughtless and hurtful? When did you last put yourself in the place of someone else to see what it would feel like to be spoken to harshly or without really understanding their situation? When was the last time you stopped yourself from looking down on someone else as if you were somehow superior to them? When was the last time you prayed? Really prayed? Gave adequate time and attention to being with God, being honest enough to speak and quiet enough to learn?

It could be that the things that need to change are not only outside us but inside us. It could be that how we think, how we speak and how we relate to other people and to God needs to be upgraded-improved for the better.

That's one of the things worship is about-not only to recharge our batteries (which we need) but to challenge, change and upgrade our lives too.

Apart from your socks, what else would it be helpful to change, starting from today?

[Hymn 443 Singing the Faith \(691 Hymns and Psalms\) "Come, let us sing of a wonderful love"](#)

1 Come let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home! weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

4 Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride:
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

(Robert Walmsley)

Reader –

Matthew 3: 1-2 "In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near".

Matthew 4:17 "From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near".

Mark 6: 7, 12 "Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two..So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent."

Acts 2: 37-38 Of the crowd at Pentecost, "Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, "Brothers, what should we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit".

Paul's letter to the Romans 2:4 "Do you not realise that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?"

Sermon "Repent!"

Do you get the message?

It's the same message proclaimed by John the Baptist, Jesus, and Jesus' followers including Peter and Paul. For good measure you could throw in all the Hebrew Old Testament prophets as they thundered out the same message.

That makes me ask questions of myself, which other preachers might want to ask of themselves-If the message "Repent!" was the distinctive repeated message of the Old and New Testaments is that what I preach?

And if my answer is "Not very often", that begs another question, "Do my sermons lack life-changing challenge?"

If I don't regularly preach the need to repent, why is that?

It's not the most popular message is it?

Do I succumb to a kind of subtle cowardice that does not want to be associated with a message which makes people feel uncomfortable?

Do I want to be a popular preacher, and so shy away from what would clearly make me unpopular?
"Please don't plan that Jenkins again, Madam Superintendent. We want to be cheered up, not depressed every Sunday!"

Another reason for hesitating to proclaim repentance is that I might ask myself, "And who do you think you are? Standing 6 feet above contradiction and demanding a change of heart and lifestyle of other people? Me, of all people?"

And then there's the hesitation of basic pastoral sensitivity. If I have been learning the arts and skills of non-judgmental counselling, how can I be a non-judgmental pastor and, at the same time, a judgmental preacher?

A story I really like is the one about the painter who has been thinning his paint in order to save money. He hasn't been doing a good job and now it's caught up with him. He's painted the walls and the door of the house where he's being employed and has really made a mess of things. Even he can't disguise it this time. The result is so obviously inadequate. Desperately he asks himself, "O no, this is terrible! What can I do?" and he hears a voice, "Repaint! Repaint! and thin no more".

The story says something profound about what repentance means. Only by repainting can he begin to put things right. And by resolving to "thin no more", he is changing his ways. He won't get in this mess again.

Changing our ways and doing what we can to put things right are important aspects of repentance.

The worst thing is when you can't put things right, because you've caused damage which is irreparable.

But changing our ways means that we've turned round now to face in the opposite direction.

If I tried to justify not preaching repentance, could I use the excuse, "People don't need to repent, do they?"

Don't they?

How could we listen to the News each day and come to that conclusion?

People in high office in various countries who may be serial liars, who cheat, manipulate, make grand rhetorical promises that they fail to keep? Nations prepared to practice torture, ethnic and religious cleansing and genocide upon their own people and those of other nations?

There are so many terrible things that happen around the world and on our own soil, that we could hardly claim that people do not need to repent.

Perhaps the nub of the matter is not that other people do not need to repent when we can see quite clearly that they do. Perhaps we are under the illusion that this failing human race does not include us, as if we are somehow over and above and outside it all, looking at it as permanent spectators and commentators, but not personally involved?

Perhaps as preachers and the people of the Church we do preach repentance more than we think we might? In terms of social justice, where tyranny, oppression and the abuse of human rights take place we may well speak out, give sacrificially and demand that people change their ways -speaking truth to power.

In our preaching series during Lent we faced up to the problems of Climate Change, recognising that we as a world are responsible for the mess we are in, and needing together and personally to change our ways.

So elements of the message of repentance do get through.

And can't it be gratifying to wag and jab our fingers pointing at others and saying "You need to change their ways"? I'm going to do it now. "You, yes you, you need to change your ways!" Ah that made me feel really smug and self-righteous, but I shouldn't think it did much for you! Tell you what, get your own back -especially if you watching this on zoom or youtube -wag and jab your fingers and me and say, "You need to change your ways!"

Go on, have a go. Made you feel good didn't it?

We feel good passing judgement on great swathes of the human race, but we don't like it, in fact we resent it deeply, if anyone dares to pass judgement on us-which is why repentance isn't likely to become the most popular of topics.

Isn't there a truth in it, though?

Don't we all need to change how we think-our inbuilt prejudice, our unconscious biases, our negative self-centred thoughts? Doesn't that need to change and wouldn't we ourselves benefit from that along with everyone around us?

Don't we need to change how we relate to other people-our defensiveness, our indifference to what happens to others as long as it doesn't affect us?

Don't we need to change how we relate to God-keeping God at arm's length as one who is useful to us, comforting to know, as long as no demands are made on us? God's OK on our terms at our convenience. Isn't it time we began to learn living on God's terms?

Well there's plenty to be going on with, isn't there?

Our joint responsibility for the planet's climate crisis, our failures to ensure people around the world are treated fairly-and our personal responsibility for the attitudes we hold onto and the damaging consequences of doing so? Let us turn to God in the silence, seeking, not only forgiveness, but the genuine repentance of a radical new beginning with God.

Prayers - In the silence let us make our own response to what we have heard.....

We pray for those around the world who long for freedom-human rights activists, especially those who are imprisoned; people whose lives are restricted by poverty, disability, oppressive regimes, Those who are struggling to live because of inadequate food or water.....

We pray for all in positions of responsibility, power and influence. Help them to learn and follow the ways of compassion, justice and peace.

And we pray for ourselves.

We come to you because you understand us fully, and we need you greatly.....

We need your healing forgiveness to reset the direction of our lives.

May love for you and our neighbour be at the heart of our existence, rather than on the edge of it.

Help us to rethink life: renew us in your image.

[Hymn 455 Singing the Faith \(63 Hymns and Psalms\) "All my hope on God is founded"](#)

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.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his 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.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendor, light and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore

from his store
newborn worlds rise and adore.

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.

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, based on Joachim Neander)

Benediction -

Beginning again with you,
renew our lives,
replenish your earth,
let justice roll down like waters
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream
and your Kingdom come and your will be done
in our lives
and on earth as it is heaven. Amen