

Sunday 31st January 2021 Jehovah Rapha: The God who heals

WELCOME

God welcomes us, his children, to worship today with words of healing, comfort and hope. Despite being far flung and apart His promise is that He is with us wherever we are and that one day we will find ourselves in His close company forever. Let me read you the words of *Revelation 21: 3 I heard a loud voice speaking from the throne: "Now God's home is with people! He will live with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. 4 He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain. The old things have disappeared."* 5 Then the one who sits on the throne said, "And now I make all things new!" He also said to me, "Write this, because these words are true and can be trusted."

The God of renewal and re-creation is none other than the One who invites us to know Him as Father, experiencing His fatherly love for ourselves. Our first hymn poses the question of how we managed before we knew Him as Father.

HYMN 186 Father God I wonder

Father God, I wonder how I managed to exist
without the knowledge of your parenthood and your loving care.
But now I am your child, I am adopted in your family,
and I can never be alone 'cause, Father God, you're there beside me.

I will sing your praises, I will sing your praises, I will sing your praises for evermore x2

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PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Lord God Almighty, You are the giver of all life. We see all around us evidence of Your hand at work.

For the beauty of the earth, the majesty and order of Your creation **We worship and adore you**

You have set everything in its place, the seasons give order to our existence. We give you thanks and praise for the beginnings of green showing through the brown earth, for aconites bravely fighting through the snow to show themselves and the world that new life has and is coming. **We worship and adore you**

From the beginning of creation your Son Jesus has been there – His were the hands that flung stars into space, His were the hands which submitted to cruel nails as He died on the cross that new life, re-creation could come into being. You sent Him to bring hope for the future. You allowed Him to go to His death on the cross because without his death there would have been no Resurrection and without Resurrection there would have been no opportunity for new life. **Thank You for the gift of Your Son. We worship and adore you**

Your Spirit has been present in this world too since time began, breathing life into creation, bringing people to an awareness of You, bringing life and vitality to the world. You sent Your Spirit to change and transform us, to comfort and challenge us **Thank You for the gift of Your Spirit**

Lord God Almighty, we are Your people. When we worship you and look to You we see how unlike You we are, and yet You have told us that we are made in Your image. Forgive us Lord for all that we do and say and think which mars Your image within us. In this week past, when we have noted with sadness and devastation the numbers of people lost during the Holocaust and now passing 100,000 deaths through Covid, we recognise how we your people lead lives which are so out of tune with what you desire. Each number is a person loved by family and friends and most importantly loved by you. You have each of their names engraved on the palm of your hands. Father would you please challenge us to change our ways as you assure us of your forgiveness when we come to you. Thank you for your willingness to work in us and through us and for the assurance You give us which allows us to walk this earth as forgiven people. In adoration we give You our offerings and ourselves in order that You might use us and them to bring Your re-creation to birth in the new life You offer to all who put their trust in You. To You be all glory and power and might for ever. In Jesus name we pray saying together the words he taught 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 forever. Amen.

READING **Isaiah 30:18-26**

Read by Irene McFadzean

¹⁸ And yet the LORD is waiting to be merciful to you. He is ready to take pity on you because he always does what is right. Happy are those who put their trust in the LORD. ⁹ You people who live in Jerusalem will not weep any more. The LORD is compassionate, and when you cry to him for help, he will answer you. ²⁰ The Lord will make you go through hard times, but he himself will be there to teach you, and you will not have to search for him any more. ²¹ If you wander off the road to the right or the left, you will hear his voice behind you saying, "Here is the road. Follow it." ²² You will take your idols plated with silver and your idols covered with gold, and will throw them away like filth, shouting, "Out of my sight!" ²³ Whenever you plant your crops, the Lord will send rain to make them grow and will give you a rich harvest, and your livestock will have plenty of pasture. ²⁴ The oxen and donkeys that plough your fields will eat the finest and best fodder. ²⁵ On the day when the forts of your enemies are captured and their people are killed, streams of water will flow from every mountain and every hill. ²⁶ The moon will be as bright as the sun, and the sun will be seven times brighter than usual, like the light of seven days in one. This will all happen when the LORD bandages and heals the wounds he has given his people.

REFLECTION

This will all happen when the Lord bandages and heals the wounds he has given his people. Is 30:26
Once upon a time in a land called Uphall a woman went about her work using the tools of her trade, her computer, her phone. Sometimes her connection to the Internet was abruptly terminated for no apparent reason. Over time she realised that this was happening more and more frequently. About the same time

she realised that it was getting increasingly difficult to hear what people were saying when they phoned her for the crackling on the line. One day it got so bad she decided to check it out and lo and behold there was a fault on her phone line. A call for help went out and in time a BT engineer came to call. Using his machine and his expert knowledge he wisely nodded and ummed and ahed and pronounced it not in the house. And so another engineer had to be called for the first was for inside work only. Another wait ensued, another engineer called and he managed in time and having disconnected the line totally, to locate the fault to within four houses but could do no more. In time another engineer called and this one realised that there was no way of repairing the faulty line, a whole new line was needed, running it up the other side of the street and then into the house. A plan was devised, drawn up agreed and then sent. All that was needed was the subcontractor to put the duct in before BT came back to put the new line in. Another wait until one day this woman arrived back in her car to discover, a digger, a white van and a motorway maintenance lorry blocking her drive way and also the drives of her neighbours. The drive was dug up, a duct was laid and then there came the wait. Eventually a new BT engineer came and put in her new line and oh what delight a clear crisp line where she could hear without disturbance a clear crisp line that allowed her uninterrupted access to the Internet. Her suffering was over, her diseased line healed.

There was a survey done and people were asked what is the one question you would ask God if you knew that he would answer. I wonder what question that would be for you? 17% of those surveyed said they would ask him to explain suffering, evil, pain in this world if he was a God of love and in control. I would have thought that the percentage might have been higher for it is the one question that people keep asking and it's one of the major biggies that will stop people believing in God. In today's world, where we are grieving the loss of so many people through Covid, people are either drawn towards God in suffering or drawn away from him as they blame Him for the suffering.

Why would a God of love allow suffering? Surely the two are incompatible and yet as Christians we have to say that we believe that God is a God of love and yet we also have to admit that there is suffering, disease in this world. How do we reconcile the two? True love surely involves choice, for if someone cannot choose whether to love or not to love then that is not love. It is coercion. Love by definition is a commitment freely given. We hear that the greatest, the deepest pleasure we are capable of having is a direct encounter with God. He does not force himself on us however. But when this relationship breaks down and we choose not to love him, then pain, suffering, evil result. God created humans to love and be loved - that is part of what make us human. If we were coerced into relationships then we would be robots not humans, so it seems that part and parcel of having the choice to love or not also means the possibility of pain and suffering. God creates the possibility, we by our choice, make it actual. That's why our verse says I will heal the wounds I inflicted. He didn't deliberate inflict them but by being a God of love he allowed for the possibility. But our verse tells us that he doesn't leave us there that indeed he is the One who waits for us his people to turn back to him and when we do he bandages and heals our

wounds. Often we talk about having to wait for God but we don't often think about the fact that he is patiently waiting for us. How many parents have waited patiently or otherwise for stroppy children?!

Our passage in Isaiah shows us three ways in which he is willing to bandage and heal our wounds.

First of all he provides **deliverance** for us. His promise is that when you **cry to him for help** he will answer you. BT answered my call for help. They came and showed me the problem. Throughout Israel's history God responded to his people's calls for help. He promised to deliver them, he promised to heal them for that is what deliverance is. He promised them a Messiah who in time came. Jesus by his death and resurrection promises us deliverance, a new connection with God, clear and crisp and intimate. A new connection when we give up our old ways. My old line was still working but inefficiently and would have eventually stopped altogether. The new line was the answer. Several stages had to be gone through in BT's deliverance of me. Several stages where actually things were made worse before they were made better, but the end result was well worth the wait and the pain and the hassle. Jesus promises us permanent deliverance which we will know in full when he returns for the second time. Our reading in Revelation gives us a glimpse of what that will be like, no more tears, no more death, no more grief, no more crying or pain. I will make all things new says the one who sits on the throne - Jesus.

Deliverance comes when we ask for help. Deliverance comes when we accept **direction**. Look at verse 20. *The Lord will make you go through hard times but he himself will be there to teach you and you will not have to search for him anymore. If you wander off the road to the right or the left you will hear his voice behind you saying, "Here is the road walk in it."* I don't know about you but whenever I go somewhere new I get the map out work out the best way and then go for it. Still I get lost and take some wrong turnings. It's much easier if I have someone I know in the car who has been there before and knows the way. Or nowadays SatNav is the thing to have. Key in the address and explicit directions at each junction are given. A satellite a way up there; equipment in the car. God is the One who gives us directions. Our equipment is our heart and our mind, a willingness to listen and be tuned into God so we need ears to listen and the will to follow. As an aside it occurs to me that when we are going in the right direction we don't always hear God's voice. In particular in this passage it is when we go off the road that we hear his voice telling us to return. There are times when we get no answer that we must assume that we are on the right track and go for it.

And it is when we follow, that God's healing will bring us new delights, with everything that we need for our new life.

God has promised his people bandages and healing for their wounds. Bandages are temporary repairs, healing is total renewal. He has promised his people both those things. Sometimes for healing to take place, pain and hurt has to precede the healing. My phone line would not have been totally transformed without the disconnections, without the inconvenience of a drive blocked and dug up. The result is worth

the wait. At all times I had to trust that one day the BT engineer would come back and restore the line as promised..

Time and again throughout the Bible God says, "I am the one who heals you, I will make you well again, I will heal your wounds." Let us be people who trust Him to keep His word, who accept his deliverance, who hear his voice and follow his way and so know the delights of being in his presence, in a limited way now, but much more clearly and intimately in our future life in heaven. What comfort, what hope, what healing He brings to the world and to those who listen to Him. Let us acknowledge that Day by Day we are carried in God's love and care. Amen.

HYMN Day by day

Music by David and Anne Bethune

Day by day and hour by hour your love for me from heaven flows,
Like streams of water in the desert living waters flow.
You walk beside me gently guiding, leading me through ev'ry storm
Everlasting, never changing grace and love divine.

Mercy's healing grace relieving, every spot and every stain
Forgiven freely, no more guilty, love has conquered shame.
The broken mended, night has ended, lost and lonely lost no more;
For I am carried in the arms of grace and love divine
I am carried in the arms of grace and love divine;
I am held by hands of healing, washed by water pure;
lifting up my heavy heart ,held in grace scarred hands
I am carried in the arms of love divine.

Never worthy, never earning, all my works now left behind.
Ever onwards, ever upwards, you've called me on to rise
above my darkness, all my failure every fear and every pain.
Always carried, always covered by grace and love divine *I am carried...*

Geoff Bullock @1997 Waterhead Productions/Kimsgway's Thank you music CCLI, 600239,634212, 27185

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Read by Iona MacNeill

Lord our God, You are the source and the giver of all good things, thank You for all your mercies and for all your loving care over all creation. We bless you for the gift of life, for Your protection around us, Your guiding hand upon us Your steadfast love within us.

Thank You for friendship and for duty, for good hopes and precious memories, for joys that cheer us and trials that teach us to trust in You. Most of all we thank You for the saving knowledge of Your Son our Saviour, for the living Presence of Your Spirit, the comforter and for the Church, the body of Your Son here on earth.

In all these things make us wise in the right use of Your blessings so that we may give You rightful thanks and praise.

You invite us to be partners in bringing your healing presence to the world by our prayers as well as our actions and so we come Lord God to you.

There are people across the length and breadth of this land who find themselves in hopeless despair. Nothing seems to be going right, one tragedy after another piles on them and today they are despairing of life itself. Grant to them O God a sense of Your powerful Spirit. As they seek You, may they find You, right there in the midst of their problems, not only comforting and consoling them but showing them that You are their strength and You will provide the means to work through to a brighter tomorrow.

Be a comfort to those who are in pain of body and of mind, be a signpost and guide to those who need new direction in their lives and a solace to those who feel bereft and all alone. We name those we know before you now.... Show them Your love O Lord.

Lord God you are the God who brings healing to our world. Let us be renewed in the power of your Spirit so that we may have life in your name, enabling us to go wherever you send us.

We thank You for the knowledge that as we pray we are joining our prayers to those prayers of all Christians around the world and to Your family now at home with You in Heaven. Our prayers are made in Jesus Name

Introduction to 3rd hymn

Our third hymn reminds us that the church is part of God's new creation here in the world. We His people, undergirded by Jesus Himself provides our world with healing comfort and hope just as God has done for ourselves. We falter and fail yet God calls us to abide in Him and His way till He comes to bring all things to fruition.

HYMN 739 The church's one foundation

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation, by water and the word;
from heav'n he came and sought her to be his holy bride,
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from every nation, yet one o'er all the earth,
her charter of salvation, one Lord, one faith, one birth;
one holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses, with every grace endued

'Mid toil and tribulation, and tumult of her war,
she waits the consummation of peace for evermore;

till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.

Yet she on earth hath union with God the Three in One,
and mystic sweet communion with those whose rest is won:
O happy ones and holy! Lord, give us grace that we
like them, the meek and lowly, on high may dwell with thee.

BENEDICTION

May the God of grace breathe health into your body, love into your heart, peace into your mind and joy into your spirit. Go now your life filled to overflowing and be poured out in His service. His blessing goes with you today and forever Amen