

Sunday 14th February Jehovah Shammah: The God who is here

WELCOME

Jesus says, Where two or three are come together in my name, I am there with them. (Matthew 18:20)

Apart we may be but we do come together to worship our God today and so His promise is true for us as He welcomes us to worship Him wherever we are. *“I will be with you always,” (Matthew 20:20)* is another promise He makes.” As we worship Him this morning let us allow His loving presence to reassure us that the cords of His love which bind us together as one are no less strong for not being physically present together, for as we gather, Jesus is here and we are joined by His Spirit.

HYMN 197 As we are gathered Jesus is here

As we are gathered, Jesus is here ; one with each other, Jesus is here ;
joined by the Spirit, washed in the blood, part of the body, the Church of God.

As we are gathered, Jesus is here ; one with each other, Jesus is here.

John Daniels Reproduced from CH4 CD-ROM edition, number 197 Words and Music: © 1979, Authentic Publishing. Administered by Song Solutions CopyCare, 14 Horsted Square, Uckfield, East Sussex, TN22 1QG, United Kingdom. <info@songsolutions.org> Used by permission. CCLI 600239,634212, 27185

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Uniquely made in your image you tell us Almighty God, the God who is love. How marvellous! You, Creator God, give form to our bodies, place your Spirit within our souls, calling us your children, inviting us to call you our Father. How wonderful!

Lord God your love has called us here as we by love for love were made. Your living likeness still we bear though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed. We come with all our hearts and minds your call to hear your love to find.

Lord Jesus Christ, our brother, you shower us with your love which breaks down barriers between you God, our Father and us and barriers between us as people living in your world today. Through your death and resurrection you provide forgiveness and renewal. Creation is being restored. How marvellous how wonderful is our Saviour's love for us and our world.

We place ourselves in your care, the One who is here, telling you how sorry we are for all that is wrong in our lives, inviting you to forgive us, restore us in order that we might be your people in our world today ready to bring love, hope, healing, forgiveness and renewal to society and creation as we seek to live our lives responsibly for you, knowing that without you in our lives this is impossible. In Jesus name we pray saying together the prayer he taught, 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 Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom the power and the glory forever. Amen

³⁰⁻³⁴ There are twelve entrances to the city of Jerusalem. Each of the four walls measures 2,520 yards and has three gates in it, each named for one of the tribes. The gates in the north wall are named for Reuben, Judah, and Levi; those in the east wall, for Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan; those in the south wall, for Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun; and those in the west wall are named for Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. ³⁵ The total length of the wall on all four sides of the city is 10,080 yards. The name of the city from now on will be “The-LORD-Is-Here!”

Revelation 22:3b-5

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. ⁵ There shall be no more night, and they will not need lamps or sunlight, because the Lord God will be their light, and they will rule as kings forever and ever.

REFLECTION Part 1

Jehovah Shammah – The God who is here.

Numerous verses in the Bible tell us the truth of that statement – I wonder if you can think of any.

Perhaps you have a favourite go to verse which sustains you through good and bad times. If you don't perhaps you'd like to find one this week and ponder anew what the Almighty can do as the hymn says, has done and promises to continue to do as *He is the same yesterday today and forever*. **Hebrews 13:8.**

What about **Isaiah 46:4** *Even to your old age and grey hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you.*

Psalms 139 ⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. ⁹ If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. ¹¹*

Jeremiah 29:11 *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. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, '*

And before the end of the reflection there will be others – from the New Testament. As I reflected on what it means for us that God is here I was reminded that God is love and therefore love is here. Love that is pure, holy, unadulterated, complete. The God who is love invites us to experience His love in our lives.

As we sing Be still for the Presence take time to ask God to show you a verse that will help you understand His love for you which means His Presence is with you wherever you are to comfort and challenge, to forgive you and to guide you.

HYMN 189 Be still for the presence

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here ;
come bow before him now with reverence and fear :
in him no sin is found — we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around ; he burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned :
how awesome is the sight — our radiant king of light !
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place ;
he comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace :
no work too hard for him — in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

David J. Evans (b. 1957) Reproduced from *CH4* CD-ROM edition, number 189 Words and Music: © 1986, Administered by worshiptogether.com songs excl. UK & Europe, administered by Kingswaysongs, a division of David C Cook & Curious? Music/Administered by Kingswaysongs tym@kingsway.co.uk. Used by permission CCLI 600239,634212, 27185

REFLECTION Part 2

Imagine the scene if you will. Your house, home, possessions have all been burnt to the ground ransacked by armies whose only thought is to take charge of your area, your country. That is the plight of thousands if not millions of people today. Forced away from the safety of their own place. It is not a new predicament. The possibility has always existed right from the beginning of time.

God in His love created a perfect world where people would live, work and play in perfect harmony as they acknowledged the Presence of God, the Holy One's Presence, in all their actions. This God whose character is Love. One day though people chose to disobey God and go their own way. In His love he allowed them to go. The unity of love was shattered. Yet God continued to provide the offer of His Presence. Time came and went. People turned to Him then ignored Him. Our reading in Ezekiel is the story of the people's return home to God's Presence.

It was a temporary return, for, in our sinful way, folk down the centuries have failed and forgotten, have ignored and cold shouldered this God who promises to be with us always.

For the folk of Ezekiel's day coming home meant new life lived together in God's Presence, new life filled with creative, joy-filled work and leisure activities. It was a place of unity, completeness, a place of continuing activity of work and pleasure.

The God who promises His Presence came even closer as He crept into the world and took on a human body. Jesus, Immanuel, God with us, showed and shared God's love with all He met. Jesus who showed and shared God's love in such a servant like way as He went to the cross so that all people, everywhere, for all time to come might have the opportunity of returning to this God who is love and who is here. Jesus who showed and shared the promise of God that one day there would be a new heaven and a new earth in which work – oh yes work will continue - will be fulfilling and joyful, freed from the toil and frustration caused by people's waywardness and sin. The "I," "eye" of sin would be removed and God would take centre place in all life – ***the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the midst of all things*** says the book of (***Revelation 22:4***).

A promise of perfection, peace, presence: God's presence that we will be able to see and experience for ourselves. And in the seeing will be the provision. The first chapter of the Bible talks about God creating this perfect world. The very last chapter of the Bible talks about God re-creating His perfect world which will last forever. What a journey the Bible takes from beginning to end but one strong theme throughout is Jehovah Shammah: the God who is here. The God who is here in the messiness of our world today, in the messiness of our lives today. God sticks with us.

The Christian hope is that we and our world are on a journey, a journey that takes many twists and turns, a journey where on occasions we find it difficult, if well nigh impossible, to experience for ourselves this God who is here. ***For now we see through a glass darkly as Paul puts it but one day we will see God face to face.(1 Corinthians 13:12)***

At present we are strangers in a foreign land – our home is not in this world yet we are called to be here for a time. When God's people were sent into exile in Babylon they were told to settle, work, marry, integrate into society while still remaining distinctive, knowing that the time they spent there would be limited – 70 years for them, perhaps a similar time for us here on earth today. ***Three score years and ten or perhaps a bit more if we are healthy*** doesn't it say in the Bible? ***Psalms 90:10***.

And yet so often we don't see notice or acknowledge this God who is present at all times. I'm reading a book by Max Lucado written in the pandemic entitled You are never alone and in one chapter he says this, "From heaven's viewpoint our earth is populated by sightless people. Blinded by ambitions. Blinded by pride. Blinded by success. ***"Though seeing they do not see."*** ***Matt 13:13***. They do not see the meaning of life or the love of God. How else do we explain the confusion and chaos in the world? Billions of people simply cannot see. ***"The devil who rules this world has blinded the minds of those***

who do not believe. They cannot see the light of the Good News. (2 Corinthians 4:4). He goes on to quote Charles Spurgeon, “It is not our littleness that hinders Christ, but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ it is our supposed light that holds back his hand.”

Blind to His Presence we may be but that does not mean He is not here. I haven't seen an awful lot of a big yellow ball in the sky this week but that didn't mean it wasn't there. Rather the clouds obscured it. Jesus gave sight to a blind man. He is willing to show Himself to us today as we put ourselves in His Presence and invite Him in love to shower us with His sustainable and sustaining love.

The Christian belief is that His presence is here today because He promised that after he died he would rise again, after he rose again he would go back to his Father in heaven and he would give us His Spirit to be our help, to give us everything we need, to heal us, to forgive us, to bring us comfort, to provide us with an example to follow, all that yes and more He would give us Himself so that as we are satisfied with all He has given us we can then rest safe and secure in his arms, looking up and seeing his eyes of love beaming down upon us. Safe in the arms of Jesus safe on His gentle breast thereby His love o'ershading gently my soul shall rest.

God has promised us that He will be with us always, Jesus said the same, the Holy Spirit in our lives convinces us that it's true. Every step of the way, whether those steps take us over grassy plains or rough mountain sides, God is here. In childhood, manhood, age and death as the hymn puts it. The latter an unknown journey for all of us but with a friend beside us to show us the way, a friend who has told us that he already has a place designed just for us, a journey that we can take with confidence, in utter safety and security.

He will bring us home to be with Himself forever, but for now He calls us to work with Him to bring His Kingdom here on earth. We do that by sharing His love with all we meet, caring for His and our world in a way that provides sustainability, growth and dignity for all people and all creation.

Just think of the security of that. God is here - Jehovah, Shammah, reach out to him and know the joy which is and will be yours forever with Him in your life. Amen.

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Margaret Johnstone

Our gracious God and Father, rejoicing in Your faithfulness and constant love we continue in our worship and bring you our prayers of intercession. Father you have set before us a great hope that Your Kingdom will come on earth and have taught us to pray for its coming. Make us ready to watch for the signs of its dawning.

Lord hear us: *Father your Kingdom come*

We pray for your world that we live in today. Since the start of lockdown we wake up to a day that seems to merge into the next day and goes on and on. The news of the various strains of the virus makes us

wonder when will our days be different and when will we regain our freedom from the stressful situation of the pandemic.

Lord hear us: *Father your Kingdom come*

Thankfully there is some good news from the continued vaccination programme. We are all so grateful and encouraged to all those who have worked tirelessly to make this happen. We are beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel.

Lord hear us: *Father your Kingdom come*

Holy Spirit, inspire us to bring all humanity together into a fellowship of hope and forgiveness acknowledging your Son to be the Saviour of the world.

Lord hear us: *Father your Kingdom come*

As we approach the beginning of the season of Lent we need to remind ourselves that above all else this is a period of reflection and secondly a period of renewed commitment. Loving God you tell us that we will not be tested beyond our limit but you also tell us to examine ourselves to keep on looking at our lives ensuring that we are serving you and honouring you as we should. Loving God help us to make time and space in our lives to meet with you and to listen for your voice. Teach us to be still and to be aware of your presence. We thank you for the time spent by Jesus Your Son when He was here on earth and tested beyond the limit. Help us to follow your will and to be obedient to your will regardless of the cost.

Lord hear us: *Father your Kingdom come*

We remember all the untimely deaths that have been happening during the time of the pandemic. Comfort and strengthen those who are grieving of such a loss.

Lord hear us: *Father your Kingdom come*

We remember Ezekiel the priest when he announced to the Israelites, this is the land from that time will be called the Lord is there. When we come into the book of Revelation John writes – the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in its place in the city. The One who guarantees these revelations repeats His promise I shall be with you soon. Come Lord Jesus come, Amen

Our final hymn reminds us that God's love is a transforming love – we are a work in progress. One day we will be complete when we see Him face to face. Love Divine all loves excelling.

HYMN 519 Love divine all loves excelling

Love divine all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down
Fix in us thy humble dwelling all thy faithful mercies crown
Jesus thou art all compassion pure unbounded love thou art
Visit us with thy salvation enter every trembling heart

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

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 (1707–1788)

BENEDICTION

The grace of God thrill your hearts, the mercy of God transform your minds, the peace of God flood your souls and the continual presence of God bring you His constant love today and forever. Know the blessing of Father Son and Spirit today and everyday...3x Amen