

Sunday 25th July 2021

WELCOME

God welcomes us to worship today as we welcome one another. May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with us all. Yet we know that this world is not a peace filled one. The book of James tells us one of the reasons. *James 4 (selected verses from The Message Translation). Where do you think all these appalling wars and quarrels come from? Do you think they just happen? Think again. They come about because you want your own way, and fight for it deep inside yourselves. You lust for what you don't have and are willing to kill to get it. You want what isn't yours and will risk violence to get your hands on it. ²⁻³ You wouldn't think of just asking God for it, would you? And why not? Because you know you'd be asking for what you have no right to. What God gives in love is far better than anything else you'll find. ⁷⁻¹⁰ So let God work his will in you. Yell a loud no to the Devil and watch him make himself scarce. Say a quiet yes to God and he'll be there in no time. Quit dabbling in sin. Get serious, really serious. Get down on your knees before the Master; it's the only way you'll get on your feet.* Jesus calls us here to meet Him in worship and through service. Let us worship this God who delights to hear our praise.

HYMN 510 Jesus calls us here to meet Him (1st three verses)

Jesus calls us here to meet him as through word and song and prayer
We affirm God's promised presence where his people live and care
Praise the God who keeps his promise praise the Son who calls us friends
Praise the Spirit who among us to our hopes and fears attends

Jesus calls us to confess him Word of life and Lord of all
Sharer of our flesh and frailness saving all who fail or fall
Tell his holy human story tell his tales that all may hear
Tell the world that Christ in glory came to earth to meet us here

Jesus calls us to each other found in him are no divides
Race and class and sex and language such are barriers he derides
Join the hand of friend and stranger join the hands of age and youth
Join the faithful and the doubter in their common search for truth

J. Bell (1949) and G. Maule (1958 – 2010)

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

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Lord we praise you for your extravagant love and your life-transforming grace, for your holiness and the utter perfection of all that you are and everything you do. Although we cannot know everything about you, you tell us that wherever we go you are already there waiting for us to acknowledge you. There is nothing we can say, or do, or accomplish that will make us worthy of your love, yet in Christ you have claimed us for yourself. There is nothing about our lives or our achievements, nothing about our commitment, worship or service that makes us more acceptable yet you have chosen to fill us with your Spirit. Lord you exceed our greatest thoughts, you blow away our deepest meditation and you completely overwhelm us with the utter and absolute sufficiency of your grace. We praise you for the coming of Christ and for the power of your Holy Spirit and for the assurance they give us that you are our God and that we are loved. We call you wonderful because that is what you are. Your presence, mercy and love hold our lives, fill us with joy and give us hope.

Forgive us when we fail to remember you and your ways. We listen to hear your voice telling us that we are forgiven and that you are there to help us reform.

We bring you our praise and the offerings that we make through the plate or bank. Please use them for the benefit of your kingdom. 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

READING

Judges 2:6-10

Read by Elma Hendrie

⁶ Joshua sent the people of Israel on their way, and each man went to take possession of his own share of the land. ⁷ As long as Joshua lived, the people of Israel served the LORD, and even after his death they continued to do so as long as the leaders were alive who had seen for themselves all the great things that the LORD had done for Israel. ⁸ The LORD's servant Joshua son of Nun died at the age of a hundred and ten. ⁹ He was buried in his own part of the land at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰ That whole generation also died, and the next generation forgot the LORD and what he had done for Israel

REFLECTION

Our next readings deal with the period after the death of Joshua and before any kings were given. You knew who was boss when Moses and Joshua were in charge, you knew too when the kings were in charge but who was in charge during the intervening period? People named Judges were appointed to rule. One commentator says this, “Israel seemed to walk a fragile swaying rope bridge slung from one great cliff to another. – *everyone did as they saw fit*,” An apt description of then, a very apt description of the world today. How well can the message of Judges relate to our world today regarding the individualism and anti authoritarianism of today’s society. Everyone out for themselves. I would suggest that as you read, listen or watch the news this week, you make note of when this would be true and pray for each situation

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as you read. And as you read through the Bible passages this week I'm sure, like me, you will be asking the question – where is God in all this and perhaps more to the point, why is He allowing all this?

Let me read you part of Eugene Peterson's introduction to the Book of Judges from *The Message*. Sex, violence, rape and massacre, brutality and deceit do not seem to be congenial materials for use in developing a story of salvation. Given the Bible subject matter – God and salvation, living well and loving deeply – we quite naturally expect to find in its pages, leaders for us who are good, noble, honourable men and women showing us the way. It is always something of a shock to enter the pages of the Book of Judges and find ourselves immersed in nearly unrelieved mayhem. There is a kind of matter of fact indifference in the tone of the narration, almost as if God is saying, "Well if this is all you're going to give me to work with, I'll use these men and women, just as they are, and get on with working out the story of salvation."

God it turns out, does not require good people in order to do good work. He can and does work with us in whatever moral and spiritual condition he finds us. God, we are learning, does some of his best work using the most unlikely people. As God found a way to significantly include these leaders - he can certainly use us along with our sometimes impossible friends and neighbours." So says Eugene Peterson.

God has chosen to work in partnership with us humans, humans with all our flaws and failings. From Deborah, Barak and Jael, through Gideon, to Samson and Ruth, this week we will be living a roller coaster ride as we witness God's people in action. From the selfishness of Samson to the selflessness of Ruth and many points in between we will discover that God's way will not be thwarted by our condition. He uses us warts and all.

The story of Judges is the story of the round about. People recognise that God is their God. They swear allegiance to him, they worship him, they promise him their undivided love, but then little by little things of life creep in and slowly but surely they fall away, finding other things to take up their time and attention. Slowly but surely they seek other gods. Especially now when they've been through the wandering of the wilderness experience and are settled in to a rural lifestyle. The God, of the journey gives way to the leader who will bring fertility to the land and who better to do that than the gods of the Canaanites, Baal, Astartes – the gods of fertility. They've forgotten so quickly that God who led them out of Egypt was the one who led them in to Egypt in the first place when there was famine in their land. He was the one who in the desert when they were complaining about lack of food provided them with manna and quails. God's provision forgotten, they falter and fall away. And in doing so choose other gods and other ways and ***God in His love for them allows them to experience what they have chosen***. Wars, being over run by the enemy – they had been warned of the consequences of not following God's way and now they were experiencing the consequences.

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I wonder if you have ever used any tools like Myers Briggs or the Enneagram to discover your personality type? We all make decisions in different ways according to our personality. When you need to make vital decisions about life and living what do you do? There are many ways to describe how folk react to situations. Some of us are thinkers, some of us are feelers, some of us are gut folk.

Deborah was a **thinker** – someone who quietly allowed God to influence her thinking. Under the palm tree she sat, listened to what God was saying and then imparted the wisdom she received to those who came looking for her help. Those who came looking for justice found it. Her thinking led her into action on occasions with her realising the consequences her actions would have. Her name means “*Bee*”, and she was as busy as a bee! *Matthew Henry the commentator says that her very name suggests the work of the bee: industrious, sharp perception (discernment), great usefulness, sweetness to her friends, and sharpness to her enemies.*

Gideon too was a **thinker** – He wanted all the i’s dotted and all the t’s crossed before he was willing to do anything. A bolt and braces man if ever there was. You might think it really impertinent of him to ask God time and time again for reassurance that God really wanted him to act. And yet God in His mercy knew that Gideon required such reassurance and gave it to him.

Samson was a different kettle of fish. He was a **gut man** through and through. Not a lot of thought went in to his actions. He saw, he wanted, he got. But God used him too. Even in the selfish actions, God found a way for His justice to be shown.

Ruth, someone **whose heart ruled** the way she acted. She felt that she wanted to be with her mother in law. She felt that Naomi needed the company and support that she, Ruth, could give her and so she followed Naomi back to a strange land, leaving her family to be integrated into Naomi’s family. Not without its problems but she went. And in the going she prepared the way for Jesus to be born, for her husband Boaz is mentioned as an ancestor of King David who in turn is mentioned as an ancestor of Jesus.

Each of our personalities is a gift from God. These are to be celebrated and used creatively. God longs for us to give them over to Him so that He can use them, us, to bring the message of His salvation to others.

Are you a thinker – then God wants to use your thinking powers?

Are you a feeler – then God wants to use your feeling ways for His own purposes?

Are you someone who acts instinctively – a gut person – then God also wants to use you?

All of our personalities are flawed but rather than want to change them to another type, God wants to transform the type we've got into a more complete, wholesome version. There are times when we will suffer the consequences of our wrong actions but the message of Judges is that God is the God of love, the God of judgement, yes, but the God of mercy too and just as the folk from so long ago turned back to Him and found forgiveness and hope so we too will find Him waiting for us.

Within the church we need people who think, people who feel and people who act instinctively. As we work together allowing God to work in us and through us we are and will become a light to those in the world around us.

One phrase struck me very vividly this week – tomorrow you will read that as long as Joshua lived the people of Israel served the Lord and after his death they continued to do so as long as the leaders were alive *who had seen for themselves all the great things that the Lord had done for Israel.*

Personal experience matters – telling our story of how God has worked and continues to work in our lives is vital. Christianity is not about a set of rules and regulations – it's about a relationship, a deep loving relationship with the living God and how that relationship influences the way we live. We live in a society today that doesn't hear God's voice very often, that ignores that voice when it is heard, but much more frequently thinks that His voice is totally irrelevant to today's living. It is only when folk come up against someone who knows and shows the life changing love, the fulfilling relationship that God offers that they can begin to make some sense out of what seems senseless to them.

What a privilege and what a responsibility to be God's co workers here in Ashkirk, Ettrick & Yarrow and Selkirk in the 21st century. Let us this week resolve to be conscious that all our actions have consequences and will have significance to the people we meet – they will either let them see God in a new and deeper way or they will distract them from meeting with the living, life changing God. May God give us the strength, the hope, the courage to live life His way this coming week. Amen

HYMN 694 Brother, sister let me serve you

Brother sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you

Pray that I may have the grace

To let you be my servant too

We are pilgrims on a journey

And companions on the road

We are here to help each other

Walk the mile and bear the load

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I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear
I will hold my hand out to you
Speak the peace you long to hear

I will weep when you are weeping
When you laugh I'll laugh with you
I will share your joy and sorrow
Till we've seen this journey through

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony

Brother sister let me serve you
Let me be as Christ to you
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant too.

Richard A.M. Gillard (1953)

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Read by Nora Hunter

Almighty and ever living God, we come before you today in gratitude for your many blessings, for your love and care for us and for your guiding hands supporting us in difficult times. Forgive us Lord for often forgetting that you are there standing right beside us and within us.

As we all have different talents, grant us the willingness to share what we can do to help your church and our communities, even perhaps in small ways, and give us strength especially when it feels like an effort and sacrifice to do so.

As we now face emerging from many of the Covid restrictions, some of us are joyful but others are very nervous. Give us all the clarity of vision to see and trust that you are there always to offer us courage if we but ask. Help us to remember to look for you, to remember to have faith in your promise to care for us.

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We give thanks for all those who played any part in the development of the vaccines which are giving us in Britain the chance of a normal life again. Those in the medical professions at all levels, scientists and carers but also the unsung heroes, often forgotten – those ordinary people who have volunteered, and continue to volunteer, to take part in trials of safety and efficacy of the vaccines and the development of treatment methods. But we also bring before you those folk in other countries where vaccines and medical treatment are expensive and less available.

Dear Lord, every day we have been hearing news of extreme climate events. Bless and care for all of those affected by the devastating floods in Germany, Brussels, the Netherlands and China. We ourselves have had a taste of the difficulties high temperatures can bring and we pray for those who are already running out of water in the Ettrick and Yarrow valleys. Please Lord encourage those in power in local and national governments in all of the countries of the world to take the necessary steps to reduce such climate changes which are threatening our wonderful planet, given to us by you.

Give grace to ourselves and to our families, to those whom we love best and who forgive us most. Grant to our friends and neighbours strength in need, comfort in sorrow and joy in companionship that we all may serve Christ in one another and love as he loves us.

We bring before you now all those who suffer in body, mind or spirit and, in silence now, name to you those known to us.

(period of silence)

Encourage them when their hopes are eroded, that by their steadfast faith in you they may bring others into your care. Help us all to treasure the health we have, to care for our bodies as we would have others care for us.

Comfort those who suffer and give them patience and courage. Let their hopes be fulfilled that they may look forward to a new and richer life of loving trust in you. Lift up their hearts, set firm their resolve and bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayers.

Amen

HYMN 542 Lord speak to me

Lord speak to me that I may speak in living echoes of thy tone

As thou hast sought so let me seek thy erring children lost and lone

O lead me Lord that I may lead the wandering and the wavering feet

O feed me Lord that I may feed thy hungry ones with manna sweet

O strengthen me that while I stand firm on the rock and strong in thee
I may stretch out a loving hand to wrestlers with the troubled sea

O teach me Lord that I may teach the precious things thou dost impart
And wing my words that they may reach the hidden depths of many a heart

O give thine own sweet rest to me that I may speak with soothing power
A word in season as from thee to weary ones in needful hour

O fill me with thy fullness Lord until my very heart o'erflows
In kindling thought and glowing word thy love to tell thy praise to show

O use me Lord use even me just as thou wilt and when and where
Until thy blessed face O see thy rest thy joy thy glory share.

Frances Ridley Havergal (1836 – 1879)

BENEDICTION

The strength of God be our support

The light of God be our guide

The love of God be our joy

Let us go, knowing the blessing of the Peace filled Presence of Almighty God; Father, Son and Spirit at
work in our lives and through our lives today and everyday Amen.