

## WELCOME

God welcomes us to worship Him this morning, the God who reminds us that in Jesus we have a Saviour who in the words of *Revelation 21:5, is the One who sits on the throne and says, “And now I will make all things new.”*

Prophets - what do you think of when someone says, “He’s a prophet for our times?” A long haired radical with a sign saying the end is near, an insightful commentator about social issues, a lone figure courageously standing up to injustice through civil disobedience, someone perhaps like perhaps Greta Thunberg?

In a sense the prophets of the Bible were all of those things. They warned of judgement to come, wrote critiques of their society and as a result were forced to stand in opposition to the powers of their day. But there is one other significant thing about biblical prophets that distinguishes them: they spoke for God. That’s what gave them their greatest power. There are 16 prophets in the Bible all with different emphasis, speaking to God’s people in different circumstances and in different ways.

Sometimes people say to me there are two God’s, the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New, the God of judgement and the God of hope and love. The prophets remind us that God is the same – you find judgement in the Old and the New, you find love, mercy and hope in the Old and the New. There is a story that runs through the Bible from beginning to end. The story that tells of God’s love for all people, the offer of His way of living and the consequences of not doing so – judgement but always with the hope of mercy, new love and new beginnings. Some of the prophets’ warnings were dire – they needed to be. But there was always the glimmer of hope. For God is the God who cares for the beauty of the earth He created and as part of that creation He is the God who cares for you and me and who delights in the praise we offer.

## HYMN 181

For the beauty of the earth for the beauty of the skies  
For the love which from our birth over and around us lies  
*Christ our God to Thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise*

For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night  
Hill and vale and tree and flower sun and moon and stars of light  
*Christ our God to Thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise*

For the joy of ear and eye for the heart and mind’s delight  
For the mystic harmony linking sense to sound and sight  
*Christ our God to Thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise*

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For the joy of human love brother sister parent child  
Friends on earth and friends above for all gentle thoughts and mild  
*Christ our God to Thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise*

For each perfect gift of Thine to our race so freely given  
Graces human and divine flowers of earth and buds of Heaven  
*Christ our God to Thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise*

Folliott Snadford Pierpoint 1834 -1917

## **PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION**

Jehovah, Ancient of Days, Almighty God... we call on You by the names we have, taking on our lips words that cannot contain You. You are always more and as we turn to You, You have already turned to us and called us: "My people! My beloved," You say!

To wait before You and meditate on You – this is what restores us. To know again that You are the Living God – this is what reawakens our hope.

So we gather in Your presence and offer You our love, our thanks and our praise for keeping the world turning, for infusing all that exists with the breath of Your Spirit, for looking on us with warmth and pride because we are Yours.

Gracious God, You know us well. We are not always at our best. Sometimes we get weary, our smiles fade, our energy runs low, and in a depleted state we become bad company. Sometimes we fail to look after ourselves and blame others for our unmet needs. Sometimes we despair that our good work does not count for much and we retreat into paralysis.

Hear our sorrow and untangle us, good Lord. You do not condemn. You sent Jesus to take our sins on Himself and in doing so offer us Your forgiveness. You do not create lost causes but human beings in Your own, beautiful, likeness. Recreate us today for Your love's sake.

As a token of our willingness to be Your children we give you our offering. Please take it and us using what we give to bring Your Kingdom of love and peace here on earth. 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 53:1-12**

**Read by Barbara Usher**

*Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? <sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected*

*by mankind; a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. <sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed. <sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. <sup>9</sup> He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. <sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD made his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. <sup>11</sup> After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*

## **REFLECTION Part 1**

The prophets look at the present and bring challenge to our ways of living. They help us look back to the past in order that we might remember the way in which God has helped His people, including ourselves, through good and bad times. They look to the future – to a new day coming. Isaiah is one such. Let us look at the passage Barbara read for us.

Isaiah is the longest book of prophecy in the Bible. It contains two distinctive themes: warning and judgement, and hope and salvation. The part we've read today comes from the hope and salvation bit. The Israelites see that their peace with God, the healing of their broken relationship with Him was secured by the servant's death. The comfort they have received, the good news of their pardon has been provided at tremendous cost.

Let's have a closer look and I'm using the NIV translation as it brings out the Hebrew in a better way. This prophecy is one that looks forward to the time when God's Saviour, Jesus Christ, will come to bring in this new way of living.

**Growing up like a tender shoot** – very unpretentious; very slender, seemingly fragile - Jesus born in a stable, born into poverty would fit the bill.

**Growing up like a root from the dry ground.** You gardeners know that when you cut a tree right down to the ground it's not long before new shoots begin to grow. The special people of God, the Israelites, would be cut right down, but from the stump – the root of Jesse as it is sometimes called (Jesse being the

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father of David if you remember) - would come new life, new hope. Jesus' human parentage comes from King David and therefore from Jesse. New life would spring up from the desert places. That is the hope of Christians. Jesus, the one who tells us that He can provide living water, is the one who reminds us that from the desert experiences of our lives He can bring growth as we put our trust in Him – as we root ourselves in Him who has His roots already firmly embedded in God's love. Roots in the desert need to go down and down and down incredibly deep to find water. Because they are incredibly deep, they prove incredibly strong.

**He was despised and rejected** – all because He didn't fit the profile. The people wanted a conquering hero not a suffering servant but, as my mum used to say, "What wants doesn't get," because to get what was wanted would not have brought new life.

**He was pierced/wounded** - well He was, wasn't He – the nails on the cross, the spear in his side .

**He was bruised/beaten.** The Hebrew word for bruised had the idea of being crushed by some overwhelming burden, crushed so that the life was squeezed out. The burden – our sins – Jesus' final breath, "*Why have you abandoned me,*" – the umbilical cord of love between Father and Son crushed totally, so that nothing could flow through and then, "*It is finished.*"

Jesus' death – all for the sake of you, me, humanity. His death though not the end and the prophets knew this for the glimmer of new life shines through even the darkest parts of their prophecies. In Isaiah's case he went on to tell his readers that this suffering servant would become full of life again for ever, would live in a place full of joy, full of peace – shalom, wholeness, a place where he will be honoured, honoured by all. Paul in *Philippians chapter 2* like Isaiah encourages hope when he says, " *God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,<sup>11</sup> and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

The promise from the prophets is that one day Jesus will reign forever, that all people will bow before Him and acknowledge Him as Lord – that's good news, good news that comes right through the Old Testament and into the New.

The Good News is that our God reigns

#### **HYMN SPG 45 How lovely on the mountains**

How lovely on the mountains are the feet of Him  
who brings good news, good news  
Proclaiming peace announcing news of happiness  
*Our God reigns x 6*

You watchmen lift your voices joyfully as one  
shout for your king, your king

See eye to eye the Lord restoring Zion

*Your God reigns x 6*

Waste places of Jerusalem break forth with joy

we are redeemed, redeemed

The Lord has saved and comforted His people

*Your God reigns x 6*

Ends of the earth see the salvation of your God

Jesus is Lord, is Lord

Before the nations He has bared His holy arm

*Your God reigns x 6*

Leonard E Smith Jun. © 1974 Kingsway Thankyou Music

## **REFLECTION Part 2**

We'll be reading Jeremiah, Daniel and Malachi too this coming week with warnings of the consequence of not standing up for God and His ways. We'll be offered a good example to follow as we read one chapter in Daniel. And in Malachi we will find the challenge of ensuring that we do not abuse scripture – perhaps taking verses out of context, perhaps not heeding what is said, perhaps not standing up for the way in which we know God asks us to live. We'll find him talking about the way priests abused their power. People chosen by God to share the Good News of new life have failed and failed miserably.

We might think we can skip that as it doesn't apply to us but the apostle Peter reminds us all to ***“come as living stones and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.” (1Peter 2:4).***

**Every** Christian is called to be a priest, called to bring the people we meet to God and bring God to the people we meet. Christians believe that people need the life and the peace that God gives through the forgiveness of sin and the promise of His presence to guide them. Jesus the perfect sacrifice – no blemished animals here - is the One who offers us that forgiveness. He is the One who offers us His Presence through His Spirit to guide us in life, in death and on into the life to come. The Apostle Paul invites us to bring the sacrifice of our own lives lived in our own way to be transformed into lives lived positively for God. In ***Romans 12:2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.***

Our daily lives lived for Him – what a challenge that is. Without His ever present help it would be impossible. But the glimmer of hope that the prophets offer us, becomes more than a glimmer in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, burgeoning into the fully mature Christian hope of Jesus making all

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things new, a promise that will come to fulfilment one day in the future. But for now we are asked to carry on in faith, assured of God's loving, forgiving Presence with us day by day; that Presence enabling us to show and tell others about the Good News of God's way of living and loving, providing that glimmer of hope of a new future lived in God's Presence forever.

**All of us** part of the great story of God revealed through the Old and New Testaments, now revealed in the lives of Christians the world over.

## **PRAYER OF INTERCESSION**

God of compassion we thank you that you know each one of us as individuals. You delight in our creativity, be it through our cooking, knitting, playing, singing or learning. You smile on us. You, smile at our attempts to please you and help each other, and support us unceasingly when we open ourselves to you.

God of compassion we ask for your help in our lives when we become hard hearted, judgemental and forget you. Help us to speak kindly to ourselves, and to everyone we come into contact with. You know the conflicts and difficulties within us – emotionally, mentally and physically. We can come to you completely as we are warts and all, and you do not look away or chastise us. Instead you draw closer and allow us to cry, lament and seek your help. Help us as individuals to draw close to you in prayer – formally and informally throughout the day. Help us to let sink in that message of complete love, grace, forgiveness and solidarity you showed on the cross. Your love pours out unceasingly on us.

God of compassion we ask your help for all people who are struggling at this time. Those struggling financially. Those struggling physically. Those struggling emotionally. We especially think of schools this month as the new term gets underway. Be in homes where the summer holidays has been long and strained. Be in classrooms where there are barriers to learning and may support and encouragement thrive. Be with school cleaners, janitors, helpers, admin staff, teachers and managers – all who work in schools, and help them to see through the talents you have given them, the positive contribution they are making. Help students at nursery, Primary, secondary and in further education to feel safe, respected, heard and encouraged. Build up our places of learning to nurture and educate.

God of compassion we ask for your help in places of fear, loneliness, confusion and despair. Where there is conflict, natural disasters or cruelty. In Afghanistan we ask for the Taliban to become more moderate, to hear your voice of compassion and not commit human rights abuses. We pray for all those in dialogue with those in conflict situations. We pray for better understanding, respect and openness to listen and work for everyone's good. Be especially with our politicians, aid agencies and NGOs as they seek fairness, and to help the human and natural world to thrive.

Richard Rohr has prayed 'crucified Jesus, you are not a stranger to my soul, you are not foreign to our history. You have revealed, resolved and forgiven it all on the cross.' Help us to realise how present you are with us. Suffering with us as we make mistakes.

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God of compassion thank you for your utter solidarity with our pain and problems , and that your love can and will heal all things, In Jesus name Amen

### **HYMN 458 At the name of Jesus**

At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow  
Every tongue confess Him King of glory now  
'tis the Father's pleasure we should call Him Lord  
Who from the beginning was the mighty word

Humbled for a season to receive a name  
From the lips of sinners unto whom He came  
Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last  
Brought it back victorious when from death He passed

In your hearts enthrone Him there let him subdue  
All that is not holy all that is not true  
Crown Him as your captain in temptation's hour  
Let His will enfold you in its light and power

Truly this Lord Jesus shall return again  
With His Father's glory with His angel train  
For all wreaths of empire meet upon His brow  
And our hearts confess Him King of Glory now

Caroline Maria Noel (1817 – 1877)

### **BENEDICTION**

**The Lord hold you in the palm of His hand and give you life that is eternal. Go knowing the blessing of the Presence of the Intimate yet Almighty God Father Son and Spirit blessing your life today and everyday Amen.**