

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry worship for individuals or families on**  
**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 10:30 am**

**Call to Worship**

Lord God, giver of light and life, by your word you bring everything into being  
Give us compassion in the use of its resources, wisdom in our stewardship of your gifts,  
and reverence for all that you have made –  
for Jesus' sake.

**Hymn R&S 41**

For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the sky.  
For the love, which from our birth, over and around us lies.  
Lord of all to thee we raise, this our joyful hymn of praise

For the beauty of the hour; of the day and of the night  
Hill and vale and tree and flower; sun and moon and stars of light  
Lord of all to thee we raise, this our joyful hymn of praise

**Prayers of Praise, Approach and Thanksgiving**

Lord of hope, we give you thanks for a New Year.  
We arise today to the knowledge that your Son, our Lord, goes before us;  
To the hope that through his presence all people will be transformed;  
To the promise of salvation for all. For this and more we thank you.

God, through your might and power the world was created,  
And through it now the world is changed, and ever changing.  
We read in the Scriptures of how you changed people's lives.  
We hear it in the stories of saints old and new.  
We know it through the experience and lives of our own communities.

We seek your forgiveness  
We thank and praise you for all that you have done through the changes you have made – and are  
still making – in our lives.  
We thank and praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit  
Who gives us – your people – strength, and the blessing of peace

**Readings**



**Genesis 1: 1-5** – then God said 'Let there be light' and there was light

**Psalms 29** –Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name

**Mark 1: 4-11**- John the Baptist said 'I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit

**Acts 19:1-7**- Paul baptises in Jesus' name

**Reflection – *The whole world changed***

Some of you will know that one of my hobbies is painting and over the past few weeks I've been having problems with my painting. I think it is a little like writer's block. Time after time my attempts have failed, try as I may I can't produce a decent picture. I have experienced this before and you just have to persevere and suddenly one day success comes.

While thinking about my minor problem, my thoughts turned to the new mutations of COVID which are spreading at an alarming rate, and have somewhat dampened the country's optimism over the vaccines. There has been a great deal of speculation about what lies ahead, but no one knows what the future holds.

This current situation is very similar to the plague in Eyam and the sacrifice the villagers made in 1665 – 1666. In the seventeenth century Eyam was a very isolated community, mainly involved in farming and lead mining.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> September 1665 George Viccars, a journeyman tailor, on finding a damp bale of cloth which had been despatched from London decided to dry it by the fire and was bitten by a flea carrying the bubonic plague and subsequently died. Within days the infection had spread to his neighbours and eventually throughout the village.

In the early stages of the pandemic, a number of the wealthier inhabitants of the village, including the priest William Mompesson's two children, left the village and moved to Sheffield. Mompesson along with his ejected Puritan predecessor, Thomas Stanley, in spite of the risk to their own lives, convinced the villagers that the right thing to do was to quarantine the whole village, to contain the plague. Their sacrifice prevented the infection spreading to Sheffield and Manchester, which would have resulted in a massive death toll.

In the fields between Eyam and Stoney Middleton sits a gritstone boulder known as the 'Boundary Stone.' The stone had six holes drilled in the top of it which were filled with vinegar, and after quarantining themselves the villagers would come and place money in the holes to pay for food and medication left by anxious neighbours. When the Duke of Devonshire became aware of their desperate situation he supplied food and medication free, on condition that the village remained isolated.

Over 40% of the village (259 adults and 58 children) died in the outbreak including William Mompesson's wife. To minimise the risk of spreading the infection the village held socially distanced services outdoors and the victims were buried in the open fields rather than the church graveyard. On a hill above the village are the 'Riley Graves', named after a local farm, where Elizabeth Hancock buried her husband and six children in a field. They remain a poignant reminder of the great sacrifice the village made for others.

By October 1666 deaths started to fall, the last death from the plague occurring on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November 1666. According to Mompesson's diary, even during the darkest times the people of village never 'lost their faith in the Lord'. After the plague things were never quite the same, a number of people moved out of the village and it took a number of years for things to get back to what they were.

Just as an aside, Hettie Unwin's late husband Jack came from Stoney Middleton and my family have been traced back to the 1740s in Barlow, which makes one wonder if we have links with Unwins and Siddalls in the 17<sup>th</sup> century Eyam.

The lectionary gospel reading for today is about Jesus' Baptism. After his Baptism, he faced a time of trial in the wilderness before stepping into an uncertain future.

In our reading from Revelation, John is writing to believers in the seven churches who are experiencing persecution. In my bible notes for this month Helen Paynter, a tutor at Bristol Baptist College, says 'that nowhere in Revelation did John promise that faith will exempt them from the time of trial. Rather they are promised that through faith God will hold them in their trials and he will one day make an end to evil'. In such situations, when our expectations are not met, faithfulness requires a steady, patient commitment even if that means both mental and physical suffering.

In 1 Corinthians 13: 2, Paul says 'If have I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing'. To quote Helen Paynter again 'true faithfulness means a steadfast determination to hold on to promises that we have and to serve God and others with patient love in the meantime.' Surely this is what the village of Eyam did so many years ago, and we must do today.  
*(Please take a moment of silence to reflect on what you have just read)*

### **Hymn R&S 495**

Father, hear the prayer we offer: not for ease that prayer shall be,  
but for strength that we may ever live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures do we ask our way to be;  
but the steep and rugged pathway may we tread rejoicingly

Not for ever by still waters would we idly rest and stay;  
but would smite the living fountains from the rocks along our way

Be our strength in hours of weakness, in our wanderings be our guide;  
through endeavour, failure, danger, Father, be thou at our side.

### **Prayer of Intercession**

God of every land and nation, you have created all people and you dwell among us in Jesus Christ. Listen to the cries of those who pray to you, and grant that, as we proclaim the greatness of your name, all people will know the power of love at work in the world.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

We hold in God's light all across the world, especially the people of Croatia and across continent of Europe who yearn for deep peace and unity. We hold in God's light all who live with anxiety, fear, dread or despair across our globe. We hold in God's light this one fragile planet which we inhabit. We pray for justice for the poor and the persecuted.

And we pray that the Prince of Peace may remind us and remind us and remind us that our task is to be his hands and hearts on this earth

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Hymn R&S 200**

The kingdom of God is justice and joy;  
For Jesus restores what sin would destroy.  
God's power and glory in Jesus we know;  
And here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace;  
The captives are freed, the sinners find place,  
The outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share;  
And hope is awakened in place of despair.

### **Blessing**

May this day, this year unfold as it should;  
May you find solace in scripture and Spirit;  
And may your journey into this New Year be filled  
With the hope and promise of God  
For the sake and the peace of the world.

The blessing of the Father, Son and Spirit go with you always. Amen