

**Sheffield United Reformed Churches**  
**Team Ministry worship for individuals or a family**  
**Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> June 2021 at 10:30 am.**

**Call to worship - (Psalm 9, 9-10)**

The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Those who know your name trust in you, for you, LORD, have never forsaken those who seek you.

**Opening Hymn R&S 543**

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us o'er the world's tempestuous sea;  
guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us, for we have no help but thee;  
yet possessing every blessing, if our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us: all our weakness thou dost know;  
thou didst tread this earth before us, thou didst feel its keenest woe;  
lone and dreary, faint and weary, through the desert thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending, fill our hearts with heavenly joy,  
love with every passion blending, pleasure that can never cloy:  
thus provided, pardoned, guided, nothing can our peace destroy.

**Prayers of Approach, Thanksgiving and Confession**

Living God, we come to you from our storm-tossed lives to seek your peace;  
we come to you with our questions and uncertainties, our worries and anxieties,  
we come to you from our joy and our happiness, our adoration and surprise -  
each emotion a kaleidoscope of our feeling in life's changing patterns.  
More than all of that we come to you because of what you have done for us  
in the love of Christ who died on the cross and showed us new life in His resurrection life.

We praise You because we know that in love You created this wonderful universe  
and that in love You have given us life so that we may know Your love and care for Your creation.

We offer praise and gratitude for our relationships with family and friends  
for our conversations with neighbours and strangers  
for our connections with internet and technology.

Merciful God, we come to you knowing that sometimes we have received your grace in vain.  
We have not relied on your word or wisdom,  
we have not shown any concern or compassion when we should have;  
we have not loved our neighbour or loved ourselves.  
We have remained silent when we should have spoken  
and spoken when we should have been silent.  
We seize the moment to ask for yet another chance of hearing you say to us:  
'Your sins are forgiven'.

May the mark of that forgiveness be your grace in us  
as we respond with grace and gratitude to your love.  
God's grace washes upon the turbulent shores of our lives; and we are forgiven to begin again  
to live at peace with ourselves and others, with Christ and creation,  
allowing justice and love to flow freely through our lives.

Living God,  
as we ask that you accept our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
we pray that from the grace we have received,  
what we say and what we do will enable those around us to glimpse the life of your Son -  
who calmed the storm with words which still echo down the centuries,  
'Peace be still' .....Amen.

## Readings



**Psalm 9:9-20** - God is a stronghold in times of trouble.

**1 Samuel 17: 1-49** - David believes he can defeat Goliath and he does.

**Mark 4:35-41** - Jesus calms the storm but questions the Disciples' lack of trust.

**2 Corinthians 6:1-13** - God's grace gives us strength to serve. Now is the time of His favour!

## Reflection

Is there a time when you **SHOULDN'T** pray?

The captain of a cruise-liner was a very devout man. Every morning he would hold a prayer meeting for crew and passengers. But none of the passengers ever came. They were too busy enjoying all the activities and the deck games and getting ready for the trips on shore. A few days into one cruise the ship ran into the most terrible cyclone. The wind howled, the waves mounted and crashed across the decks. The ship heeled from side to side at an alarming angle. Everyone was very frightened. The passengers sent a delegation to the captain on the bridge. "Captain!" they cried "Wouldn't this be a good time to organise one of your prayer meetings?" "No," The captain replied. I have done all my praying - now it's time to steer the ship"

A terrible storm, a vessel in peril, an imperturbable and seemingly indifferent skipper and a very frightened group crying out for help. Sound familiar? At the heart of our Gospel story about Jesus calming a storm there is a conundrum: it's the reaction of Jesus to the disciples' cry for help. I would say that Jesus was annoyed with the disciples because they had woken him up. The context of Mark's Gospel makes it clear that Jesus had been having a very busy time ministering to people's needs and travelling around the countryside. He needed, desperately, to rest. Witness the fact he was sleeping soundly through a terrible storm. Would you have been annoyed? I know I would!

I have heard many preachers interpret this passage in terms of prayer. The Disciples were afraid. They called to Jesus. He answered. The storm abated. But such an interpretation doesn't fit the facts as Mark records them. When Jesus says "Peace! Be still!" I wonder if Mark misinterpreted what he heard. Maybe Jesus wasn't talking to the wind and the waves at all! Maybe he was talking to the disciples, addressing the anxiety in their hearts?

Sometimes it's hard to know how to act as a Christian - what is the Lord's will in any particular situation? Jesus rebuked his disciples for their lack of faith. The implication is that the disciples should not have disturbed Jesus at all but simply waited for the storm to blow over. It was the "wrong time" to "pray"!

This Gospel story is all about trust. Jesus' rebuke to his followers might be interpreted as a question. "I am with you. Why don't you trust me?" But the story also seems to underline the idea that Jesus trusts his disciples too. He seems to be saying to them "When I go to sleep and I'm resting, you know what to do." The disciples do not need Jesus to be holding their hand every minute of every day. He trust them to use their initiative, their common sense. This does not mean they are doing their own thing but, having learned enough from their time with Jesus, they are able to put their faith in him and act accordingly. Is he saying "Don't wait for me to wake up, just get on with it"?

I'm reminded of the story of a vicar who had served a parish church for over 30 years. One Sunday morning his congregation arrived to find the church door locked. A note in the Vicar's handwriting was pinned to the door:

*"You have been coming here long enough; now just go and do it."*

This period of lockdown has given us a golden opportunity to spend time in quietness and reflection - to have a deeper think about our individual and corporate lives of discipleship. We are hoping that this period will soon come to an end and life may get a bit more active. When lockdown ends will we have the faith to go in obedience to our Lord's command to bring the Gospel to our communities in both word and deed?

The Gospel is not about dependence but growth in maturity. So often our lives are characterised by anxiety and worry. We dare not take even a small step without a feeling of security and certainty. I don't think the Lord wants us to live in that way. Rather he seeks to empower us. All the time we are waiting and waiting and waiting for the right moment the Lord is at our shoulder saying "Just do it!"

If the story of Mark is about anything it's about the Gospel transforming humankind's relationship with the world. We are no longer tossed about by the winds and waves of circumstance, fashion and opinion, but, as children of our Heavenly Father, like our Big Brother Jesus, the Son of God, we can take responsibility and make the wind and waves of challenging circumstances obey us. We can face any problem any Goliath-sized issue of division, want or injustice and tackle it.

The story of David and Goliath bears no little relation to the thoughts that Zaidie shared last week about the tiny mustard seed that grew to become a great tree. David was one young boy among an army of thousands. But, while everyone cowered in fear in the face of danger and challenge, David had a seed of faith that was able to face the challenge and overcome it - despite all the nay-sayers and discouragement around him. And David's faith was not built on wishful thinking but on solid experience. God had given him strength, when shepherding his father's sheep, to overcome lions and wild beasts. David knew God is faithful in small things and then larger things. Surely this same God would help him step up to a larger challenge? The God who has been faithful to us in leading us and caring for us through lockdown, and never let us down, is well able to equip us and strengthen us for the next challenge of our journey.

Our human responsibility does not contradict our reliance on the strength of God or the fact that we are saved purely by his gracious action in Christ. It is the outworking and response to that very same grace. We can wait and wait and wait for God to do something but Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth that God already has - and now it is our turn. "You are God's co-workers", Paul says. He is working but he is working as you work - and working through you. So "do not receive God's grace in vain" because there is no need to wait any longer. God says "I have already heard your prayer and I have already stepped in to save you. Now is the time of my favourite and my salvation."

This will not be easy, necessarily. Paul's description of his own life of service that follows makes that clear. But that does not mean that we should not act. If anything both Paul testimony and the Gospel story underline the fact that storms will come but that, trusting in God's purposes, we will weather them. Is there a time to not pray? Paul elsewhere says we should "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5, 17) but perhaps it is the manner of our praying that is in question - not the panic stricken prayer of fear but a thankful prayer of trust. Trust in the God who has done it all for us and now invites us, in response, to do it too

### **Song of praise and response**

Great, is the Lord and most worthy of praise - in the city of our God, the Holy place  
The Joy of the whole Earth.

Great, is the Lord in whom we have the victory - He aids us against the enemy  
We bow down on our knees...

And Lord we want to lift your name on high!  
And Lord we want to thank you for the works you've done in our lives!

And Lord we trust in Your unfailing love,  
For you alone are God eternal - Throughout earth and heaven, above.

## **Prayers for our world**

Loving God, We bring to you this morning: people and situations in our world, in our city, in our church community and in our lives who are experiencing storms.

Living God, creator of the immense galaxies and of the tiniest mustard seeds. This week we have seen the news of destruction caused by storms and flooding. We pray for those who are experiencing displacement, disruption to livelihoods and destroyed crops and food sources. You are with us in yearning for deeper engagement with the climate crisis.

Hospitable God, host of the marginalised and excluded. This week is Refugee Awareness Week: in the news we continue to see refugees and asylum seekers. We pray for those who are far from home, in overcrowded boats and camps, living in unsafe conditions or families divided from one another at a border. You are with us in yearning for a world where there is no longer inhospitality. Compassionate God: who implores us to love our enemies. This week in the news, we witness the on-going armed conflict from Syria to Israel/Palestine, Myanmar to Yemen. We pray for those in all wars who lose their lives, are injured, brutalised or bereaved. You are with us in yearning for a world where there is no longer conflict.

Just God, who desires a fulfilling life for all. We pray for those who are struggling on salaries below the living wage, cuts in benefits or sanctions. You are with us in yearning for a world where there is no longer injustice.

Healing God: who provides us with living water. We pray for those suffering from mental ill health, those who feel utterly lost and alone. You are with us in yearning for a world where there is no longer stigmatisation.

God of Peace and Comfort, we thank you that you are in the midst of our lives, even in the storms we go through and we can trust in you. We pray for those that are frightened in their personal storms, illness, sorrow, loneliness, or fear. Your voice is more powerful than the most deafening sound of any storm! Your voice brings wholeness.

Speak to us Lord, in each particular situation so all will know and find rest, hope and renewal in your peace. Amen - **We say The Lord's Prayer**

## **Our Closing Hymn**

I the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.  
All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save  
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright  
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord? I have heard You calling in the night  
I will go Lord if you lead me; I will hold Your people in my heart*

I the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain  
I have wept for love of them. They turn away...  
I will break their hearts of stone; give them hearts for love alone  
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send? - *Here I am Lord...*

I the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame  
I will set a feast for them; My hand will save  
Finest bread I will provide, 'til their hearts be satisfied  
I will give My life to them. Whom shall I send? - *Here I am Lord...*

## **Blessing**

God is with you, Christ beside you, The Holy Spirit within you  
Go, with courage and trust to serve, to speak, to pray and to live  
And the blessing of Father, Son and Spirit  
Be with us all