**Sunday 26th April 2020 - Act of Worship**

**Welcome and opening words**

Welcome to our service today on the 26th April. When we will continue with our reflections on Paul’s letter to the Colossian Church. If you missed last week when we reflected on Colossians 1:1-14 then you can catch up with it later as the video is on the Bamford Chapel and Norden URC website or YouTube (along with the scripts of the services too.)

One of the Lectionary readings today is Psalm 34 and as I read it in preparation for the service, I realised that some of the words would lead well into times of prayer. So, during our service today I will read certain verses which will lead is into our times of prayer.

Our opening words also come from Psalm 34:1-3:

**“1 I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips. 2 My soul will boast in the LORD; let the afflicted hear and rejoice. 3 Glorify the LORD with me: let us exalt his name together.**

We “exalt his name” in singing our first song today:
**Opening Song: King of Kings, Majesty**

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| 1.King of kings, majesty,God of heaven living in me,gentle Saviour, closest friend,strong deliverer, beginning and end,all within me falls at Your throne. | 2. Earth and heaven worship You,love eternal, faithful and true,who bought the nations,ransomed souls, brought this sinnernear to Your throne; all within me cries out in praise. |
| *Your majesty, I can but bow.**I lay my all before you now.**In royal robes I don't deserve**I live to serve Your majesty.*  | *Your majesty, I can but bow.**I lay my all before you now.**In royal robes I don't deserve**I live to serve Your majesty.I live to serve Your majesty.* |
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**Psalm 34:11-14
“ 11 Come, my children, listen to me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD. 12 Whoever among you loves life and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.**

**Prayers of Praise, thanksgiving and *Confession***

Loving Father God, we come as your children to offer our prayers of praise and confession. May we listen to you as your *always* listen to us. We praise you for creation, for the lovely weather we have been enjoying when we can experience the goodness of your creation. *Forgive us when we use it and abuse it. When we don’t think of others who are not as fortunate as we are.*

We praise and thank you for family and friends. For the joy they bring to us and the joy we bring to them. For times we have spent with them in the past and the time we will spend with them in the future post lockdown. *Forgive us when we take our friends and family for granted. Help us to be thankful for them.*

We praise and thank you for food and drink. For a roof over our heads and a place that we can call home. *Forgive us for those times when we take that privilege for granted and forget that there are many, many people who don’t enjoy such luxuries.*

We praise and thank you for Jesus and all that he did for us on the cross. We thank you for the love he had for us and that whatever we do, say or think…nothing can ever separate us from that love that we can know in a relationship with Jesus.

*Forgive us when we take our faith for granted. When we look down on others and when we don’t show the love of Jesus to others. When we don’t take seriously, as committed followers of Jesus, the “Great Commission” of Matthew’s Gospel to: “make disciples of all nations…to baptise them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to teach them to obey the commandments of Jesus.*

We join together in the prayer than unites us with brothers and sisters of Christ in all nations as we say together: Our Father, who art in heaven…

Having confessed and sought forgiveness we now sing again God’s praise….

**Hymn: Rejoice, rejoice Christ is in you** *(sung left to right)*

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| *Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you -* *the hope of glory in our hearts,**He lives! He lives!* *His breath is in you.**Arise, a mighty army we arise!* | 1.. Now is the time for us to march upon the land -into our hands He will give the ground we claim;He rides in majesty to lead us into victory,the world shall see that Christ is Lord. | *Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you -* *the hope of glory in our hearts,**He lives! He lives!* *His breath is in you.**Arise, a mighty army we arise!* |
| 2.. God is at work in us, His purpose to perform - building a kingdom of power not of words;where things impossibleby faith shall be made possible:let's give the glory to Him now. | *Rejoice! Rejoice! Christ is in you -* *the hope of glory in our hearts,**He lives! He lives!* *His breath is in you.**Arise, a mighty army we arise!* | 3.. Though we are weak,  His grace is everything we need -we're made of clay, but this treasure is within;He turns our weaknesses into His opportunities,so that the glory goes to Him.*Rejoice, Rejoice…..* |
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**Bible Reading: Colossians 1:15 – 23**

**The supremacy of Christ**

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. Thanks be God for His Word.

**Reflection: Following Jesus 1**

Paul writes in Colossians Chapter 1v15: **“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.”** This I one of the most powerful statements of the divine nature of Jesus in the whole of the Bible!

*Anyone who has met my Dad will often say to me how much I look like him! Ruth, my wife, tells me I am going more and more like him every day! (I always get the impression that is not a compliment* 😊 *Thankfully they get on very well!)*

When Paul says that Jesus is **“the image of the invisible God”** he doesn’t mean that Jesus somehow looks like God (like I look like my Dad) He doesn’t mean that Jesus has some of the traits that God has - like we might have traits of our parents or like our children do of us. Paul is not saying that Jesus is ‘equal to God’ he is saying that ‘Jesus ***is*** God!’

Verses 15-23 of Colossians chapter 1 are then one long list of ways of stating that Jesus is divine, that Jesus is God and how anyone can have a relationship with him. It is not some select club…or you don’t have to qualify in anyway. What we need to do is believe in Jesus and accept him as our friend.

I mentioned last week that part of the reason Paul was writing to the Colossians was to refute the belief of “Gnosticism” – the belief system that stated that only by acquiring special knowledge can someone really know God.

*I have been blessed to have been brought up in a Christian family. My sister and I were taken to church from birth. I attended regularly and for a number of years I couldn’t have told you what I believed. What I did know was that it never felt right when I wasn’t at Church on a Sunday.*

*It was when I was at secondary school that I went to an evangelistic mission being held in my home town of Blackburn and whilst there I found myself responding to an invitation from the speaker one night to “give my life to Christ.” I know now that my walk from my seat to the front of that big top was possible only by Christ’s calling. Was it a Damascus Road encounter like the Apostle Paul (known then as Saul) had in Acts 9? No, it wasn’t – but something changed in me that day and I believe that to be Christ in my life and the Holy Spirit changing and transforming me.*

*(And interestingly it was a tent at another evangelistic event, in the same park in Blackburn when I received my call to ministry a few years later – but that is a story for another time!)*

Paul longed for those in the Colossian church to have an encounter with Jesus – only possible through accepting and knowing the risen Jesus Christ. Not any special knowledge acquired or given to us (as the gnostic belief system held) But a genuine relationship with Jesus.

On the Alpha course there is an interview with an American scientist called Francis S Collins, Director of the Human Genome Project, and I invite you to watch this video….

(Transcript of the video: *well in the home where I grew up faith was not something that was talked about very much. My father was a professor of Drama and my mother a playwright. When I went to college those discussions in the dorm late at night about religion began to occur. I had no particular reason to attach value to a faith system it had never been something I was familiar with or had internalised at all. And I assumed that any religious feelings that anyone held must be on the basis of some emotional experience, and I didn’t trust those. Or on the basis of some childhood indoctrination which I felt I was fortunate to have missed.*

*I loved the experience of learning about the human body and all of the components of that and I particularly loved being introduced to genetics. But then I ended up in the medical school curriculum sitting at the bed side of patients with diseases that was no longer an abstract study of molecules and organ systems, these were real people. And one afternoon one of my patients a wonderful elderly woman, much like a grandmother, who had very bad heart disease. She had a particularly bad episode of chest pain whilst I was with her. She got through it and at the end of that explained to me how her faith was the thing that helped her in that situation, she realised that doctors around her weren’t giving her that much help but her faith was.*

*And after she finished her own very personal description of that faith, she turned to me, and I had been silent, and she looked at me quizzically and she said, “what do you believe doctor?” And ultimately I had to admit to myself that her question had made me realise that I had arrived at an answer to the most important issue that we humans could ever deal with: “is there a God?” And I had arrived there without ever really looking at the evidence. And I was supposed to be a scientist! If there’s one things scientists claim they do is to arrive at conclusions based on upon evidence. And I hadn’t taken the trouble to do that.*

*I was greatly assisted by a Pastor who lived down the road who I went and asked about all this and who gave me a copy of C.S. Lewis’s wonderful book:* Mere Christianity*. Because here was an Oxford scholar a prodigiously developed intellect who had travelled the same path within those pages I realised for the first time that one can come to believe on a rational basis and that in fact given the many pointers that one sees around oneself in terms of the universe and it having a beginning and its fine-tuning in the way in which all those constants that determine the behaviour of matter and energy seemed to have been set just in a certain very precise range to make life possible.*

*And many other things including my belovéd mathematics and why they actually work anyway to describe the universe, something that makes you think that the creator must have been a mathematician. That brought me then to the person of Jesus Christ as a person who was historically extremely well documented, that was news to me, I thought Christ was as much myth as history and I realised, after reading more about it, this was a historical figure upon which we have a great deal of evidence for his existence, his teachings and even his rising from the dead in a literal way. That day at my patient’s bedside started a journey for me, a journey that I was reluctant to begin but I felt I needed to. A journey that I thought would result in strengthening my atheism but to my surprise resulted in my conversion.”* end of video)

Friends here is a man, a scientist, clearly a very clever man who took steps to find out more about Jesus. That journey he thought might confirm his atheism…but instead it led to his conversion. All through an elderly lady in a hospital bed. Who asked the doctor what he believed?

Never underestimate what seeds we can plant in people’s lives. And never underestimate what seeds people plant in our lives.

But like my walk to the front in that big top many years ago….and like the doctor’s journey he began following the question from his patient. We, too, must take that walk/journey to Christ the image of God.

Amen.

**Song: Majesty (sung twice)**

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| Majesty, worship His majesty;unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.Majesty, kingdom, authority,flows from His throneunto His own, His anthem raise.So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus,magnify, come glorify,Christ Jesus the King.Majesty, worship His majesty,Jesus who died, now glorified,King of all kings.  | Majesty, worship His majesty;unto Jesus be glory, honour and praise.Majesty, kingdom, authority,flows from His throneunto His own, His anthem raise.So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus,magnify, come glorify,Christ Jesus the King.Majesty, worship His majesty,Jesus who died, now glorified,King of all kings. |
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**Bible Reading: Colossians 1:24 – 2:5**

**Paul’s labour for the church**

24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

2 1 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. 5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Reflection: Following Jesus 2**

I have here what look like 2 chocolate bars (one large one small) If I were to offer you just one of them – which would you choose? The small one or the large one?

*(I then open the large one and find there is no chocolate in it but filled with something else which is inedible. I open the small one and it is chocolate.)*

If you chose the large packet then you are disappointed as it is not filled with chocolate but with cardboard! If you choose the small one then you would have been enjoying a piece of chocolate right now!

That is a description in some way of the message that Paul was trying to get across to the Colossians who were being enticed away by the belief that only a few can really know God and that that only comes through special knowledge being imparted to us (last week I mentioned it as a belief system called “Gnosticism”).

Gnosticism sounded and even looked like my large block of so-called chocolate…the person might think they were extra special if they were the one chosen to have the special knowledge of God. But it was counterfeit…it was not the real deal. It was not the true message! It was just not chocolate (I have never compared the Good News of Jesus to chocolate before!)

But the gospel message of Jesus life, death and resurrection is not counterfeit…it is the real deal. It is true. It is available to all people. Whatever their background…whatever they have done in life…however “bad” people think they have been…or indeed however good they think they have been. *All are in need of Jesus* *changing and transforming their lives*.

And that is what Jesus is longing to do for all of us (inside and outside of our chruches). It is not just a one off decision to follow Jesus but a continuing act of surrendering more and more of ourselves to him. We don’t have to have every question answered before we can come to Jesus. We don’t have to be “good enough” to come…that is untrue. We have to come acknowledging that we need a saviour, and that Jesus and him alone is our saviour.

May we *all* this day commit, or re-commit, ourselves to follow Jesus.

I invite you to read through the prayer on the screen and then if you want to we will pray it together…

**Loving God, in Jesus you came to earth to change and transform lives. We commit (or re-commit) ourselves to following Jesus today. May we be open to the Holy Spirit coming into our lives and changing and transforming us day by day as we grow ever closer to Jesus. Amen.**

**Song to lead into prayer….Rend Collective – My Lighthouse**

One of the young people from Bamford Chapel and Norden URC asked if we could have a “Rend Collective” song in one of the services. This one came to mind and I think the words are fitting for this time of isolation and anxiety. I suspect it is new to most people and I invite you to listen to it and if you pick it up quickly then sing along to it.

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| 1..In my wrestling and in my doubts In my failures You won't walk outYour great love will lead me throughYou are the peace in my troubled seaYou are the peace in my troubled seaIn the silence, You won't let goIn the questions, Your truth will holdYour great love will lead me throughYou are the peace in my troubled seaYou are the peace in my troubled sea | Chorus: *My lighthouse, my lighthouse**Shining in the darkness. I will follow You**My lighthouse, my lighthouse**I will trust the promise**You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore* |
| 2.. I won't fear what tomorrow bringsWith each morning I'll rise and singMy God's love will lead me throughYou are the peace in my troubled seaYou are the peace in my troubled sea | *My lighthouse, my lighthouse**Shining in the darkness, I will follow You**My lighthouse, my lighthouse**I will trust the promise**You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore* |
| Fire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the stormsFire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the stormsFire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the stormsFire before us, You're the brightestYou will lead us through the storms | *My lighthouse, my lighthouse**Shining in the darkness, I will follow You**My lighthouse, my lighthouse**I will trust the promise**You will carry me safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore (oh-oh-oh-oh-oh)**Safe to shore* |
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*Some verses from Psalm 34 to lead into our time of prayer….*

**Psalm 34:17-20**

**“17 The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. 18 The LORD is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 The righteous may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers them for them all; 20 he protects all their bones, not one of them will be broken.”**

**Prayers for those places and people that we are concerned about**

*Loving God, we pray for Your Church around the world today*. In many places unable to meet physically together but joined by the Holy Spirit as we worship scattered in community.

We pray for those in our churches who struggle with self-isolation. Who feel the darkness of loneliness and long for human touch. Come alongside them, Lord, we pray.

As we, in due course, prepare to return to regular worship together in our church buildings may we not forget the time we have come through but appreciate each other more.

*Loving God, we pray for Your World.* We pray for the affects of Covid-19. We think and give thanks for the lives of those who have sadly died. And we pray for their families as they grieve their loss.

We pray for those who are ill and in need of hospital care and treatment. We give thanks for the NHS and all working tirelessly to help others who are poorly.

We pray for countries that are starting to ease the lockdown and pray that they won’t see a second wave of the virus hitting their country. We pray for those who are/will be fearful in returning to a new normality. Comfort them and hold them in your loving embrace.

*Loving God, we pray for those we love and for ourselves.* Be with our families, friends and those who live near us. For those who are unwell, bring healing we pray. For those who are fearful, bring your calm and presence to them. For those who are sick or unwell in body, mind or spirit, being healing and wholeness we pray.

And we pray for ourselves. We ask that you come close to us at this time. May we hear Your voice and feel Your presence. We offer all these prayers in and through the name of Christ.

Amen.

We sing our final hymn today:

**Closing Hymn: Lord of the Church**

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| 1.. Lord of the Church, we pray for our renewing: Christ over all our undivided aim;fire of the Spirit, burn for our enduing,wind of the Spirit, fan the living flame!We turn to Christ amid our fear and failing, the will that lacks the courage to be free, the weary labours, all but unavailing, to bring us nearer what a church should be.   | 2.. Lord of the Church, we seek a Father's blessing, a true repentance and a faith restored, a swift obedience and a new possessing, filled with the Holy Spirit of the Lord. We turn to Christ from all our restless striving, unnumbered voices with a single prayer - the living water for our souls' reviving, in Christ to live, and love and serve and care.  |
| 3.. Lord of the Church, we long for our uniting, true to one calling, by one vision stirred; one cross proclaiming and one creed reciting, one in the truth of Jesus and His Word! So lead us on; till toil and trouble ended, one Church triumphant one new song shall sing, to praise His glory, risen and ascended, Christ over all, the everlasting King! | © Timothy Dudley-Smith / Oxford University Pressccli 275793 |

As with the service last week questions for further discussion/reflection will be in the Missional Partnership newsletter on Wednesday 29th April.

**Prayer of Blessing for the week ahead**

Some words from Isaiah chapter 41 verse 10:

**“So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God, I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.**

Amen.

Have a good week and know of God’s presence with you.