**Communion Service – Sunday 3rd May 2020**

**Welcome and opening words:**

Good morning/afternoon/evening whenever you are reading/watching this act of worship.

As we continue to be apart we are united by the presence of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. And we take this time to sit and enter God’s presence….let us take a moment of stillness and quiet…..*(we keep silence)*

I often turn to the Psalms at the start of worship to focus our minds on God. The Psalm from the Lectionary this week helps us to focus on God and worship and I invite us all to say the words of Psalm 100 together. Let us speak these words out….

**1Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. 2****Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. 3 Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. 4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. 5 For the Lord is good and his love endures for ever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.** Amen. (Psalm 100)

We sing our opening hymn of praise:

**Opening Hymn: To God be the glory**

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| 1.. To God be the glory!  great things He hath done!  So loved He the world  that He gave us His Son,  who yielded His life  an atonement for sin,  and opened the life gate  that all may go in. | *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  *Let the earth hear His voice!*  *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  *Let the people rejoice!*  *O come to the Father,*  *through Jesus the Son;*  *and give Him the glory,*  *great things He hath done!* |
| 2.. O perfect redemption,  the purchase of blood!  To every believer the promise of God;  the vilest offender who truly believes,  that moment from Jesus a pardon receives. | *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  *Let the earth hear His voice!*  *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  *Let the people rejoice!*  *O come to the Father,*  *through Jesus the Son;*  *and give Him the glory,*  *great things He hath done!* |
| 3.. Great things He hath taught us,  great things He hath done,  and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  but purer and higher,  and greater will be  our wonder, our rapture,  when Jesus we see. | *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  *Let the earth hear His voice!*  *Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!*  *Let the people rejoice!*  *O come to the Father,*  *through Jesus the Son;*  *and give Him the glory,*  *great things He hath done!* |
| Fanny J. Crosby ccli 169737 | |

Today we will be sharing in Communion later in our service. If you haven’t prepared for it feel free to pause and get bread and wine/juice for later in the service.

**Time of prayer:**

The Psalmist writes: **“Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.” (Psalm 100:2)** We come before you, Lord, today to offer our songs of praise and we come with gladness even in these times of isolation for we are never out of your loving presence. We come and offer ourselves afresh today as we come to worship and praise your name.

We praise you that we are made in your image and you have given us the gifts, skills and abilities that we have.

The Psalmist write: **“Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise, give thanks to him and praise his name.”** (Psalm 100:4) We thank you for your creation which we can enjoy day by day. We thank you for the glorious weather we have enjoyed in recent days and for the beauty of growth in this Spring time.

We thank you for your love and your presence with us. However we might feel in this moment we can be assured you are with us and are here to help and support us.

As we come in prayer, we are conscious of our weaknesses and frailty. And we come to seek your forgiveness as we say “sorry” for the times when we have failed you and others. Take away any guilt from within us and may we know and accept the words written in 1 John 1:9 *(from the Revised English Bible)* **“If we confess our sins, he is just and may be trusted to forgive our sins and cleanse use from every kind of wrongdoing.”**

**Let us join together in saying The Lord’s Prayer**

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.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

for Thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

**Bible Reading: Colossians 2:6-23**

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

8 See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human

tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

9 For in Christ all the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fulness in Christ, who is the Head over every power and authority. 11 In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful

nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, 12 having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, 14 having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. 15 And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body,

supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Reflecting Together: “In Jesus we are: forgiven…loved…free”**

Prayer:

*As I look out of my study window in my manse I feel very blessed to have such a beautiful outlook. In winter when the trees are without leaves, I can see right the way up into the hills. In summer when the trees are full of leaves I can see the beauty of the trees and the different shades of the green leaves!*

*I am always amazed that the trees get their nourishment from their deep roots into the ground that clearly use the water table for growth! The roots playing a vital role in the growth of the trees.*

*They grow taller and more bushy year on year and that is because of the nourishment they receive.*

Like the trees need the water from the ground through their roots so the Colossian Christians need to be “rooted” (the word used in Colossians 1:7) in Christ. Likewise we, as followers of Christ, need nourishment from God and our roots need to go deep into Christ.

Today I have entitled the message ***“In Jesus we are: forgiven…loved…free”*** and I want us to explore these verses under those three headings in the service today.

1. **“In Jesus we are forgiven…”**

In verse 13 we read: **“13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins…”**

This is almost a before and after for the Colossian Christians. The first part of this verse is really an image of how they/we are *before* we know Christ. The language is strong here. Paul is reminding the Gentile believers that they were not only sinful (as we all are) they were also not part of God’s chosen people (hence the comment about circumcision – which was a sign of being part of the chosen people of God!)

But when Christ comes into the life of the Colossian Christians (and us) they (and we) are forgiven! Once Christ is part of our lives we can know the true forgiveness.

And today as we celebrate Holy Communion a little later on in the service we will be reminded of our forgiveness because of Christ and his death and resurrection!

In other words before we know Christ we are like a tree that is dead because its roots cannot reach water! When we know Christ we are like a tree with deep roots going straight into the water that nourishes and strengthens and enables the tree to grow!

*Sometimes we don’t always accept that we have been forgiven. When God forgives us, He wipes the slate of sinfulness clean! The cross of Jesus covers all sin! If you struggle to accept just how much you’re forgiven imagine sin being like a monetary debt…in those terms sin = millions of pounds…it is like God coming along and simply paying that debt so that you no longer have to live with it. It is as if that debt never existed!*

1. **“In Jesus we are forgiven…loved…”**

Paul writes in v14: **“…having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.”**

Here Paul, with his strong Jewish credentials, is saying that the “written code” which was the OT Law and regulations (of which there were many) that in his opinion were never possible to follow and keep in their entirety – and therefore those stood against people – was taken away by Jesus when he was nailed to the cross.

As we reflected over Easter – Jesus went to the cross of Calvary because He *loved* us! He bore the pain of the cross and all that led up to it because he loved us.

*I may have told this story before…when I was a young child I used to suffer terribly from migraines. The headaches were excruciating. I recall a particularly bad one and I recall my Mum sitting on my bed and saying: “I wish I could have tat headache instead of you.” I recall thinking – “Why would Mum want to have this horrendous headache?”*

As I grew older and definitely when I became a parent myself I know why she said what she said! As a parent to see your child suffer is awful and you want to take that pain away.

And that is, I believe, what Jesus feels about us in regards to sin. He longs to take it from us so that we can be free from the burden of it. It is certainly the message Paul was trying to get across to the Colossian Christians. He wanted them to be focused on the truth contained in God’s Word and in following Jesus and not some other philosophy or belief system.

As I said last week and it is worth repeating…whatever sin we have done in the past…whatever we currently do….or whatever we might do in the future…the cross covers the cost and the love of God will never waver.

Jesus loved you. Jesus loves you. Jesus will always love you.

1. **“In Jesus we are: forgiven…loved…free”**

Paul says in verses 6 to 8: **“6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8 See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.”**

How easily do we get caught up in what Paul calls: “hollow and deceptive philosophy”? In the world today we are sometimes easily distracted from the path of faith by other ideas that are hollow and actually mean we become tied up and restricted in our outlook and living.

You hear of people reading tarot cards…going to mediums…placing their hope in star signs…dipping a toe in to the world of the occult and other things that are hollow (not to say demonic!) When what Paul is encouraging is something that will free us (and the Colossian believers) from something that will tie us down and lead us away from Christ.

As we read in Hebrews 12:2&3 – **“ 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of God. 3 Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”**

*I enjoy watching Wildlife programmes on the TV especially the African ones. I was watching one the other day on Lions and how they pick out their prey – once they do they lock their eyes on to it and focus on it.*

Our focus has to be the same…we are free because of the forgiveness we have in Jesus and the love he has for us. But the Colossians then, and we now, must focus on Jesus. Letting nothing distract us or making us stray from the path that Jesus has invited us to walk with him in faith, obedience and trust.

Let us pray – we give thanks that in Jesus we have the opportunity to be *forgiven, loved* and *free.*

We bow the knee in worship and praise. Amen.

**Hymn: Be still and know that I am God**

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| 1.. Be still and know that I am God.  Be still and know that I am God.  Be still and know that I am God. | 2.. I am the Lord that healeth thee. I am the Lord that healeth thee.  I am the Lord that healeth thee. |
| 3.. In Thee, O Lord, I put my trust.  In Thee, O Lord, I put my trust.  In Thee, O Lord, I put my trust. | Anon  Copyright Control  ccli 169737 |

**Prayers of intercession**

During our prayers of intercession there will be moments when I invite you to offer your own prayers….

Loving God, who hears all things, sees all things, feels all things and shares our experiences. We come before you in prayer. We pray for those in need in other countries around the world today:   
For places where there is war. For places where people are starving and thirsty. For places where there is sickness and disease. For places where people are used, abused and trafficked.

Comfort them, heal them, protect them, release them and provide for them we pray.

*(We keep a moment of silence and offer our own prayers)*

We pray for those in authority. For those making decisions as to how best to fight the Covid-19 Pandemic. For Governments, for scientists, for medical staff and for all who work in any of the caring professions and establishments. We pray for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one both because of Covid-19 and because of other illnesses.

Protect them and help them we pray.

*(We keep a moment of silence and offer our own prayers)*

We pray for our own country. For our Government and all who are advising the Prime Minister and others in these times. Give them wisdom and understanding we pray.

We pray also for the wider population that we would be patient in these times of lockdown and self-isolation. That we would do our best to follow the guidelines.

*(We keep a moment of silence and offer our own prayers)*

We pray for the concerns that we have for ourselves and/or for others. May we know and feel your presence and love in all that we face at this time.   
*(We keep a moment of silence and offer our own prayers)*

We offer all our prayers to you and through the name of Jesus our Saviour and friend.

Amen.

**Communion Hymn: Spirit of the Living God (note the change from “me” to “us” between the verses)**

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| Spirit of the Living God,  fall afresh on me;  Spirit of the Living God,  fall afresh on me;  break me, melt me,  mould me, fill me;  Spirit of the Living God,  fall afresh on me. | Spirit of the Living God,  fall afresh on us  Spirit of the Living God,  fall afresh on us;  break us, melt us,  mould us, fill us;  Spirit of the Living God,  fall afresh on us. |
| Daniel Iverson ©1963 Birdwing Music/ EMI/CopyCare ccli 169737 | |

**Communion:**

As we gather at this table, we remember that Jesus was born of Mary; he lived out common life on earth: he suffered and died for us; on the third day God raised him from the dead; and he is always present with us through the Holy Spirit. In his presence and in the company of all the people of God we celebrate the Supper of the Lord.

John, in Revelation 3:20, says: **“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me.”**

We are reminded by Paul in his letter to the Corinthian Church what we do here in remembrance of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

**“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way he took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”**

Let us pray…

We give thanks to you, O God, that from the earth you cause the grain to come for the making of bread and that you cause the vine to yield fruit. We praise you for Christ, the bread of life and true vine, whose body was given for us, and whose blood was poured out for us.

By your Holy Spirit sanctify us and these gives of bread and wine, that the bread which we break may be the communion of the body of Christ, and the cup which we bless may be the communion of the blood of Christ.

As we share the sufferings of Christ, so give us grace to know the power of his resurrection, that we may be made one and evermore abide in him, to your praise and glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

As we heard from the Bible reading when Jesus was with his disciples at the table he took bread *(lift the bread)* and when he had given thanks he broke it *(break the bread saying…)* and said, “this is my body that is for you.” *(place the bread back on the plate)*

Let us take, eat, remember and give thanks. *(we break a piece of bread, eat the bread, pause and give thanks)*

As we heard in the Bible reading, after supper, Jesus took the cup *(lift the cup)* and said, “Do this, as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.” *(we lift the cup, sip from it, pause and give thanks)*

And a concluding prayer that we can say together:

**Loving God, you have of yourself in the form of Jesus. We thank you for the bread and wine of communion. Symbols of the body and blood of Jesus shed for us and for the whole of humanity.  
We thank you that as we have taken the bread and wine we have taken into ourselves the transforming presence of Jesus.**

**May we be transformed by the preaching of your Word, the breaking and eating of bread and the pouring and drinking of wine. Amen.**

*[Communion Liturgy taken and in places adapted from ‘Third Order of Holy Communion’ in the URC Service Book (pages 29-37). Some parts added by the Revd Richard Bradley.]*

**Closing Hymn: Crown him with many crowns**

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| 1.. Crown Him with many crowns,  the Lamb upon His throne;  Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  all music but its own:  awake, my soul, and sing  of Him who died for thee,  and hail him as thy chosen king  through all eternity. | 2.. Crown Him the Son of God  before the worlds began;  and ye who tread where he hath trod,  crown him the Son of Man,  who every grief hath known  that wrings the human breast,  and takes and bears them for His own,  that all in Him may rest. |
| 3.. Crown Him the Lord of life,  who triumphed o'er the grave,  and rose victorious in the strife,  for those He came to save:  His glories now we sing,  who died and rose on high,  who died eternal life to bring,  and lives that death may die. | 4.. Crown Him the Lord of heaven,  enthroned in worlds above;  crown Him the King to whom is given  the wondrous name of Love:  all hail, redeemer, hail!  for Thou hast died for me;  Thy praise shall never, never fail  throughout eternity. |
| Matthew Bridges (1800-1894) and Godfrey Thring (1823 - 1903) ccli 169737 | |

Invite people to send me photos for prayers. Photos of the outdoors…gardens, parks, hills etc. for prayer slides.

**Prayer of blessing for the week ahead:**

Almighty God bless each and every one of us today and in the week that lies ahead. May we know the presence of almighty God in Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.