**Service – Sunday 5th July 2020**

**Leader of Worship: Revd Richard Bradley Children’s Address and Preacher: Daniel Harris**

**Welcome to Worship**

Friends, we gather in God’s presence to worship Him today. He invites us

in our weakness, to receive His strength,

in our poverty, to receive His riches,

in our sickness, to receive His healing,

in our sinfulness, to receive His forgiveness,   
in our emptiness, to be filled with His presence,

and in our time of worship to be assured of His never-ending love.

Friends, welcome to Worship today!

Our opening song of praise is:

**Opening Song: Light of the World** (sung left to right)

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. Light of the world,  You stepped down into darkness.  opened my eyes, let me see  beauty that made this heart adore You,  hope of a life spent with You | Chorus: *So here I am to worship,*  *here I am to bow down,*  *here I am to say that You're my God:*  *You're altogether lovely,*  *altogether worthy,*  *altogether wonderful to me.* |
| 2.. King of all days  O so highly exalted,  glorious in heaven above,  humbly You came  to the earth You created,  all for love's sake became poor. | Chorus: *So here I am to worship,*  *here I am to bow down,*  *here I am to say that You're my God:*  *You're altogether lovely,*  *altogether worthy,*  *altogether wonderful to me.* (x2) |
| Bridge: And I'll never know how much it cost  To see my sin upon that cross  I'll never know how much it cost  To see my sin upon that cross. | Chorus: *So here I am to worship,*  *here I am to bow down,*  *here I am to say that You're my God:*  *You're altogether lovely,*  *altogether worthy,*  *altogether wonderful to me.* |
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Daniel Harris is taking part in the service this morning so he will be bringing God’s Word to us a little later. Today is also our Communion Service so if you are not prepared for Communion then pause me and go and prepare bread and wine/juice.

**Prayers of Praise and Confession**

Living God, light of the world we come in prayer and praise and worship you that in and through Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit we can have the same light to radiate Christ’s light.

So, Lord, as we have just sung so now we pray as we come to worship you and as so many have done before us, we bow the knee in praise and worship. We are here to acknowledge your greatness and to offer you our praise in spoken word, in song, in reflection and in stillness.

So, we come in this moment of stillness and reflect on the week that has passed. Giving thanks for your goodness. We take a moment of silent prayer…….

We also come knowing that we have done wrong. Help us to know that only through Jesus’ death and coming to life again can we fully know we are forgiven, loved and free.

So, we come in this moment of stillness and offer you our prayers of confession…..

Lord may we know your true and full forgiveness.

And whilst we are physically apart we are joined through the presence of the Holy Spirit and we, together with our sisters and brothers in Christ, say

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 (part 1): John 9:1-12**

The reading this morning is split into 2 parts. It is taken from John 9:1-38 and we will first hear verses 1 to 12.

**Jesus heals a man born blind**

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’

3‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.’

6After saying this, he spat on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. 7‘Go,’ he told him, ‘wash in the Pool of Siloam’ (this word means ‘Sent’). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

8His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, ‘Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?’ 9Some claimed that he was.

Others said, ‘No, he only looks like him.’

But he himself insisted, ‘I am the man.’

10‘How then were your eyes opened?’ they asked.

11He replied, ‘The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.’

12‘Where is this man?’ they asked him.

‘I don’t know,’ he said.

Thanks be to God for His Word

**Children’s Address:**

I remember hearing of a family of three generations who lived in an isolated farm in the United States.

One morning the parents took their two children to school leaving the grandmother at the house.

Later that morning the grandmother realised that there was no milk in the house.

She decided to get into the spare car and head out to the local stores.

There was a problem with this.

Firstly, she couldn’t see very well and hadn’t used a vehicle for several years.

Secondly, the local stores were over ten miles away.

She starts out on her intrepid journey.

Several miles down the road she fails to see a sharp corner and drives straight off the road into the nearby desert.

She soon becomes aware of her predicament but decides to keep driving hoping to find a new road.

The parents arrive home to find grandmother is missing.

They phone the police and a search and rescue effort starts in haste.

Meanwhile, the grandmother has a stroke of good fortune!

She comes across a road and starts following it hoping to will lead back to civilisation.

She drives for what seems like an eternity.

Finally, a police helicopter spots the grandmother driving on the road.

It takes the pilot a brief minute to size up the full situation.

He is able to land in front of her and flags her down.

Trying to be as calm and professional as possible, the police officer tells the grandmother that she had accidentally stumbled across an abandoned racetrack.

She had been driving around it for three hours.

Kids, I encourage you:

• Don’t go around in circles.

• Do something amazing with your life.

• God wants to take you on an adventure.

• Hold on – it starts now!

We continue in sung worship as we sing together…

**Song: Lord, I Come To You**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. Lord, I come to You,  let my heart be changed, renewed,  flowing from the grace  that I've found in You.  And, Lord, I've come to know  the weaknesses I see in me  will be stripped away  by the power of Your love. | Chorus: *Hold me close,*  *let Your love surround me;*  *bring me near,*  *draw me to Your side.*  *And as I wait,*  *I'll rise up like the eagle,*  *and I will soar with You,*  *Your Spirit leads me on*  *in the power of Your love.* |
| 2.. Lord, unveil my eyes,  let me see You face to face,  the knowledge of Your love  as You live in me.  Lord, renew my mind,  as Your will unfolds in my life  in living every day  in the power of Your love. | Chorus: *Hold me close,*  *let Your love surround me;*  *bring me near,*  *draw me to Your side.*  *And as I wait,*  *I'll rise up like the eagle,*  *and I will soar with You,*  *Your Spirit leads me on*  *in the power of Your love.* |
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**Bible Reading (part 2): John 9:13-38**

The second part of our reading today comes from John 9:13-38

**The Pharisees investigate the healing**

13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. 15Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. ‘He put mud on my eyes,’ the man replied, ‘and I washed, and now I see.’

16Some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.’

But others asked, ‘How can a sinner perform such signs?’ So they were divided.

17Then they turned again to the blind man, ‘What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.’

The man replied, ‘He is a prophet.’

18They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. 19‘Is this your son?’ they asked. ‘Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?’

20‘We know he is our son,’ the parents answered, ‘and we know he was born blind. 21But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.’ 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23That was why his parents said, ‘He is of age; ask him.’

24A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. ‘Give glory to God by telling the truth,’ they said. ‘We know this man is a sinner.’

25He replied, ‘Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!’

26Then they asked him, ‘What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?’

27He answered, ‘I have told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?’

28Then they hurled insults at him and said, ‘You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.’

30The man answered, ‘Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. 32Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’

34To this they replied, ‘You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!’ And they threw him out.

**Spiritual blindness**

35Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’

36‘Who is he, sir?’ the man asked. ‘Tell me so that I may believe in him.’

37Jesus said, ‘You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.’

38Then the man said, ‘Lord, I believe,’ and he worshipped him.

Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Sermon**

I am sure that you have heard the popular mantra “life is a journey, not a destination.”

Today I want to put that mantra to the test.

If life is a journey, does it ever feel like we are going around in circles?

Do we feel that our lives are leading somewhere significant?

If not, is there an alternative course of action?

My problem with the idea of life as a journey is this:

It’s too casual.

It feels like going on a Sunday afternoon drive or a trip down to the shops.

So … let’s change the language a bit.

Let’s settle on the word …. quest.

A quest is a long journey or an arduous search for something significant.

A quest is an expedition such as climbing Mt Everest.

Have you ever woken up thinking that today will just be a normal day filled with the usual activity and short trips.

Then, suddenly, something comes out of the blue and sets our lives on a completely new direction!

This happened to our blind friend in John’s Gospel.

The quest that he found himself taking on took two roads.

Firstly, he found himself being dramatically healed.

But the healing occurred on a Sabbath which broke a law that outlawed medical intervention.

If there was ever a law that deserved to be broken, this was it.

So our friend became the unwitting chief witness of an investigation into that crime.

That was the first road.

Secondly, he started out on the long road to faith in Jesus Christ.

I want to compare the journey that our blind friend took as akin to mountain climbing.

I want to suggest this mountain metaphor works for our own spiritual journeys too.

Let’s call this mountain Mt Faith.

The famous TV survival expert Bear Grylls says this:

“You climb only because the mountain allows it.

If the peak hints at you to wait, then you must wait;

and when she begins to beckon you to go then you must struggle and strain in the thin air with all your might.”

We climb towards God only because God permits it.

We only climb because God beckons to us.

And we will find that God was indeed calling to our blind friend.

I also want to briefly introduce a navigational aid to help us on our way.

Mountains are hostile environments, so we need to know where we are going.

This map is called Doug Schuapp’s Threshholds of Conversion.

Doug used to be a campus minister in the USA.

He identified five thresholds, or steps, which people took leading to faith in Jesus Christ.

We will see that our blind friend took these recognisable steps.

These thresholds are akin to the camps required at different levels of a mountain ascent.

The assault on Mt Everest requires four such camps.

You will notice the Death Zone at 8000 meters – we will come back to this shortly.

But hopefully you will agree that this is more of a quest than a mere journey.

So come with me as we climb Mt Faith following the footsteps of our blind friend.

Trust: Our first step is the Threshold of Trust.

This is the basecamp at the foot of the Mt Faith.

Simply put, it is built on trust.

Anyone who is setting out on the quest to climb Mt Faith has to place trust in the first foothold.

This could be the trust of a Christian friend or trust in a church.

You or I can be that bridge of trust for people to cross on their spiritual journey.

But this trust is the foothold from which they will push off from.

For our blind friend, the initial bridge of trust was his sudden healing.

He had never met Jesus before, so had no prior relationship.

But the dramatic healing was certainly enough to generate trust.

But we need to remind ourselves that this initial investment of trust is not, in itself, faith in Jesus.

Our friend was not yet a signed-up follower of Jesus.

(That requires a whole different level of commitment.)

But it is an essential first step that helps us climb higher leading to our next camp.

Curiosity: As we climb the Mt Faith, moving beyond the Threshold of Trust, we start to push up into the foothills.

We become curious about what we will find.

And this is our next camp – the Threshold of Curiosity.

Trust leads to curiosity, and begs the question;

*Curiosity about what?*

The task of the Christian is to encourage curiosity about Jesus Christ.

He’s our chief mountain guide.

This encourages us to start living curiously.

Our blind friend, indeed, was curious about what had happened to him.

*Who* had broken that stupid law, risking death, to heal him?

Why?

Where was he now?

In the words of Lewis Carroll: “Curiouser and curiouser!”

While our friend was searching for answers, he found himself being drawn into the criminal investigation of Jesus’ so-called crime.

It is worth bearing in mind, at this point, that our friend was born on the wrong side of the tracks.

His only income was from begging making him a person of ill repute.

Legally his testimony was inadmissible at court, which was somewhat ironic.

The court was firing questions at him.

He did his best to answer honestly but his testimony was not legally accepted.

The investigation was going around in circles.

But in his mind, our friend seemed to making progress.

The questioning-under-fire is leading him to explore new possibilities.

“Maybe he is a prophet,” he suggests to the court.

This curiosity keeps us and our blind friend climbing to the next level.

Openness: The journey upwards takes us onto a plateau on Mt Faith – an open space where we can set up our next camp.

This is the third threshold – the Threshold of Openness.

We are a significant way into our expedition now.

We notice that the air is becoming thinner.

As we cross this plateau, we become aware of our height.

We can feel that we are teetering on the edge of an abyss.

The Threshold of Openness is often brought on by threat or a life-changing event.

It could be illness, the birth of a child, or loss of a job.

It confronts us with the reality that there is more to life than meets the eye.

It opens us up to the possibility of personal and spiritual change.

This can be a scary time.

Our blind friend was in such a place.

His parents wouldn’t testify for him in court and he faced the risk of being ex-communicated from the Temple.

This is serious stuff.

A modern-day equivalent would be to have our passport and citizenship withdrawn and being declared state-less.

However, our friend was open to the possibility of real change in his life – change that was more important that the gift of his sight.

Demonstrating an openness to new possibilities, our friend told the court:

“Maybe the man who healed me came from God.”

There was *uproa*r in the court!

Seeking: We now set up camp ready for the final assault on the summit of Mt Faith.

This is the fourth of the five thresholds – the Threshold of Seeking.

Unlike our previous thresholds, this is not a neutral position.

The climber is seriously entertaining the idea that a personal God does exists, is concerned for our wellbeing, and is beckoning us towards the summit.

It is like being engaged with the purpose of getting married.

This is where the quest is gathering momentum as the summit comes into view.

At these heights we find ourselves reflecting on our own fragility in life.

It is at this point that we become mindful of our own baggage – our failings, our worst moments, and the dark side of our character.

We are forced to admit to the existence of sin in our lives.

But despite this, the summit of Mt Faith is calling us on.

For our friend the investigation is over.

The cost has been heavy on him.

He had previously been stigmatised as an outcast.

He was now legally categorised as a “non-person”.

However, Jesus went looking for our blind friend after the court case.

This is what Jesus does when people are seriously seeking him – he comes looking for us.

Wherever we are he *will* find us.

And Jesus finds our friend in a side street.

Our friend is getting close to the end of the spiritual quest.

He is approaching the summit of Mt Faith.

The words are on his lips:

“You – are – Lord.”

He recognises the One who made the Universe is reaching out to him in friendship.

But our friend is not quite there yet.

He hasn’t quite reached his destination.

We are now at the most dangerous point in our journey.

In our metaphorical mountain pilgrimage, we are entering what climbers’ parlance calls the Death Zone.

We are now so high up the air is too thin to support human life.

The human body starts to consume its own muscle and bone in the struggle for precious energy.

Climbers have to carry their own oxygen for the final push towards the summit.

If we stay up here for long, we will die.

However, when we enter the Death Zone of Mt Faith, we are amazed to discover that the mountain has its own eco-system.

There is air up here.

We are starting to breathe the breath of God – the Holy Spirit – which sustains all life.

Life that actually reverses decay.

There is the forgiveness of sins.

The soul becomes clean in the mountain air.

But dying of a sort must happen.

To reach the summit we must be prepared to die - to - ourselves.

We are being challenged to live for Someone Else.

Our friend is able to cross through the Death Zone.

He reaches the summit of Mt Faith.

This is the final threshold – the Threshold of Discipleship;

The choice of following a new way of life.

The way of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

He was able to die to himself, leaving his old life behind and embracing a new one.

John’s Gospel tells us that he worshipped Jesus – the identity marker of a follower of his ways.

This is his new identity.

So as we close, I want to ask you a question.

Where are you on our metaphorical mountain?

Are you in the foothills of trust – just starting to reach out?

Are you starting to push into curiosity?

Are you open to the serious possibility that a personal God exists and cares for you?

Are you so serious in your search that the summit is in now view?

Or maybe you are a veteran climber.

You’ve already ascended Mt Faith and allowed Jesus into your heart.

If so, you are now a mountain guide called to help other people scale the slopes of Mt Faith.

Now *there* is a whole new adventure.

So wherever you are on this quest – please don’t give up.

Keep pushing through.

Keep climbing upwards.

The view from the summit is amazing.

The view is to see the glory of God.

It is to die for.

**Song (leading into communion): Open Our Eyes, Lord, we pray**

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. Open our eyes, O Lord, we pray,  enlighten heart and mind;  that as we read Your Word today  we may its treasures find. | 2.. Open our ears, that, small and still,  Your voice be clearly heard,  to guide our steps and cleanse our will  according to Your Word. |
| 3.. Open our lives to love's embrace,  our dear redeeming Lord;  Your Word of life and truth and grace  within our souls be stored. | 4.. Open our lips, O Lord, in praise  to tell what love imparts:  the work of grace about our ways,  Your Word within our hearts. |
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**Communion**

In Revelation 3:20 we read these words: **“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.”** (NIV)

As we gather at this table, we remember that Jesus was born of Mary; he lived our 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, past, present, and to come, we celebrate the Supper of the Lord.

We hear in Mark’s Gospel the account of the Last Supper:

**“22While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’**

**23Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.**

**24‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them. 25‘Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.’”** (Mark 14:22-25 - NIV)

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 bless us and these gifts 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, thought Christ our Lord. Amen.

When Jesus had give thanks he broke the bread and said: “Take, eat: this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” *(we take the bread, eat and pause to give thanks.)*

When Jesus had given thanks, he gave the cup to his disciples and said: “Drink this, all of you; for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

*(we take the wine/juice, drink and pause to give thanks.)*

Let’s pray….

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord Jesus, thank you for your love for us that took you to the cross. We thank you that as we have take the bread and the wine today so may we be transformed to be more like Jesus in all we say and do.

As we have been received the bread and wine and so remembered Jesus’ love for us so we now come to him with prayers for the church….

We pray that your church might be a beacon of light and life to all people. That in the church people may find a home in the presence of God. That people may find the challenge and the comfort in a relationship with Jesus.

We come and pray for the world…a world where there is suffering and pain because of war, sickness, disease, human trafficking and poverty. May we do all we can to share the world’s resources and share all we have with those who have little or nothing.

We thank you for those in the world who are called to help those in need. We life them to you and ask that you would bless and keep them close to you.

We pray for those for whom we are concerned. For our families, friends and neighbours.

In a moment of stillness we bring our prayers of concern to you…..Amen.

**Hymn: Amazing Grace**

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| --- | --- |
| 1.. Amazing grace how sweet the sound,  that saved a wretch like me;  I once was lost, but now am found  was blind, but now I see. | 2.. T'was grace that taught my heart to fear,  and grace my fears relieved;  how precious did that grace appear  the hour I first believed. |
| 3.. Through many dangers, toil and snares,  I have already come;  'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  and grace will lead me home. | 4.. When we've been there ten thousand years  bright shining as the sun,  we've no less days to sing God's praise  than when we've first begun. |
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**Blessing**

From Hebrews chapter 3 verses 20 & 21 - NIV:

**“20**Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, **21**equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen”

Friends go in peace and may God be with you.