**Service of Worship – Sunday 6th September 2020 – Communion**

**Welcome and opening words**

Welcome to our time of worship. Jesus famously said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit … and surely I am with you always, until the very end of the age.” (Matt 28.18-20).

God hasn’t got great plans for us; His plan is unchanged – to call more people to follow his Son. He invites us to join his plans.

Let’s come to God in prayer and we enter into worshipping the Living God:

We gather together in Your presence with expectation,

hungry for an encounter with You,

eager to hear Your Word.

Open our eyes and ears to the presence of Your Holy Spirit.

May the seeds of Your Word have scattered among us this morning

fall on fertile soil.

May they take root in our hearts and lives,

and produce an abundant harvest

of good words and deeds.

We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,

our teacher and our Lord.

Amen.

(Christine Longhurst, re: Worship)

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

With this in mind, let’s join in worship as we sing our first song “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 lifegate  that all may go in. | 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. |
| 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. | *Chorus:*  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! |
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**Prayers of Adoration and Confession**

Heavenly Father, give us hearts that wait with faith. Build in us the assurance that you are at work and in control. Forgive us for our impatience, our uneasiness, and our wandering desires when we do not feel that we have what we need. Help us to see and to rejoice in the fruit that you are bearing in our own lives and in the lives of those around us—in the small things as well as the big things—and guide us to rest our concerns and anxieties in you. We pray these things in the name of the one who shows us your peace, Christ Jesus. Amen.

**Bible Reading: Psalm 119:33-40 – NLT [New Living Translation]**

33 Teach me your decrees, O LORD; I will keep them to the end. 34 Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions; I will put them into practice with all my heart. 35 Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my happiness is found. 36 Give me an eagerness for your laws rather than a love for money! 37 Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word. 38 Reassure me of your promise, made to those who fear you. 39 Help me abandon my shameful ways; for your regulations are good. 40 I long to obey your commandments! Renew my life with your goodness.

Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Family Talk**

Today I want us to think about instructions. In our reading we heard a line that said: **“Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions.”** (Psalm 119:35 - NLT)

I want to test us this morning with some signs…signs that instruct us/advice us and keep us safe.

So, I need you to guess what each of them are (children may need the help of parents/carers):-

1.  2) 3) 4)

5) 6)

**Answers:**

1. Traffic lights ahead (triangles are warning signs)
2. Zebra crossing ahead
3. Speed limited to 40mph (if it is safe to do so)
4. No entry
5. Warning of wild animals
6. Warning of sheep

I wonder how well you all did?

When we think about instructions they are there to help us whether it is the instructions of how an appliance works or whether they are road signs to help and guide us on the roads.

It may even be teachers at school who are instructing us in our learning.

God instructs us too. God, like our teachers at school, wants us to be the best people we can be and we should always follow God’s instructions so that we can have a close relationship with God.

**Prayer**

Let us pray….Loving God, help us to follow your instructions and to walk by your side. Guided and led by you every day. Help us through prayer and reading the Bible to know your will for us.

Amen.

**Song: Spirit of the Living God**

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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 | |

**Sermon/Reflection**

Prayer: Lord, open our ears and hearts to receive the words you want to speak to us this day. Amen.

*Men often have the reputation for not reading instruction manuals on new gadgets/devices/vehicles etc. Yet, in my office are three folders which are crammed with instruction manuals! Some numerous pages, others fewer still others are not large at all. Many, for the most part, are unread unless I have had some issue with a device which has driven me to the instruction manual! I suspect some of the instruction manuals are for devices I no longer have!*

One Bible commentary I looked at suggested Psalm 119 (some 176 verses long) is offering us the reader “godly instruction”. As I looked at Psalm 119:33-40 it reads like a prayer and I want us to reflect on this in the context of it being like a “spiritual instruction book” for us as followers of Jesus.

I want to explore for a few minutes the words of Psalm 119: 33-40 and how they might help us on our spiritual journey especially in these times of the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a sense in these words of the Psalmist wanting to stay close to God and to walk in God’s ways.

In V33 the Psalmist writes…**“*Teach me* your decrees O Lord and I will keep them to the end.”** (NLT) *I didn’t much like school! In fact if the truth be told I pretty much loathed it! The teachers did their best for me but I just didn’t connect with learning in my formative years. It wasn’t until I got into further education and Ministerial Training that I connected more with learning.*

It was when my head and heart connected with the subject matter that I found learning a much more enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

When I became a Christian in my youth there was a sense of being hungry for knowing more about God. Of engaging in God’s Word and wanting to learn and experience more of God.

I think this comes across in these 8 verses in Psalm 119. The psalmist wants to be taught by God and was hungry for that. And not just for a limited time but the writer wants to keep God’s decrees **“to the end”** (Psalm 119:33 – NLT)

Are we hungry in the same way? Are we longing for more of God working in our lives wherever we might be on our faith journeys?

In V34 the Psalmist writes: ***“Give me understanding and I will obey your instructions; I will put them into practice with all my heart.”*** (NLT)

There is in this verse a real sense of longing to learn about God and grow ever closer to God through an understanding of God’s instructions. We must not just see Christian faith as a series of instructions to follow. Earlier I used road signs in the family address – clearly if we don’t follow road signs then there could be real dangers on the road. If, for example, we decided one day that we weren’t going to stop at a red traffic light….that would cause mayhem…not to mention real danger!

But in God’s Word what we read there is not just instructions about how we should live but what God’s desire is for us and for all people. It is in following God’s Word in the Bible that we can get closer to God and become more like Him. And we, like the Psalmist, should ask God to give us understanding of His Word.

In V35 we read: ***“Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my happiness is found.”*** (NLT)

Sometimes in life we look for happiness in things, places or even people that can never truly make us happy. We walk down paths that we think will lead us to happiness and they don’t.

True happiness is found when we follow God’s guidance and leading and for that to happen we need to be sure that we are being led and guided by God, trusting Him to lead us on the right paths with Him as our guide!

Where are you happy? Is there a place that makes you feel happy? It may be a place where fond memories were made, it may be a place you frequent quite regularly…For the Psalmist the place he feels will make him happy is following on the paths with God. And we, too, can find happiness in walking with God on the paths He leads us on.

In V36 & 37 we read: **“ 36*Give me an eagerness for your laws rather than a love for money. 37Turn my eyes from worthless things, and give me life through your word.”***(NLT)

In the Old Testament keeping the law was not a matter of simply following rules and regulations but for the heart of the believer to be in tune with God’s desires for all believers.

The law was there to draw the heart of the believer close to God.

Friends God doesn’t want any of us focusing on things that are not of Him. That can be in our personal lives or in the life of our churches. We come close to God when we are in tune and walking in step with Him…we can do this by having that personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. We learn more about Christ and how God desires for us to live through following His Word contained in the Bible.

In V38 the Psalmist writes: ***“Reassure me of your promise made to those who fear you…”*** (NLT)

How often in life do we seek reassurance from others? Children seek reassurance from parents….pupils seek reassurance from teachers….patients seek reassurance from medics…..

How often do we seek spiritual reassurance from God through prayer? Bible study? Worship etc?

How often do we use the Word of God to assess our relationship with God?

The LORD calls each of us into that special, close relationship with Him and He longs that we accept that invitation and follow Him on the journey of faith.

Friends, may we this day recommit ourselves to seek more of God in our lives as we follow his decrees and walk in His ways. We can start that in prayer now and also as we share together in the bread and wine of communion.

Let us pray….

Gracious God, who leads and guides His people. Lead and guide each one of us watching, listening to or reading this service today. May our hearts beat in time with Yours. May Your will and desire for our lives be made clear to us so that we may walk with You, Loving God. Amen.

**Communion hymn: As the deer pants for the water (verse, chorus, verse, chorus…)**

As we reflect on the challenge from Richard’s sermon, and prepare to enter into communion, let’s still our hearts recognising of our deep need for God. Join us as we sing “As the Deer Pants for the Water.”

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| 1. As the deer pants for the water  so my soul longs after You.  You alone are my heart's desire  and I long to worship You | 2. I want You more than gold or silver,  only You can satisfy.  You alone are the real joy-giver  and the apple of my eye. |
| 3. You're my friend and You are my brother,  even though You are king  I love You more than any other  So much more than anything. | Chorus: *You alone are my strength, my shield,*  *to You alone may my spirit yield.*  *You alone are my heart's desire*  *and I long to worship you.* |
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**Communion**

In the film The Martian (2015) actor Matt Damon plays astronaut Mark Watney who is marooned on Akin to a 21st century Robinson Crusoe, Watney endures an epic struggle of survival before being rescued and returning to Earth. At the end of the film, standing in front of a class of trainee astronauts, Watney says this:

“At some point everything’s going to go south on you. You can either accept that, or go to work.”

This is what life is like.

We are aware of threats that are either on the horizon, or imminently closer, and take action to stop things going south.

We try to manage, manipulate or control circumstances to save the day.

It is as if we are rowing against a current which threatens to take us over the waterfall.

Sometimes we are successful, and sometimes we are not.

As we come to our time of Communion, Jesus reminds us of another way. “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (Jn 12.24) When things seem to be going south, new life can and does emerge.

Reflection: So lets come to prepare for entering our time of communion

Think of a time when things were going south.

Maybe its something that is currently happening.

Think of your anxieties.

Think of your fears.

Remember how tense your body felt.

Sense that loss of control.

As we enter communion, reflect on the knowledge that Jesus was in such circumstances as he shared the first communion with his disciples.

On the night of his betrayal, Jesus felt the currents pulling him south. Knowing that the man who was about to betray him was in that very room, Jesus said:

Hold cup: “Take this (cup) and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”

Hold bread: And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

Holding both: In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table.”

(Luke 22.17-21)

So as we come to Communion, be mindful of the fact that the first Communion was held in the darkest of days. Hope came in the resurrection, although this was beyond the horizon at the time. Jesus is saying: “You are not alone. Stop trying to control things, let go, and trust me.” Now is the time to put the world on pause, create some breathing space, and to enter into the presence of God.

Prayer: Father God, By your Holy Spirit sanctify us and give us life. These are your 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; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Taking bread: When Jesus had given thanks, he broke the bread and said: ‘Take, eat: this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’

Taking wine: 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.’

As we come out of this time of Communion, may God’s peace with us. As our Morning Star, may the Lord Jesus Christ lead us. May God’s Spirit bring renewal to the lives of our friends and family, our communities and churches, and to our hearts.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

When we feel that things are going south

May we turn to you.

May you bring resurrection and life.

Amen

**Prayers of Intercession**

As we scan the morning headlines, we find a world of wonder, but also a world in need. Let’s continue with our time of prayer by praying for families, communities and the wider world.

Father God, we hear that you are a God who acts with justice and mercy. When we struggle to believe in this, help us to find faith.

We pray for all countries that continue to be caught up in the COVID 19 pandemic.

Give governments, medical communities and pharmaceutical industries wisdom to know how to respond.

We pray for international travellers entangled with travel restrictions and quarantine restrictions.

We pray for communities in Greater Manchester and further afield, communities who are experiencing renewed or continuing local lockdowns.

We pray for civil co-operation to help bring outbreaks under control.

We pray for communities along the Gulf of Mexico which have been devastated by Hurricane Laura.

We pray for families and communities who have had to leave their homes in Texas and Louisiana. May your peace be with them while they are temporarily rehoused.

We pray for emergency services looking for survivors and engineering teams who seek to make houses and infrastructure safe in the wake of the hurricane. May you grant them strength.

We pray for our own children who are preparing to return to school this week.

May you be with the teachers and staff, to keep schools are safe as children, return to classes.

We pray for churches that are considering to re-open in the weeks ahead. May you inspire them.

We pray for churches that continue to be closed. May your presence rest upon them.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.

We thank you, Lord, that you reign in this good Earth. May people see you, recognise you, and declare you as King over their lives.

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

Despite how it sometimes seems or feels, God still reigns over this good Earth.

May people see this and take comfort and inspiration from God’s reign.

Let’s come together to sing our final song, “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 Streaming Licence 595811 | |

**Blessing:**

So now we leave this space of worship

And while so much of the road ahead is uncertain,

the path constantly changing,

we know some things that are as solid and sure

as the ground beneath our feet,

and the sky above our heads.

We know God is love.

We know Christ’s light endures.

We know the Holy Spirit this there,

found in the space between all things,

closer to us than our next breath,

binding us to each other,

until we meet we again,

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

Amen.

(Rev. Nora Vedress, Calvary United Church in Prince Albert,

Saskatchewan, Canada.

Accessed from https://re-worship.blogspot.com)