**Sunday 5th September 2021, Service of Worship with Communion**

Good morning, and welcome to worship this morning. My name is Ken Greer; I am a non-serving Elder at Bamford Chapel and Norden URC, and a member of the Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership. This morning is our monthly Communion Service, so if you want to share in that, please get some bread and drink ready.

Let us worship God. The prophet Isaiah said “Tell everyone who is discouraged, “Be strong and don’t be afraid. God is coming to your rescue.” “

**Let us sing our first hymn “Dear Lord and Father of mankind”**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  forgive our foolish ways;  re-clothe us in our rightful mind;  in purer lives Thy service find,  in deeper reverence, praise. | 2.. In simple trust like theirs who heard,  beside the Syrian sea,  the gracious calling of the Lord,  let us, like them, without a word  rise up and follow thee. |
| 3.. O Sabbath rest by Galilee!  O calm of hills above,  where Jesus knelt to share with Thee  the silence of eternity,  interpreted by love. | 4.. With that deep hush subduing all  our words and works that drown  the tender whisper of Thy call,  as noiseless let Thy blessing fall  as fell Thy manna down. |
| 5.. Drop Thy still dews of quietness,  till all our strivings cease;  take from our souls  the strain and stress,  and let our ordered lives confess  the beauty of Thy peace. | 6.. Breathe through the heats of our desire  Thy coolness and Thy balm;  let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  speak through the earthquake,  wind and fire,  O still small voice of calm. |
| John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-82) ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 | |

**Let us pray.**

Lord, we come together this morning to worship you. We come in awe and wonder, feeling totally inadequate to comprehend your glory and majesty. How can we, who feel so weak and helpless, dare to approach someone who is so powerful, and omnipotent. And yet, this is what you tell us to do, you call us your children, and ask us to treat you as a loving father.

We approach you with our strengths and our weaknesses, our faith and our doubts, our hopes and our fears, our humanity. We know you will not reject us, or turn your back on us, but welcome us into your presence, and helpfully guide us in the week ahead. We know we are weak and foolish at times, but your love is all surrounding.

However, Lord, we recognise that time and again, we have failed you. We know what you want from us, as your chosen children, but we don’t seem to be able to do what you would want us to do. We fail to seize the opportunities that are presented, when we could share your Good News, unsure of how our words would be received, feeling that we lack the skills to tell people about you, failing to trust in your Spirit to give us whatever skills we need to be worthy disciples for you.

We know, Lord, that we have been poor stewards of your world. Help us to look after it as you would wish, and help us to share the earth’s riches in a fairer way.

We now bring these prayers together, using the words that Jesus taught his disciples, saying

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 today 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.

**Let us hear our first reading, Mark 7 v. 24-37 (NIVUK)**

**Jesus honours a Syro-Phoenician woman’s faith**

24Jesus left that place and went to the vicinity of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know it; yet he could not keep his presence secret. 25In fact, as soon as she heard about him, a woman whose little daughter was possessed by an impure spirit came and fell at his feet. 26The woman was a Greek, born in Syrian Phoenicia. She begged Jesus to drive the demon out of her daughter.

27‘First let the children eat all they want,’ he told her, ‘for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.’

28‘Lord,’ she replied, ‘even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’

29Then he told her, ‘For such a reply, you may go; the demon has left your daughter.’

30She went home and found her child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

**Jesus heals a deaf and mute man**

31Then Jesus left the vicinity of Tyre and went through Sidon, down to the Sea of Galilee and into the region of the Decapolis. 32There some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged Jesus to place his hand on him.

33After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man’s ears. Then he spat and touched the man’s tongue. 34He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, *‘Ephphatha!’* (which means ‘Be opened!’). 35At this, the man’s ears were opened, his tongue was loosed and he began to speak plainly.

36Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it. 37People were overwhelmed with amazement. ‘He has done everything well,’ they said. ‘He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak.’

**Children’s Address**

Good morning, boys and girls,

Hasn’t the weather been really nice for the last few weeks? But Summer is nearly over, and things change. What is happening next week for a lot of you? Yes, Back to school. Who is starting school, or moving to a new one? My grandson is moving into “big school” as he describes it, and he is excited but a little bit nervous about it. His older sister is just looking forward to getting back to seeing her friends.

That’s one of the great things about school, most people make lots of friends,; probably your Mums and Dads have still friends who they met at school. You play games together, look at your phones, text each other. But possibly there are people you don’t quite hit it off with, and they are never going to be close friends with you. But that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be nice to them. Try and include everyone in your circle, make it really big, for that’s what Jesus realised he was meant to do. He thought he had just come to save the Jews, but God showed him that everyone is part of God’s plan. So everyone is a child of God, and therefore we should be nice to every one we meet.

**Let us join in our hymn, “Bind us together” (chorus, verse, chorus, verse, chorus, verse, chorus)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Chorus: *Bind us together, Lord*  *bind us together*  *with cords that cannot be broken;*  *bind us together, Lord,*  *bind us together,*  *O bind us together with love.* | 1.. There is only one God,  there is only one King,  there is only one body -  that is why we sing: |
| 2.. Made for the glory of God,  purchased by His precious Son.  Born with the right to be clean,  for Jesus the victory has won. | 3: You are the family of God,  You are the promise divine,  You are God's chosen desire,  You are the glorious new wine. |
| Bob Gillman ©1977 Thankyou Music ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 | |

**The next reading is Isaiah 35 v. 4-7 (NIVUK)**

4Strengthenthe feeblehands,   
steady the knees that give way  
say to those with fearful hearts,  
    ‘Be strong, do not fear;  
your God will come,  
    he will come with vengeance;  
with divine retribution  
    he will come to save you.’

5Then will the eyes of the blind be opened  
    and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
6Then will the lame leap like a deer,  
    and the mute tongue shout for joy.  
Water will gush forth in the wilderness  
    and streams in the desert.  
7The burning sand will become a pool,  
    the thirsty ground bubbling springs.  
In the haunts where jackals once lay,  
    grass and reeds and papyrus will grow.

**Let us sing the hymn, “The church is like a table”.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1..The church is like a table,  a table that is round.  It has no sides or corners,  no first or last, no honours;  here people are in one-ness  and love together bound. | 2..The church is like a table  set in an open house;  no protocol for seating,  a symbol of inviting,  of sharing, drinking, eating;  an end to them and us. |
| 3..The church is like a table,  a table for a feast  to celebrate the healing  of all excluded-feeling,  (while Christ is serving, kneeling,  a towel around his waist). | 4.. The church is like a table  where every head is crowned.  As guests of God created,  all are to each related;  the whole world is awaited  to make the circle round. |
| Fred Kaan Hymn Text Words © 1985 Hope Publishing Company ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 | |

**Sermon:**

The passage we heard from Mark’s Gospel must be one of the most challenging in the New Testament, not just for us, but also for Jesus. He had set off to go to near Tyre. Tyre was a Phoenician seaport, a long way north of Jerusalem, and was a city state on the coast of Lebanon. It was a vey famous trading centre, and had provided David and Solomon with the cedar wood used to build the temple. Some notable people had come from Tyre, not least Jezebel, the daughter of the King of Tyre ands Sidon, who married King Ahab, and clashed with Elijah. It was a place that was frequently condemned by the prophets for its pride and luxury.

It seems a rather strange place for Jesus to decide to visit, for it was an extremely Gentile area; Jezebel had introduced Baal worship, after her marriage. But it had a smallish Jewish community, and it was they who Jesus came to visit and stay within. He was wanting to keep a low profile, staying incognito, but that was not going to happen. A local woman heard about Jesus, and immediately comes to him, so that he might heal her daughter who is possessed by an evil spirit; although not a Jew, she felt that Jesus was the only person who could help her.

It is a very brave decision on her part to go to Jesus, she would have known the obstacles that lay in her way. When she arrived at the house, she would have been met with open hostility, a Gentile and a woman! She asks Jesus for his help, but his response is almost shockingly rude; he ranks her with the dogs! I always felt that this was not an appropriate response to a woman who was obviously in need of help, and had shown great courage in doing what she had done, for love of her child. The reply comes across as rude and offensive, but would only have articulated what every one in the room would have been thinking. The proper order of things- Jewish men first, then Jewish women, and at the very end of the queue, Gentile women.

Jesus refuses to help the woman, saying his ministry and help is only for the Jews, but the woman makes a brilliant reply, saying that the dogs can still pick up the crumbs that fall from the table. Her faith stops Jesus in his tracks abd maybe for the first time, Jesus realises in what direction his mission should lie. Maybe he is called to save more than the house of Israel, and this for me, emphasise again the humanity of Jesus.

At times we forget that Jesus was born a human being, like me or you. At his baptism, he heard the voice from heaven, but no one else heard it. He underwent the temptations where he was challenged by Satan , whether he really was what he was starting to believe, that he was the Son of God. Even on the cross the doubts existed, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Yes, he believed he was the son of God , but was never certain. He had been shaped, as we all are, by his upbringing in a traditional Jewish home , with all the prejudices that might bring. He was brought up believing that the Messiah was coming to save Israel, but just Israel. Suddenly this preconception is challenged, and suddenly his ministry becomes more inclusive.

We make decisions every day about what we will include and what we will exclude, what is worthy of our attention and what is a waste of time. The problem is there is so much need in our world, where do we start. We see it every day, but what do we see? The man sitting begging outside Aldi, is he a person or a label, do we see a person or just a drug user, or someone who will fritter any money given on drink?

The great thing is that labels don’t matter when we come to the Lord’s Table. Jesus is totally inclusive, none will be left hungry, and we won’t be dependent on the crumbs others have dropped . We are there by right. This is the beauty of the Gospel. Christ knows all our faults and failings, but there are still bread and wine waiting for us at his table

**Let us come to God in prayer, as we make our prayers of Intercession.**

We pray for our world. We have heard the terrible things that are happening in Afghanistan, and we pray for all those suffering there. We see the misery and hurt on all the faces, particularly on the children. We hear about shortages of food, and the way people have fled, leaving everything behind them as they try to escape to safety. Be with all those across the world who have struggled recently with natural disasters, those who have been hit by the terrible fires that have raged, and those who have suffered flooding.

We pray for our country. Co-vid still dominates our news, with the numbers of new infections still soaring. We give thanks for the scientists across the world, whose hard work and knowledge has produced the vaccines that now give us hope for the future. Help us be able to carry on with our lives, and to live with this disease, so that we can still be effective Christians, working for you.

We pray for Rochdale. We think of all the children returning to school. For many it will be a new challenge, starting a new phase in their lives, and we pray that it will be a peaceful and happy transition. We pray for the teachers, and other school staff, as they try and get things back to a degree of normality, after the upheavals of recent months. We think of all those in our community, who are struggling for whatever reason, mental depression, problems with drugs or alcohol, homelessness, family break up. Be with all who need you in their lives.

We pray for our church. As things get back to normal, we rejoice that we are able to start things kike the Luncheon Club again, as well as the Dementia Café. These activities reach out to those in our community, and we give thanks for all who give up their time to support them.

Finally we pray for ourselves. We have all gone through difficult times over the last couple of years. We have had our highs, and more probably lows, but we have had the reassurance all along that you have been with us every step of the way. Continue to guide us and help us be good disciples for your message.

We ask this through our saviour, Jesus Christ.

Amen

**Let us sing the hymn, “There’s a quiet understanding”, as we prepare to share Communion.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. There's a quiet understanding  when we're gathered in the Spirit,  it's a promise that He gives us,  when we gather in His name.  There's a love we feel in Jesus,  there's a manna that He feeds us,  it's a promise that He gives us  when we gather in His name. | 2.. And we know when we're together,  sharing love and understanding,  that our brothers and our sisters  feel the oneness that He brings.  Thank You, thank You,  thank You, Jesus,  for the way You love and feed us,  for the many ways You lead us;  thank You, thank You, Lord. |
| Tedd Smith © 1973 Hope Publishing Company ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 | |

**Communion**

Jesus was often a guest. He shared many meals with his friends, and they long remembered his words at the table. Though some disapproved of the company he kept, Jesus ate and drank with all kinds of people and showed everyone the love of God. Wherever people met together Jesus was glad to be welcomed and fed. Today we are the guests of Jesus. He welcomes us, whoever we are and whatever we bring, and he will feed us at his table. Old or young, rich or poor, joyful or in sorrow, Jesus invites us to share bread and wine with him, to remember the story of his life and death, and to celebrate his presence with us today. On the night before he died, Jesus shared a meal with twelve of his disciples in an upstairs room in Jerusalem. The gospel writer tells us what happened that night.

“While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them and said, ”Take, this is my body.” Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I tell you, I will never again drink the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” “

We are the friends and disciples of Jesus today. He invites us to break bread together to remember him and to pray that God’s Kingdom will come.

So before we share the bread and wine, let us share in a prayer of thanks. We praise you that we are here today around the table of Jesus. we have heard the good news of your love; the cross is the sign of your arms stretched out in love for us and the empty tomb declares your love stronger than death.

Christ has died

Christ is risen

Christ will come again

Send your Holy Spirit upon this bread and wine, and upon your people, that Christ may be with us, and we may be ready to live for you and to do what you ask of us, today, and every day to come. We make this prayer through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, in the love of the Creator, one God, to whom be glory and praise forever. Amen

Eat this bread. It is the bread of life

Drink this wine. It is the cup of blessing

Let us pray

Loving God, you have fed us generously at this table, as we have remembered Jesus and rejoiced that he is with us today. We are ready now to follow him and to be your people in the world. May your Holy Spirit show us the way, make us holy and fill us with you love.

Amen

**Let us sing our final hymn, “Beauty for Brokenness” (verse, verse, chorus, verse, verse, chorus, verse, chorus)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 1.. Beauty for brokenness,  hope for despair,  Lord, in Your suffering world  this is our prayer.  Bread for the children,  justice, joy, peace,  sunrise to sunset,  Your kingdom increase. | 2.. Shelter for fragile lives,  cures for their ills,  work for the craftsmen,  trade for their skills;  land for the dispossessed,  rights for the weak,  voices to plead the cause  of those who can't speak. |
| 3.. Refuge from cruel wars,  havens from fear,  cities for sanctuary,  freedoms to share.  Peace to the killing-fields,  scorched earth to green,  Christ for the bitterness,  His cross for the pain. | 4.. Rest for the ravaged earth,  oceans and streams  plundered and poisened -  our future, our dreams.  Lord, end our madness,  carelesness, greed;  make us content with  the things that we need. |
| 5.. Lighten our darkness,  breathe on this flame  until Your justice  burns brightly again;  until the nations  learn of Your ways,  seek Your salvation  and bring You their praise. | Chorus: *God of the poor,*  *friend of the weak,*  *give us compassion we pray;*  *melt our cold hearts,*  *let tears fall like rain;*  *come, change our love*  *from a spark to a flame.* |
| Graham Kendrick ©1993 Vertical Worship Songs/Sovereign Music UK ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 | |

**The grace**

And may the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, rest and abide with each and every one of us, this day and for ever more.