**Sunday 6th June 2021 – Communion Service**

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.

The Psalmist said “From the depths of my despair I call to you, Lord. Hear my cry, O Lord; listen to my call for help.” During the long spell of the pandemic, many of us have experienced or know someone who has suffered from mental health problems. The fact we have not been able to mix socially, been deprived from seeing our families, all these have left mental scars on many of us. Hopefully the restrictions are lifting, but we know, Lord, that through all these dark days, you have been with us.

**Let us commence our worship by singing “Thou whose almighty word”**

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| 1.. Thou, whose almighty word  chaos and darkness heard,  and took their flight:  hear us, we humbly pray,  and where the gospel day  sheds not its glorious ray,  let there be light! | 2.. Thou, who didst come to bring,  on Thy redeeming wing,  healing and sight;  health to the sick in mind,  sight to the inly blind,  O now to all mankind  let there be light! |
| 3.. Spirit of truth and love,  Life-giving, holy Dove,  speed forth Thy flight;  move on the water's face,  bearing the lamp of grace,  and in earth's darkest place  let there be light! | 4.. Bléssed and holy Three,  glorious Trinity,  wisdom, love, might;  boundless as ocean's tide,  rolling in fullest pride,  through the earth, far and wide  let there be light! |
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**And now, let us come to God in prayer, let us pray.**

O Lord, we are joined together this morning, to praise you and give thanks for all that you have done for us. It has been a tough time for many of us over the last year, we have had all sorts of different problems to face, but you have been there for us. At times, we have struggled to reach out to you, we were too engrossed in ourselves, failing to recognise where the answer to all our problems lay.

We realise that we have so much to be grateful for, the love of family, the friends that surround us, all the wonders of technology that we almost now take for granted, the never ceasing wonders of nature. There is so much for us to be grateful for, and to praise and thank you for giving it to us.

But, Lord, we have fallen far short of what you have asked of us, and so we open our hearts to you in confession.

We have failed to appreciate that everything ultimately comes from you. We deceive ourselves and congratulate ourselves on what we have achieved, without realising where the gifts have really come from. Open our eyes, so that we can see properly from where our powers and knowledge really emanate and let us give thanks to you for all you have given to us.

We confess that we have proved to be very bad guardians of our world. The wonders of nature are all around us, but so often we either ignore them or actively harm them. Millions are still starving in a world where there is more than enough food for all, if only we could learn to share it. We rejoice that even at this late stage, we are beginning to realise the enormity of what we have done, and are trying to turn back the tide of destruction.

WE confess that we haven’t been as friendly to our neighbours as we should, that our lives have not really reflected the love of Christ. Make us more like Christpeople, thinking of others, open to your guidance, trying to continue Christ’s work on earth.

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.

**Children’s address**

Well, good morning to any of the boys and girls who may be sharing our worship with us this morning

Families are a great thing, they can be quite small just you with Mum and Dad, or really big. When I lived in Belfast, one of my friends had a really big family. His parents had a boy, then a girl and then another boy, and the mother really wanted another girl. Unfortunately, she didn’t appear until she was child number 12!

Some of you may have watched a progamme on TV called “Who do you think you are?” In it, people trace their family tree. I have had a go at mine recently, for I know virtually nothing about my father’s family, except that he was, like my mother, an only child.

But families are just like any other group of people, sometimes they don’t get on. I’m sure you have had disagreements with your brothers or sisters. In our reading today, we see the family of Jesus coming on a journey to try and stop Jesus doing what he had been doing. Why was he wandering around the country with his disciples, when he should have been at home, working as a carpenter like his father?

Jesus is saying that if we listen to God and follow his ways, then we will be his brothers and sisters, part of one big family. But of course, that can mean that people we maybe don’t particularly like may also be part of this family as well. We must try therefore and get on with everyone, remembering that they too are a brother or sister of Jesus.

**Let us sing the hymn, “Make me a channel of thy peace”** (verse, chorus, verse, chorus, verse)

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| 1.. Make me a channel of Your peace.  Where there is hatred  let me bring Your love;  where there is injury,  Your pardon, Lord;  and where there's doubt  true faith in You. | 2.. Make me a channel of Your peace.  Where there's despair in life  let me bring hope;  where there is darkness, only light;  and where there's sadness, ever joy. |
| 3.. Make me a channel of Your peace.  It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  in giving to all men that we receive;  and in dying that we're born to eternal life. | Chorus: *O Master, grant that I may never seek,*  *so much to be consoled as to console;*  *to be understood as to understand;*  *to be loved as to love with all my soul.* |
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**Our readings this morning are both from the New Testament, first 2 Corinthians 4 v. 13 – 5v.1, and then Mark 3 v. 20-35**

***2 Corinthians 4:13 – 5:1***

**13**It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, **14**because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. **15**All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

**16**Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. **17**For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18**So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

**Awaiting the New Body**

**5**For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.

***Mark 3:20-35***

**Jesus Accused by His Family and by Teachers of the Law**

**20**Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. **21**When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind.”

**22**And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, “He is possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons.”

**23**So Jesus called them over to him and began to speak to them in parables: “How can Satan drive out Satan? **24**If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. **25**If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. **26**And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come. **27**In fact, no one can enter a strong man’s house without first tying him up. Then he can plunder the strong man’s house. **28**Truly I tell you, people can be forgiven all their sins and every slander they utter, **29**but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are guilty of an eternal sin.”

**30**He said this because they were saying, “He has an impure spirit.”

**31**Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. **32**A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

**33**“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked.

**34**Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! **35**Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”

**Let us sing again “Living Lord”**

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| 1.. Lord Jesus Christ,  You have come to us,  You are one with us, Mary's Son;  cleansing our souls from all their sin,  pouring Your love and goodness in:  Jesus, our love for You we sing -  living Lord! | 2.. Lord Jesus Christ,  now and every day  teach us how to pray, Son of God;  You have commanded us to do  this in remembrance, Lord, of You:  into our lives Your power breaks through,  living Lord! |
| 3.. Lord Jesus Christ,  You have come to us,  born as one of us, Mary's Son;  led out to die on Calvary,  risen from death to set us free:  living Lord Jesus, help us see  You are Lord! | 4.. Lord Jesus Christ,  I would come to You,  live my life for You, Son of God;  all Your commands I know are true,  Your many gifts will make me new:  into my life Your power breaks through -  living Lord! |
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**Sermon:**

Over the last year, families have been forced into closer contact, what with parents working from home, and the children facing home schooling., and frustrations build up!. “Parents, they just don’t understand” is the cry from so many children, over clothes, the use of phones, so many things. And tensions do exist frequently in families, and I find it quite reassuring to know that Jesus’s family was no different.

The family just did not understand this whole Messiah business. I can understand it from his brothers and sisters point of view, but am a bit surprised at Mary, his mother. She had experienced the revelation of the divine birth from Gabriel, and had gladly accepted it. When the shepherds and angels had appeared at the birth, Mary thought long and hard about what she had experienced. Even at the wedding at Cana, she trusted Jesus to be able to do something miraculous to save the situation. But maybe even she had reached the end of her tether.

It says in Mark’s Gospel, “Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. They stood outside the house and sent in a message, asking for him.”. The family had arrived. Some versions of the Bible try and protect them; the Authorised Version talks of “friends” arriving, while the NRSV refers to them just as “people”. But we mustn’t forget that the Jews were very family orientated, with very clear ideas of how a family should behave. Why wasn’t the first born at home helping his father in his carpenter’s business? What’s he doing gallivanting round Galilee with this odd band of hangers-on ? Maybe, like all good Jews, they were expecting a Messiah, but the way Jesus was acting, did not fit in with their expected picture, of how the Messiah would behave.

They may even have thought he was going mad; as John says in Chapter 7,” even his brothers did not believe in him.” But the whole family had made this long journey all the way from Nazareth to Capernaum, a distance of 20 miles, a full day’s walk. Jesus would not be the only one to be regarded as mad. Many of the early Christians were regarded as insane; when Paul appeared before the Governor, Festus, Festus shouted at him “Paul, you are mad; your great learning is driving you mad.” One of the Fathers of the Protestant Church, Martin Luther was accused of being a fool and possessed by demons. And the family of Jesus had come with the intention of taking him back home.

Of course, his family were not the only people disapproving of Jesus, and what he was doing. The Jewish leaders were gunning for him as well. They had travelled even further, 70 miles, to see if what they had heard rumoured was true. It was obvious that they saw him as a really serious threat to their authority, and to the cosy relationship they had with the Romans. As long as the peace was not threatened, the Romans allowed the Jews to carry on as normal, but Jesus could disturb that relationship. The Jewish leaders were totally unable to see Jesus as God’s agent. They could see that he could cast out demons, the evidence was before their very eyes, but on whose authority was he acting?

The Jewish leaders claimed that not only was Jesus possessed by a demon, but by Beelzebub, the King of the demons, and was using that power to cast out other demons. But as Jesus points out, that is a total non-sequitur; why would Beelzebub want to destroy his own empire? The Jews just did not recognise that Jesus was God sent. What he was saying is that Satan is strong, but he is stronger. Jesus had already overcome the power of Satan in the wilderness, and knew that he had nothing to fear from him, but still recognised that Satan had strength.

But while this argument with the Jewish leaders was going on, Jesus got the news that his family had arrived and were waiting for him outside. And his answer at first sight seems very cutting; it is almost as if he is disowning his own mother. But this is the first portrayal of the wider” church family” Jesus is saying that whoever believes in God is automatically part of that wider family. We are part of that family, but we must make sure that it is not an exclusive club, we must be striving our hardest to bring other people into the family as well. Jesus’ family were trying to silence him and to remove him from his mission, but Jesus was saying that all were welcome into his family, it was not a limited thing. When you are welcomed into the family, both you and the family are change. And that is how our church should be, a growing, changing organism, responsive to the call of Jesus.

**Let us join in our prayers of Intercession, as we make our prayers for others.**

We pray for our world. While we rejoice that we are emerging from the Covid pandemic, we realise that many other parts of the world are still suffering greatly. Let us show our love for our fellow man by sharing what medical resources we have, for the greater good of all. We pray for our worldly resources. The theme of climate change has featured strongly in the press recently. Let us make sure that it is not something we just talk about, but something that we take steps to rectify.

We pray for our country. We rejoice that we are coming out of the depressing periods of lockdown, and that we are able to freely mix with friends and family again. At the same time, we remember in our prayers those who have suffered badly during this time; those who have lost family members to Covid, those whose mental health has bee adversely affected, those who have lost their jobs and with it their confidence for the future. We lift all these up to you in our prayers, and ask you to support them in the days ahead.

We pray for our churches in the Missional Partnership. We rejoice that after so long we can begin to worship together again, but we need to pray that we will quickly get into the habit of attending church again, and be able to concentrate on our Christ given role, that of bringing people to him.

Finally, we pray for ourselves. Thank you, Lord, for always being there for us in the difficult times we may have experienced, and be with us in the days ahead, for we need your guidance wherever we may go.

We bring these prayers to you, for your name’s sake. Amen

**Let us now approach the Lord’s table, singing ”Here is love vast as the ocean”**

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| 1.. Here is love vast as the ocean,  loving kindness as the flood,  when the Prince of life, our ransom,  shed for us His precious blood.  Who His love will not remember;  who can cease to sing His praise?  He can never be forgotten  throughout heaven's eternal days. | 2.. On the mount of crucifixion  fountains opened deep and wide;  through the floodgates of God's mercy  flowed a vast and gracious tide.  Grace and love, like mighty rivers  poured incessant from above;  and heaven's peace and perfect justice  kissed a guilty world in love. |
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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 ands 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 closing hymn “ Take my life and let it be”**

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| 1.. Take my life, and let it be  consecrated, Lord, to Thee;  take my moments and my days,  let them flow in ceaseless praise. | 2.. Take my hands, and let them move  at the impulse of Thy love;  take my feet, and let them be  swift and beautiful for Thee. |
| 3.. Take my voice, and let me sing  always, only, for my King;  take my lips, and let them be  filled with messages from Thee. | 4.. Take my silver and my gold,  not a mite would I withhold;  take my intellect, and use  every power as Thou shalt choose. |
| 5.. Take my will, and make it Thine;  it shall be no longer mine;  take my heart, it is Thine own;  it shall be Thy royal throne. | 6.. Take my love; my Lord, I pour  at Thy feet its treasure store:  take myself, and I will be  ever, only, all, for Thee. |
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**Blessing**

The blessing of God be upon you

The One who loves you,

The Christ who calls you,

The Spirit who makes you holy,

Today and forever.

Amen