

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES: United Service for Sunday 30th August 2020

The service for today has been prepared by The Reverend Liz Howlett and can also be accessed by phone on **01308 293062**. (If you are listening on the phone, we would love to hear from you – let us know what you think about these phone services. Contact Jane, the Rector with your thoughts.)

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE?

The Greeting

Welcome to this United Service for the Bride Valley churches. It is good to know that we are joining together in worship this morning, both at LATCH and in homes around the valley. Although separated physically and socially distanced, yet we are united through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Psalm 105: 1-3

O give thanks to the Lord and call upon his name;

Make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing to him, sing praises,

And tell of all his marvellous works.

Rejoice in the praise of his holy name;

Let the hearts of them rejoice who seek the Lord.

Invitation to Confession

We come together to receive the forgiveness of a new day.

We come together to rejoice in the freedom to begin again.

We come together to receive mercy from our heavenly Father.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love bring *us* back to himself, forgive *us* our sins, and assure *us* of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect

God of constant mercy, who sent your Son to save us; remind us of your goodness, increase your grace within us, that our thankfulness may grow, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Old Testament Reading

Exodus 3:1-15

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

Song

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the holy One, is here
Come bow before him now with reverence and fear
In him no sin is found we stand on holy ground
Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the holy One, is here

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around
He burns with holy fire, with splendor he is crowned
How awesome is the sight our radiant king of light
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace
No work too hard for Him, in faith receive from him
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

David Evans

The Gospel Reading

Matthew 16:21-28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will

they give in return for their life? "For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Reflection

MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE?

Our Old Testament reading for today tells one of the most significant encounters in the story of the people of God. The writer invites us to join Moses as he is shepherding the flock of his father in law and leading them to the far side of the wilderness, to Mount Horeb. You could say that Moses himself is in a wilderness time in his life: he had to run away from his home in Egypt, where he found himself caught between his blood people, the Israelites, who were slaves and living under oppression and his adoptive family, the Pharaohs, who were the chief of the oppressors. He had seen how the Israelites were being badly treated and he had defended one who was being struck by an Egyptian and Moses had killed the Egyptian and hid the body in the sand. He had to flee for fear of these facts being made known to Pharaoh, who would have had him killed. Moses therefore is living in an alien land – he calls his first son Gershom (which means alien) because, as he said, 'I am a stranger in a foreign land'.

In some ways, perhaps we have been and still are, strangers living in a foreign land these last 5 months. We may have stayed in our own homes, but so much has changed around us. We can meet others today, as some are at Latch, but we cannot mingle across households, we cannot touch one another, we cannot share food in the usual relaxed way – and when we are with others, much energy is taken up thinking – Are we far enough apart? When should I put a mask on? Is this group too big now? Where's the hand sanitiser? When oh when can we get back to some normality? A foreign land, a wilderness indeed, which none of us has chosen as our home.

We know too, that later in the story of the Exodus, the wilderness will play a huge role in the shaping of God's people. They wander for many years, giving Moses all kinds of grief - even complaining at times that they would rather be back in slavery than seizing their freedom – but at last reaching the land promised as their home. For Christ, also, the wilderness is key as the place where he is tested, before he begins his public ministry - he is tested like the Israelites had been, but without sin, before starting to bring good news to all people.

- I wonder if there are ways in which we as individuals and churches and as a benefice together are sensing that God is drawing closer to us in our testing Covid wilderness period.

Reflecting further on Moses and the burning bush: this encounter tells us quite a bit about Moses and about God. So Moses first! This stranger in a foreign land, in this dislocated period in his life, stumbles onto holy ground. We will probably never know what was truly happening to that burning bush – but that really doesn't matter! What is important is that God draws near to Moses and Moses draws near to God.

I wonder if Moses had ever day-dreamed about returning home – I imagine if he did, he would soon have realised how unrealistic a prospect that would ever be. But now, on this holy ground, he is given the chance to go back, but in a way that he would never have dreamed of! He was being called by God to return - not to return to the palace he abruptly left behind, but to lead the slaves out of their slavery. Not the stuff of daydreams – more like a nightmare – judging by Moses' reaction.

Some people suggest that belief in God is a way of giving ourselves what we want – a form of wish-fulfilment. A feeling of comfort and a sense of safety perhaps in a harsh world. That may sometimes be true, but I don't know about you, but my experience as a Christian is that having a faith in God can make life more difficult in some ways – for example, we can't duck some tough questions about life and suffering and injustice and other things that go on in the world.

And we can imagine the scene here with Moses - he is listening to God's love for God's people – 'I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians... So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt'. Moses is horrified by the thought – it will never work!! There are so many reasons why this will never work!! This is not Moses indulging in some wish-fulfilment! He questions

God – who are you, what is your name? He questions himself – why on earth should anyone believe that God has spoken to him? And his objections about his suitability continue beyond the passage we have heard today, as he expresses his fear that he is not an eloquent speaker. In desperation he says to God, ‘Lord, send anyone else you like’. We may think of Moses as a great archetypal leader whose encounter with God at the burning bush changes his life and that of his people for ever and this is true. We do know that in spite of his fears and objections, Moses said ‘Yes’ to God, for he returned to Egypt with his wife and family and one step at a time, set in train the events that would lead to the liberation of his people. But here we see him ‘warts and all’, with his deep sense of inadequacy for the role, full of doubts and anxieties. ‘Lord send anyone else you like’. This too is part of the whole person who became the great leader.

And what about God? I wonder what strikes you most about God in this encounter. For me there are two key themes:

- The first is that God goes to great lengths to ensure that Moses works with God to release the Israelites. This requirement for human involvement in God’s work in the world is seen throughout the biblical story – and especially for us in Jesus’ calling his disciples to live and work with him in his earthly ministry. God presumably doesn’t need us, but amazingly wants us to work with him.
- Secondly, we are given such a strong glimpse of God’s character here, as one who hears the cry of those who are oppressed and acts to set them free. And in the wider context of the story of God’s people, God sets these people free so that they might ultimately be the means by which all peoples are set free. Christ sets us free from all that hurts us and other people that we might help others discover this good news. We are part of the problem that has become part of the solution!

Amen

Song

Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
In you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

Will you love the ‘you’ you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you’ve found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I’ll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I’ll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

Graham Maule, John L. Bell. Iona Community

Prayers

Heavenly Father we give you thanks for this opportunity to come together as a Benefice, both at LATCH and in homes across the Bride Valley.

We pray your protection over us all, and as we continue this journey out of lockdown, we pray for local businesses and tourists visiting this area.

We pray for the whole Church at this time, particularly remembering Bishop Matthew Peter in the diocese of Wonduruba as they face the coronavirus in the Sudan with a collapsed health service.

We pray for all who are struggling with ill health, for healing and wholeness in their lives.

We remember all those who have died - those are known to us, and those who are known to God alone.

We pray for this beautiful area where we live and we lift one another to you:

For the parish of Littlebredy and all who live and work there.

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For the parish of Long Bredy and all who live and work there

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For the parish of Litton Cheney and all who live and work there

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For Thorners School, the teachers, staff and pupils

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For the parish of Puncknowle and all who live and work there

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For the parish of Swyre and all who live and work there

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For the Othona community and all who live and work there

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For the parish of Shipton Gorge and all who live and work there

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For Burton Bradstock school, the teachers, staff and pupils

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

For the parish of Burton Bradstock and Chilcombe and all who live and work here

Thy kingdom come: **Thy will be done**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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

Final Prayer

God of our pilgrimage,
You lead us to the living water:
Refresh and sustain us
As we go forward on our journey,
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Blessing

May the Father from whom every family
in earth and heaven receives its name
strengthen *you* with his Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in *your* hearts by faith;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among *you* and remain with *you* always.
Amen.

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Invitation to Confession adapted from *Praying with the Earth: a prayerbook for peace*, John Philip Newell, Canterbury Press (2011)

CCLI no.1197519