

## **A Podcast for North Coventry Group – May 10 2020**

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for the fourth Sunday after Easter, 2020.

If you can, please have a small stone available to hold later in the service.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript and include words for our songs and hymns, and I would like to thank Bill and Janet for joining in the preparation of this week's edition.

As we prepare to worship in this time – whatever time – we have been able to set aside, let's accept the peace that God offers us and listen to a few sounds from nature gathered this week, and enjoy a short piece of music evoking God's love shown through the natural world.

### **Introductory Sounds and Music**

[Birdsong in Coventry, *Morning has Broken (Bunessan)* adapted and played by Rick Wakeman, from his album *Piano Portraits*.]

### **Call to Worship:**

This week was set to be Christian Aid Week, but like so much else, has had to be rethought. Our call to worship is based on words from Christian Aid material for 2020:

Love never fails.

Coronavirus impacts all of us.

But love unites us all.

United in love, let's worship God.

### **Prayers:**

We begin our worship with a time of prayer. Let us pray.

Dear Lord, as we devote this time to worship you, we pray that you will listen to us and bring us peace; be our rock and our refuge, so that we can feel stronger; let your face shine upon us, and let us in turn show your love to others.

At a time of stress and anxiety for many, we remember that all that we have comes from you and that we have much to be thankful for. We thank you again for the beauties of the earth, for spring rain after sunshine, for the fresh greens of newly opened leaves, for blossom and the promise of fruits in due season. We thank you for the life all around us, from birds to

beetles, as spring once again works its miracle of new life. We thank you for our homes, giving us safety and security, even at a time when we might wish to be away from them. We thank you for our friends and families and the promise of reunions ahead.

But forgive us, loving Lord, that we have strayed from your way, and not loved our neighbour as we love ourselves.

Forgive us for the times when our lives have not been shaped by your truth and for the times we have kept you at arms' length.

In the name of Jesus, the way, the truth and the life, we pray, saying together the prayer that Jesus taught us:

*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*

### **Scripture: From Psalm 31**

From the Old Testament, here is a setting of some words from Psalm 31:

You, O God, are my refuge. Let me never be put to shame.

*Bend down your ear and hear me, come quickly to my rescue; be just, protect me from danger.*

Be a place of safety for me, a rock where I find shelter; lead and guide me for your own name's sake.

*You, O God, are my refuge. Let me never be put to shame.*

Set me free from the net spread to catch me, for you are my protector. Into your hands I commit my spirit.

*Turn your face towards me, with unfailing love defend me, do not reject me when I call your name.*

Your goodness knows no limits; it is kept for all who revere you and turn to you in their need.

**You, O God, are our refuge. Let us never be put to shame.**

**Reflection 1:**

The Psalmist looks to God for help. Psalm 31 is one of those psalms that expresses confidence that God will help, and even rescue, the worshipper. But as Christians, we believe that part of our own response to God is to help other people. Christian Aid has for many years been a key part of putting this into practice. I mentioned at the start this should have been Christian Aid Week, which is the single biggest fund-raiser for this important charity doing humanitarian work around the world. It still is! But because of the lockdown, none of the house to house collections or other fund-raising events can take place in the usual way. Like so much, the mode of delivery for this year has switched to online and it is possible to fill a virtual 'e-Envelope' to donate. We have put a link to this on the email that we send out each week and on the webpage where we lodge the podcast. Please contribute if you can.

The message from Christian Aid is to say that as this virus spreads across the world, love rises up in response. People have already shown incredible kindness to their neighbours. And now is the time to reach out to neighbours both near and far.

Christian Aid say 'Your love protects. From storms, from drought, and now from coronavirus. Your love protects our global neighbours battling the spread of this illness. Your love protects. With soap, clean water and medical supplies'.

By supporting them this Christian Aid Week, you can reach out and protect more of your neighbours today. Because love never fails. Even in the darkest moments, love gives hope.

Listen to a song from the Wild Goose Worship Group. The words are in the transcript, and re-express the story of the first few verses of John's Gospel, emphasising the oneness of Jesus and his Father, and their infinite and eternal connection with Creation and humankind.

*'I am for you'*

**Music** Before the world began one Word was there (as in Church Hymnary 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 417)

*Before the world began one Word was there;  
grounded in God he was, rooted in care;  
by him all things were made;  
in him was love displayed;  
through him God spoke and said, 'I am for you.'*

*Life found in him its source; death found its end;  
light found in him its course, darkness its friend,  
for neither death nor doubt  
nor darkness can put out  
the glow of God, the shout: 'I am for you.'*

*The Word was in the world which from him came;  
unrecognised he was, unknown by name;  
one with all humankind,  
with the unloved aligned,  
convincing sight and mind: 'I am for you.'*

*All who received the Word by God were blessed;  
sisters and brothers they of earth's fond guest.  
So did the Word of Grace  
proclaim in time and space  
and with a human face, 'I am for you.'*

Words by John Bell and Graham Maule, based on John 1.1-13

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**Scripture: 1 Peter 2:2-10**

Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says:

“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone,  
and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.”

Now to you who believe, this stone is precious. But to those who do not believe,

“The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone,”

and,

“A stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.”

They stumble because they disobey the message—which is also what they were destined for.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

### **Reflection 2:**

Of the three New Testament readings in the Lectionary for this week I chose the one from Peter’s Letters, and it brings us two main images to contemplate. If you listen to other services for today you will most likely hear a passage from John’s Gospel, most familiar from its use in many funeral services, including my mum’s last week. I hope you’ll forgive me for choosing another option.

Firstly, we have the image of a new-born baby craving milk. Earlier in this letter Peter talks of us being given new birth as Christians, or of being born again to a new life as his children. In my student years, and since, I have sometimes found some other Christians frustrating, in their emphasis on the importance of a turning point in their life when they found Christ – or He found them. They felt reborn to their new life as Christians and appeared to pity those of us brought up in the life and worship of the church, who had never had a big conversion experience. However, this isn’t how I choose to interpret these references. I prefer to see them as an invitation to return to the simplicity of our early life, when we didn’t over-analyse every situation, or see ulterior motives in others. To trust in God’s love and to put aside the negatives that can bring us down.

And I wonder whether in the continuing lockdown we should look for the positives that this enforced return to a simpler, and slower life can yield. We know that pollution has decreased, that nature is returning to places that humans had made inhospitable. Many people have slowed down and have learned important lessons about the value of relationships over possessions. All I wanted for my birthday on Thursday was the chance to

be with more of the people I love and to share some long overdue hugs. Who needs anything gift-wrapped?

The other image in the passage was that of stones, and us as stones, given structure and purpose by grouping around Christ, the cornerstone. In the hands of a skilled craftsman, a disparate pile of stones, of all shapes and sizes, can be built into a drystone wall that can last for decades or even centuries. Our son Charles did some volunteer drystone walling with the National Trust for Scotland while he was a student. I remember him saying that the first thing they were told was that if you pick up a stone you must find a place to use it. Not to pick them up and put them down, looking for the perfect one for the purpose, wearing yourself out and getting nowhere. Every stone has a purpose, and your job is to find the place where that particular one will belong, adding strength and structure in its own way. What a fabulous metaphor for the people of the church.

If you have a stone to hold, look at it, feel it, consider it. It might be one that you collected on holiday for its beauty or because it reminded you of a special place. Or it might be any old stone that happened to be at hand in a flower bed or on your drive. But each one is millions of years old, has been shaped by its origins and has found its way to you, by accident or design. Just as all the people in the church have our different origins, our different histories, but we have come together to be a community and to serve God in this city. And these ancient stones can help us to regain our sense of perspective. The last couple of months have been like none that any of us have ever lived through and we may be lamenting the opportunities denied to us. But these times are the merest, tiniest instant in our lives and of life on earth.

As Julian of Norwich said in the Fifteenth Century, 'All shall be well; and all shall be well; and all manner of things shall be well'.

Amen

### **Prayers of Intercession**

In a world where there is warfare and violence,  
many people live in fear of the bullet and the bomb;  
many have had their lives and livelihoods destroyed;  
many grieve for loved ones who have been killed.

**That they may know your strength and peace, loving God:  
be for them a rock and a stronghold.**

In a world where harvests have failed;  
where there have been droughts and floods;  
many do not have money to pay for food and power;  
many are reaching the end of their tether.

In a world afflicted by viral pandemic;  
where the unseen assailant is an ever present threat;  
many key workers are scared and weary yet carry on their work;  
and many whose activities have been curtailed are frustrated by their own inaction.

**That they may know your strength and peace, loving God:  
be for them a rock and a stronghold.**

In a world where many people are alone;  
many do not know where to look for comfort and encouragement;  
many see no purpose or future;  
some cannot see the point of anything.

In our lives when we struggle and doubt;  
when we don't know what to say or do;  
when life overwhelms us and we turn to you.

**That we may know your strength and peace, loving God:  
be for us a rock and a stronghold.**

In the name of the living Lord Jesus,  
our Saviour and companion.

**Amen.**

### **Hymn**

Listen to – or join in with – a hymn linked to our scripture today: *Christ is made the sure foundation*

[Sung by the St Michael's Singers in an arrangement by Paul Leddington Wright, from the Album *Crown Him with Many Crowns*]

Christ is made the sure foundation,  
Christ the head and cornerstone,  
chosen of the Lord and precious,  
binding all the church in one;  
holy Zion's help forever,  
and her confidence alone.

To this temple, where we call thee,  
come, O Lord of hosts, today:  
with thy wonted loving-kindness  
hear thy servants as they pray;  
and thy fullest benediction  
shed within its walls always.

Here vouchsafe to all thy servants  
what they ask of thee to gain,  
what they gain from thee forever  
with the blessed to retain,  
and hereafter in thy glory  
evermore with thee to reign.

Laud and honour to the Father,  
laud and honour to the Son,  
laud and honour to the Spirit,  
ever Three and ever One,  
consubstantial, co-eternal,  
while unending ages run.

Words by John Mason Neale (1818-66), translated from the Latin

### **Blessing**

May God bless you, guide you and direct you.

May God bless you, give you strength and the assurance of his love.

May God bless you and fill your life with his presence –  
today and always.

**Amen.**



Thank you for listening to this edition of the podcast. For our closing music, an opportunity to hear the whole of Rick Wakeman's treatment of *Bunessan: Morning has broken*.

### **Closing Music**

*[Morning has Broken (Bunessan) adapted and played by Rick Wakeman, from his album Piano Portraits.]*

The tune *Morning has Broken (Bunessan)* was adapted and played by Rick Wakeman, from his album *Piano Portraits*.

*Before the world began* was sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group and is taken from the album *Heaven shall not wait*

*Christ is made the sure foundation* was sung by the St Michael's Singers in an arrangement by Paul Leddington Wright, from the album *Crown Him with many crowns*