

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – June 14 2020 (Second after Pentecost)

Hello and welcome to our podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for June 14 2020, which is the second Sunday after Pentecost.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Bill and Wynne for joining in the preparation of this week's edition.

Introductory Music: *Largo* (2nd mvt.) from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons (Winter)*
played by The Academy of Ancient Music
conducted by Christopher Hogwood

Call to Worship: Isaiah 6.8

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"*

And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Hymn: *I, the Lord of sea and sky*

[Unfortunately our licensing arrangements don't permit the reproduction of the words of this song in this transcript, although they can be found online if you are so equipped.]

Prayers and Lord's Prayer

Lord God, Creator and sustainer of the world, we turn aside briefly from the cares and stresses of the world to worship you, to thank you, to recharge our spiritual batteries and to look for new insights in the scriptures.

And yet we bring our cares with us. We do not, cannot and should not leave the world behind. We should look outwards as well as inwards. As we reflect on your greatness and love help us also to seek a new purpose and inspiration to share that love with others.

Our experiences of the last three months have been as individual as we are. When we emerge, even a little, from this time of lockdown and relative isolation, help us to hear others' voices even where we have become accustomed to seeing to our own needs day by day.

Where we have seen good practice come from the necessities of these times, help us to retain and build on them, especially the habit of more frequent communication with our neighbours, care of the vulnerable and appreciation of those who care for us in so many ways.

In our worship now, give us a renewed sense of the right direction to travel in order to be closer to you, the right items for our to-do lists and a truly Christian sense of the order in which to rank them.

For you understand us and will forgive us when we go wrong, if we try harder to align our wills with yours. Reveal that will to us now, and may the words and thoughts we share be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our Redeemer.

We offer these prayers to you in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ.

...and in the words he taught we join all of our prayers together:

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.

Scriptureⁱⁱ: Psalm 139 (as in *The Iona Abbey Worship Book, 2001 edition*)

O God, you search me and know me. You know my being and my doing.
From far off, you read my inmost thoughts.

You know the journeys that I take and the places where I rest.
You know the meaning of my words before I speak.

You are familiar with all my ways; you are around me, on every side, holding and protecting with your power.

Your knowledge of me is too wonderful, too high for me to reach.

Where could I escape from you? Where could I flee your presence?

If I climb to the heavens, you are there. You are there if I lie in the grave.

If I fly off into the sunrise, or dwell beyond the western sea, even there your hand will lead me, even there you hold me fast.

If I ask the darkness to hide me, and the daylight to turn into night, the darkness is not dark to you, for night is as clear as day.

Search me, O God, and know my heart, test me, and know my thoughts.

See that I do not follow wrong paths, and guide me in the everlasting way.

Amen.

Reflection (1)

Last week, Bill touched on this psalm, Psalm 139, which is a favourite for many. I recall that Bill Lewis, our friend at Holyhead Road church, chose it as a reading to be used at his funeral, some years ago now.

Last week, my Bill's focus was on the assurance we are given, in knowing that God is with us always. My purpose in choosing it today, alongside the set Gospel reading, is to focus on two different aspects of God knowing us. In the psalm, for me the point is that God knows us all individually, our good points and our bad points, or 'areas for improvement' as present-day performance appraisal would have it. Warts and all, you might say. He knows us and he loves us, despite the worst that we can be as well as the best. God knows us completely, like no one else ever can or will. The Gospel reading, that we will turn to later, gives us a different aspect of God's knowledge of us – his knowledge of what we can be and do, that is not limited in the way that we sometimes limit ourselves.

Not for the first time, I used the Iona Community's telling of the psalm for this act of worship. Although there is a time and place for the poetry of older translations, I find the modern language they use in their paraphrases can help me to find new meaning. The psalmist says that God searches us and knows our inmost thoughts, our action and our inaction. He knows us beyond what we ever show to others. He puts us under a searchlight, and we are exposed before him in a way that can really be rather uncomfortable.

I'm sure I'm not alone in feeling that my inmost thoughts don't always stand up very well to scrutiny. I have tried to take to heart the instruction voiced by the rabbit Thumper, in the film Bambi that 'If you can't say something nice, don't say nothin' at all'. However, that doesn't mean that I never think something that isn't nice, even if I am nice enough to keep the thought to myself. And yet, and yet, God loves us despite the not so nice, not so worthy aspects of our natures and our behaviours.

The psalmist goes on to say that there is no escaping this scrutiny, wherever we might go to try to hide from it. Whether we climb to the heavens or lie in the grave, still he is there with us. We can't even hide in the dark, because he can still see us clearly. But despite our imperfections, this scrutiny is nothing to fear. After listing all the ways and means by which we might try to hide from God, the psalmist turns things around right at the end and admits that His closeness is actually to be welcomed. The psalmist invites God to search him and to know his heart. To test him and to know his thoughts. This closeness of our God is what will save us, because He will keep us from going the wrong way in life and will point us in the right direction. Indeed, the times when we feel furthest away from God are the times when we most need His closeness.

In recent weeks many of us may have felt rudderless, cut adrift, without the control that we normally have of our comings and goings, our activities and our relationships. As the lockdown is eased in a number of ways, we may be feeling even more uncertain than we were at the height of the crisis. How will things end? What will life look, and feel, like in the future? How much of what we used to think was permanent, is lost forever? Whether the changes for you have been big, like bereavement or redundancy, or whether they have been more subtle, the notion of a God who remains at our side, fully aware of our situation, is very reassuring. And the notion of a God who loves us come what may, warts and all, is even more reassuring.

Scripture: Matthew 9.35 – 10.8

³⁵ Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

10 Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

² These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter) and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; ³ Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; ⁴ Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

⁵ These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As

you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'⁸ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give.

Song: Sing Hey for the Carpenter Words by John L Bell and Graham Maule
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[from the album *Heaven shall not wait*]

Come with me, come wander,
come welcome the world,
where strangers might smile
or where stones may be hurled;
come leave what you cling to,
lay down what you clutch
and find, with hands empty,
that hearts can hold much.

*Sing Hey for the carpenter
leaving his tools!
Sing Hey for the Pharisees
leaving their rules!
Sing Hey for the fishermen
leaving their nets!
Sing Hey for the people
who leave their regrets!*

Come walk in my company,
come sleep by my side,
come savour a lifestyle
with nothing to hide;
come sit at my table
and eat with my friends,
discovering that love
which the world never ends. (Chorus)

Come share in my laughter,
Come close to my fears,
Come find yourself washed
With the kiss of my tears;
Come stand close at hand
While I suffer and die,
And find in three days
How I never will lie. (Chorus)

Come leave your possessions,
Come share out your treasure,
Come give and receive
Without method or measure;
Come loose every bond
That's resisting the spirit,
Enabling the earth
To be yours to inherit. (Chorus)

Reflection (2)

For the few short years of his ministry, Jesus worked really hard. Travelling around, preaching and teaching, sometimes just to his immediate followers and sometimes to great crowds. Some would have been ready to learn and to act on his words; others would just have been curious to hear what he had to say, without being committed to acting on what they heard. Then there was the healing; people came from far and wide wanting cures for what ailed them. Some of these were immediate problems with obvious solutions, but Jesus saw beyond them to deeper and more widespread challenges. He could have continued dealing with people and situations one by one, but he saw the bigger picture. He saw that the people were 'like sheep without a shepherd', harassed and helpless. The physical ills were indicative of deeper trouble.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field." In normal times this kind of imagery would not be very relevant to us here, but this year it resonates with one of the many challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. We are all too aware that crops may rot in the fields and greenhouses, due to a lack of seasonal workers to pick and pack them. And what Jesus means is that without help to spread his message, many who could hear

and respond to it may not have that opportunity. So he selects, authorises and sends out the disciples – getting them to do things they didn't know were possible for them.

The twelve disciples are then named in the Gospel. Some of them are men we have heard little or nothing about before now. I know some of us could name them all while others of us would struggle after we had listed the more famous ones. And although we know of women who were friends of Jesus and who were active in the early church, these original disciples were all men. Personally I don't choose to object to that, because it would have been appropriate to the culture there and then. And Jesus sent them out specifically to proclaim to the People of Israel the message that the kingdom of heaven has come near. I don't have a problem with that, either. It's what our government keep calling 'baby steps'. Making changes that will take people and events in the right direction as steps along a much longer journey to a universal message.

The sending out of the disciples to proclaim the message and to heal was just the beginning of what is a journey now through nearly 2000 years. And in that time the message has broadened out to encompass all people, and to involve countless disciples, each playing their part. It's a journey that continues. Maybe we thought that our ways of serving Christ, of proclaiming the Gospel and helping others, loving God and loving our neighbour, had settled into a form that was permanent. But the last three months have shaken us up, removed our certainties and obliged us to seek and find new ways of being church.

Our pattern of worship in a fixed time and place has been replaced, for now at least. I wonder how many people are listening to this podcast at the regular worship time on Sunday, and how many have found different days and times that they prefer? Do tell us how and when you are using the podcasts and whether you think they will continue to meet a need, even after we are allowed to worship collectively again.

This week saw St Columba's Day, when those involved in the Iona Community reaffirm their commitment. Bill and I have only rarely attended special services on this day, but this year we took part in an online service led from Iona. There were perhaps 500 people, all around the world, taking part in the service together and even in our isolation we felt more connected than ever to this body of people.

So Jesus sends out his followers to serve him. Sometimes this involves leaving what is familiar behind and trying something new. Sometimes it means getting involved in things we didn't know we were capable of. Sometimes it means trying something we really don't like the sound of. But we are called to be pilgrims, to travel with Christ and put our trust in him, knowing that he will not ask anything of us that we can't achieve with his support.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

We turn again to God in our prayers. As on the Wednesday of Holy Week we are using the short song, *Take, O take me as I am* as a wrapper for our prayers for the Church and the world in which it is set to act.

Take, O take me as I am, a 'wee song' from the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community, written by John L Bell and taken from the album *Come all you people*.

*Take, O take me as I am.
Summon out what I shall be.
Set your seal upon my heart, and live in me.*

Dear Lord, your ancient people knew that you know your Creation inside out, and found ways and words to express their awe of you. Through Christ we realise that you want us to be a part of your work. Help us to accept your call, to acknowledge our responsibilities to look after your world and each other, and to cope with your challenge to each of us, even when we sometimes despair of finding the next step.

We pray for the Church in these difficult days, for each strand in the tapestry of faith, made up as it is of different traditions with different emphases and preferences, yet surely one in you, its origin and sustenance. We pray for those desperate to return to former ways of worshipping. And for those whose innovation and expertise has allowed worship to go on. Take what we are as a Church and summon out new ideas to combine with long-loved habits. All to renew and refresh and re-equip the Body of Christ for its ongoing role in the world.

We pray for the world we live in and all of its inhabitants – our sisters and brothers in the human family, a family in which all lives matter.

Be with us in our frustration and impatience. Make clear to those who take the decisions what route leads to a better place and a safer place for all. May those who guide the resourcing and policy-making in all facets of our human family life be inspired and emboldened to do the right thing. And as focus changes and moves on may we never forget those who are ill and have been ill, those who mourn the loss of a life.

In a world finding space to focus on issues of race and prejudice, be with those who are challenging others and those responding to the challenge to be better than we have been. May this debate be carried on peacefully but effectively, to summon out what we all can be in our relationships with others.

We pray for ourselves and those we love, conscious that for each person we can name who is suffering, there are millions more. For each person we have cared for there are millions who receive less care. For each family we know who live in security and peace there are millions more who are under-supplied, vulnerable to the effects of conflict or natural disaster. Summon forth the abilities we already possess, to share your love in ever-new ways.

And keep us and those we love safe in your care.

In Jesus' name

Amen

Hymn *O God, you search me and you know me* Bernadette Farrell
from the album *Christ be our light*.

[Unfortunately our licensing arrangements don't permit the reproduction of the words of this song in this transcript, although they can be found online if you are so equipped.]

Blessing

Lord, may we be willing to be challenged and changed as we strive to follow you. And may the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us and remain with us, evermore.

Amen

Music: *Allegro* (3rd mvnt.) from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons (Spring)*
played by The Academy of Ancient Music
conducted by Christopher Hogwood

Thank you for listening to our podcast. Next week will mark the three-month anniversary of the first edition; it seems we still have some way to go before we can resume anything like 'normal' worship. But please look out for news as the Elders in all of our churches are keeping up to date with the latest advice both from the Government and the denomination.

Credits

Worship opened with Antonio Vivaldi's Violin Concerto, Op. 8, No. 4, RV 297 "Winter": II. Largo, performed by Catherine Mackintosh on violin, with the Academy of Ancient Music conducted by Christopher Hogwood, with Nigel North on Harpsichord.

The song *I the Lord of sea and sky* was performed by *Sound of Worship* on the album *Greatest Hymns Ever, Volume 1*.

Sing Hey for the carpenter by John Bell and Graham Maule was performed by the Wild Goose Worship Group and taken from the album *Heaven shall not wait*.

O God, you search me and you know me by Bernadette Farrell was taken from Bernadette Farrell & Frank Brownstead's album *Christ be our light*

The concluding music was Antonio Vivaldi's Violin Concerto, Op. 8, No. 1, RV 269 "Spring": III. Allegro (Danza Pastorale), performed by Christopher Hirons on violin, with the Academy of Ancient Music conducted by Christopher Hogwood, with Nigel North on Harpsichord.

ⁱ All music included in this podcast is made available for download under the terms of the PRS for Music Limited Online Music Licence number LE-0019067

ⁱⁱ Bible quotations in this transcript are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition.