

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – 2 August 2020 ('Ninth after Pentecost')

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for 2 August, the ninth Sunday after Pentecost, 2020.

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

Our introit this week is from the German Mass by Franz Schubert – the part of the liturgy we would call the Sanctus – Holy, holy, holy. In German, *heilig, heilig, heilig*:

Musicⁱ – *Heilig, heilig, heilig* (Sanctus)
from the *Deutsche Messe* (German Mass) by Franz Schubert
sung by the Youth Choir of St Hedwig's Cathedral,
directed by Heinrich Riethmüller & Karl Forster, from the album
Jesu, meine Freude: Greatest Choral Masterpieces

*Heilig, heilig, heilig,
heilig ist der Herr,
heilig, heilig, heilig,
heilig ist nur er.*

*Holy, holy, holy,
holy is the Lord,
holy, holy, holy,
only he is holy.*

*Er der nie begonnen,
er, der immer war,
ewig ist und waltet
sein wird immerdar.*

*He without beginning,
he, who has always been,
and shall reign eternally,
will always be.*

Heilig, heilig, heilig...

Holy, holy, holy...

*Allmacht, Wunder, Liebe,
alles rings umher!
Heilig, heilig, heilig,
heilig ist der Herr.*

*Almighty and miraculous,
With love all around!
Holy, holy, holy,
holy is the Lord.*

[rough translation by Bill Young!]

Call to Worship: words from Psalm 63

*You, God, are my God,
earnestly I seek you;
I thirst for you,
my whole being longs for you,
in a dry and parched land
where there is no water.*

*2 I have seen you in the sanctuary
and beheld your power and your glory.*

*3 Because your love is better than life,
my lips will glorify you.*

*4 I will praise you as long as I live,
and in your name I will lift up my hands.*

*5 I will be satisfied as with the richest of foods;
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*

Hymn:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
from the album *Hymns and Songs of Worship* -
the choirs of Britain's cathedrals perform

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation!
All ye who hear,
brothers and sisters draw near;
praise him in glad adoration.

Praise to the Lord, who o'er all things so wondrously reigneth,
shelters thee under his wings, yea, so gently sustaineth!
Hast thou not seen
all that is needful hath been
granted in what He ordaineth?

Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and defend thee;
surely his goodness and mercy here daily attend thee;
ponder anew all the Almighty can do,
he who with love doth befriend thee.

Praise to the Lord, oh, let all that is in me adore him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with praises before him;
let the Amen sound from his people again,
gladly for aye we adore him.

(words by Joachim Neander (1650-80), translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827-78))

Prayers

We offer our prayers to God:

Lord God, we stand on the threshold of another month, feeling frustrated at the time we have been isolated, restricted, held back from doing so much in all these past weeks. As we gather round these words and round *your* Word, help us to make space for you in our minds and in our lives. May we use this worship to feed our faith, and focus our personal mission.

The ancient people recognised your infinite power and how your time span dwarfs any period we can imagine. *A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.* And yet you care for us and take care of us. We praise and worship you for your being. We thank you for your love.

Help us to look for the positive in our lives, the glass-half-full moments. We thank you for both sunshine and showers, for the garden growth that they promote, for the prospect of time off, even if travel is difficult. We thank you for calm in our shops, even if extra precautions have to be taken. And we pray for those who have to develop, implement and police ever changing rules.

We thank you that we can use this medium to maintain our worship, and for those who facilitate and distribute recorded or live-streamed worship across our churches.

We remember also those whose circumstances, as individuals or as members of less prosperous and developed communities, mean that these routes to worship are closed to them. Be with those whose exile from traditional churches leaves them in the darkest places and forgive us when we take technology for granted.

Forgive us when we think of ourselves before others, when we let our lockdown conditions loom too large in our lives. Plant in us the seed of your love. Give us grace to grow and to share it, with all your people.

We gather all of these prayers together in the prayer Jesus taught us:

The Lord's Prayer

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: Isaiah 55.1-5

'Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.

³ Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live.
I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

⁴ See, I have made him a witness to the peoples, a ruler and commander of the peoples.

⁵ Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations you do not know will come running to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendour.'

Scripture Matthew 14.13-21

¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed those who were ill.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, 'This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so that they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.'

¹⁶ Jesus replied, 'They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.'

¹⁷ 'We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,' they answered.

¹⁸ 'Bring them here to me,' he said. ¹⁹ And he told the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Reflection (1)

Everyone likes to get a bargain. Everyone likes to save money on things they buy, or to get something extra as they buy things. We like to maximise the return on our investment in as many ways as we can. When we have time, we like to shop around and see who gives us the best deal. We especially like to get something for nothing. I used to take shortbread back to my workmates after a Scottish holiday, but sometimes said to them – don't be too impressed: it was *buy one, get one free* and I gave you lot the free one. And some thought I was being serious.

Every so often the tactics that businesses use to tap into this public desire for a bargain make the headlines. Sometimes it's because the companies go too far, and sometimes it's because some sort of shady goings on are suspected, or detected. Sometimes it seems like a joke to those of us not involved. I remember the offer quite a few years ago now, when Hotpoint, I think, were offering free flights to America with every washing machine they sold. There was such a big take up that the firm got into serious trouble when they were finding it hard to deliver on their promises. There were wannabe transatlantic travellers queuing outside the company's offices demanding their tickets.

The companies are of course not normally stupid, and each offer that's made is calculated to bring the business some benefit in due course. By offering cut-price goods in one department, the shop will bring customers in, and expose them to the other goods on sale.

Offering the bargain is making an investment. Remember the parable of the talents – the servants were each left pieces of gold, in decreasing quantity. The servant who came in for most praise was the one who had invested the money most wisely, got most back from it. The servant who was in effect punished was the one who had failed to do anything with his gold – had just hidden it away until his master came back.

Long term there's a balance to be struck, and if those involved know what they are doing, even with what looks like a giveaway, there will still be profits for the businesses. Frankly, the costs of the bargains or the loss leaders will be loaded onto other items, or onto the next generation of the products involved. Truly getting something for nothing is difficult. In this world it's difficult to look at any day to day things we do or have or buy or make and use words like *free*, or *infinite*, *unlimited* or *limitless* with any accuracy.

But if we have faith, we can look at God and use these words with complete justification. If we believe in his involvement with nature, in his involvement with creation throughout the universe. If we believe in his forgiveness, who can say that any limit can be placed on his power and his love?

Those who worship God have been reflecting on this power and love since the earliest times. Before we think on this weekend's scripture let's hear a metrical version of the psalm with which I started this recording: Psalm 63, O God, you are my God alone...

Music: *O God, you are my God alone* (a metrical version of Psalm 63)
Words and music by John L Bell
Sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group, the Iona Community

[Unfortunately our licensing arrangements don't permit the reproduction of the words of this song in this transcript, although they may be found online if you are so equipped, and are certainly in a number of current hymnbooks.]

Reflection (2)

Isaiah paints a very dramatic picture when he tries to encourage the people to turn to God. You need to know that when this was written the people of Israel were in dire straits – the country was dominated by foreign powers. A proportion of the Jews had been taken away to serve the overlord in Babylon. But a return from exile is forecast by the prophet, and a longer term prosperity, if the people will just turn to God. The next verse that we didn't hear read earlier says "Seek the Lord while he may be found – call upon him while he is near!"

The Lord says, "Come, everyone who is thirsty- here is water! Come, you that have no money- buy corn and eat! Come! Buy wine and milk- it will cost you nothing!

Why spend money on what does not satisfy? Why spend your wages and still be hungry? Listen to me and do what I say, and you will enjoy the best food of all.

Listen now, my people, and come to me; come to me, and you will have life! I will make a lasting covenant with you and give you the blessings I promised to David.

Something for nothing? Wine and milk that will cost nothing – listen and you will get food, good food, free food. This is spiritual food, sustenance for the soul, you might say, but a great image to those who are looking for something – who need something, but don't feel worthy to receive.

When God offers something for nothing, there is **no** hidden catch. He waits to be asked, he looks for a response to his love, but then gives and gives and gives again. He doesn't need to balance the books. God doesn't have loss leaders. Ask and you will receive, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you.

There's a lot of nonsense talked about the feeding of the five thousand. No, that's a little unkind. There's a lot of unnecessary analysis goes on over the possibilities and potential explanations of this miracle. You can take it on a number of levels, and some like to take it very literally. Jesus took a small amount of food and in dividing it up turned it into a vast amount of food.

By the way, did you notice the little comment at the end that the feeding of the five thousand doesn't include those women and children who were present. We assume they were fed, and that the miracle was therefore all the greater, but "women and children first" is not a biblical concept.

Others like to take it as a miracle of sharing – when those who were waiting saw the generosity of those who had given in their food to be divided up, they produced the supplies that they had had with them all along – hence the twelve baskets of scraps and leftovers.

But that doesn't really do justice to the text, that is, to the original words that we can find in the earliest versions of the scripture. I think it's pretty clearly intended to be taken as a real miracle. These people were **fed**. This wasn't "something for nothing". Not even buy one get one free.

And it was symbolic that Jesus chose to feed them in such a generous way. They were in a lonely place – a desert place, some translations put it. This wasn't a desert as we understand it, there was grass to sit on. And it wasn't too far for the people to disperse and find their own food – they had walked to this place following Jesus, they could walk away again. They weren't at death's door. Missing their dinner would not have been a massive hardship.

And yet there are echoes of the miracle of the way that God provided food for his people when they were wandering in the desert places after escaping from Egypt and had nothing. And there are echoes of the way that Elijah once fed a hundred men with twenty loaves – read all about it in the 2nd book of Kings! But this is a far greater thing.

And there are advance echoes – if such a thing exists – of the fellowship meals we share together as Christians. Bread and fish were ordinary things, ordinary forms of food, and someone had brought them along as their picnic. But Jesus got the people to sit down, as if this were something fairly formal that the group was doing together. Jesus took the food, he broke it, he blessed it, and he distributed it. How much more explicit do we need to be!!

And one more thing. Jesus was showing concern that the ordinary and the extraordinary, the spiritual **and** the physical needs of the people should be looked after. And they were. 12 baskets of food afterwards – maybe it's symbolic, maybe it's literally one basket per disciple. Either way, it's a lot of food.

And whether or not you go for the literal interpretation of these words, let's step back and consider the essentials of the message in this story for us now – a message about God, like Isaiah's source of limitless water and food. Jesus asked the disciples to deal with the situation, and they couldn't, but what Jesus did was to offer to God all the resources that human power and resourcefulness had come up with, and trust God to take these resources and make them sufficient.

And he did.

God responds to us if we respond to him. By offering something, we suddenly find out how much we **can** offer. That's what we are doing today. We ask God to take what we can offer – what we feel ready to give – and make it enough. Do something good with it. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

We turn again to our God in our prayers for the Church and for the world.

Lord, we hear once again the story of the miraculous feeding of the many, starting with so little. And we ask whether in this story we are the crowd, or the disciples, or perhaps the loaves and the fish.

For we and the world need to be fed, and are craving sustenance. Not just to address physical need but to restore our spiritual balance. We feel the lack and need to be restored. Send your Spirit among us to give us the strength and endurance to be your champions, to share your love through our actions and to be the Body of Christ in the world that he came to save.

We pray for those in your Church who are as the disciples were, channelling your amazing love and generosity to the crowd. The crowd who did not expect and would not recognise your hands to be active among them and for them, miraculous in the transformation of the ordinary into the special, reacting to needs, overflowing with love.

We pray for those who regard their own talents as insufficient and inadequate, that they may nevertheless offer them to you. The world and the Church need ever-renewed resources, women and men of faith reacting with commitment to your call and trusting to your intervention to make up the shortfall in their own perception of their worth.

In this pandemic time we bring before you the whole spectrum of need among our families, in our churches, in our communities and towns, in our cities. The pain and grief of loss that has not found its full expression. The frustration of lockdown, the slow emergence from it, local return to it. Challenges in and out of employment, education suspended and resumed. And everywhere against a background of apprehension and uncertainty, putting faith and trust in the carers and key workers. Lord we ask your blessing on all and your healing power to be with all who are suffering.

Be with our sisters and brothers across the globe as each nation and state writes its own chapter in the history of this tumultuous year. As we place the future of all humanity into your hands help us to take back from you whatever responsibility you know that we in turn can bear, and give us grace to fulfill our own calling.

In the name of Jesus your Son, our Saviour.

Amen

Hymn

I heard the voice of Jesus say (Horatius Bonar, 1808-89)
performed by Nick & Anita Haigh, from the album
Celtic Roots and Rhythms: Heartcry

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Come unto me and rest;
lay down, thou weary one, lay down
thy head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad;
I found in him a resting place,
and he has made me glad.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down, and drink, and live."
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul
revived,
and now I live in him.*

*I heard the voice of Jesus say,
"I am this dark world's Light;
look unto me, thy morn shall rise,
and all thy day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my Star, my Sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk,
till trav'ling days are done.*

Blessing

May God who offers us food and drink without cost sustain us today and every day. May God whose Son fed the crowds give us the spiritual sustenance we need this week and every week.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us all today and for ever. Amen

Music:

Main theme from the motion picture Champions by Carl Davis
from the soundtrack album,
performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra
conducted by Carl Davis

Thank you for listening to this worship recording. Previous similar podcasts, for the period since March, are archived on <https://revdbill.uk>

Credits

Heilig, heilig, heilig (Sanctus), from the *Deutsche Messe* (German Mass) by Franz Schubert was sung by the Youth Choir of St Hedwig's Cathedral, directed by Heinrich Riethmüller and Karl Forster, from the album *Jesu, meine Freude: Greatest Choral Masterpieces*

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty was taken from the album *Hymns and Songs of Worship - the choirs of Britain's cathedrals perform*

O God, you are my God alone (a metrical version of Psalm 63) by John L Bell was sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community, and taken from their album *Psalms of Patience, Protest and Praise*.

I heard the voice of Jesus say was performed by Nick & Anita Haigh, from the album *Celtic Roots and Rhythms: Heartcry*

and

The main theme from the motion picture Champions, by Carl Davis was taken from the film's soundtrack album, performed by the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Carl Davis

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 are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition