

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – 9 August 2020 ('Tenth after Pentecost')

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for 9 August, the tenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2020.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica and my cousin Ella for sharing in the preparation of this week's edition. As this edition is uploaded we are in Scotland and you may notice the odd reference in our words and music.

Our introductory music this week is played by Jennifer and Hazel Wrigley, who are musicians from Kirkwall in Orkney. This tune is called *The Fifth Flight*

Musicⁱ – *The Fifth Flight/Madame Neruda* (excerpt)
from the album *The Watch Stone*
composed by Jennifer Wrigley & J. Scott Skinner
and performed by Jennifer and Hazel Wrigley

Call to Worship: Isaiah 6.6-8

As we come together in spirit to worship God, we remember the call of Isaiah:

One of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.'

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: *Jesus calls us, o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea*
sung by the St Michael's Singers, Coventry Cathedral,
from the album *Morning Gladness*

*Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
of our life's wild, restless sea;
day by day his clear voice soundeth,
saying, "Christian, follow me;"*

*Jesus calls us from the worship
of the vain world's golden store;
from each idol that would keep us,
saying, "Christian, love me more."*

*As, of old, Saint Andrew heart it
by the Galilean lake,
turned from home and toil and kindred,
leaving all for his dear sake.*

*In our joys and in our sorrows,
days of toil and hours of ease,
still he calls, in cares and pleasures,
"Christian, love me more than these."*

*Jesus calls us! By thy mercies,
Saviour, make us hear thy call,
give our hearts to thine obedience,
serve and love thee best of all.*

words by Cecil Frances Alexander, 1818-1895

Prayers

Lord God, your Son chose a team of followers from among many walks of life. A tax collector, a revolutionary, fishermen. With different attitudes and different priorities. Some independent and some with families to look after. They were not instantly active or always on-side. Their answers in group discussion often left something to be desired. They were impatient. They were prejudiced. They didn't always get the point.

And here we are. Are we different? Should we feel superior? No - we come to you with a range of backgrounds and abilities, attitudes and priorities. There are times when we need to look again and again at your Word to realise how we should respond, how we should change. We too don't always get the point.

Forgive us our slowness, our *un*readiness to change, our frustration at others which Jesus would call *a plank in our eye*. Help us not just week by week but hour by hour to look for opportunities to be better followers of Christ, more deserving of your love.

We have the advantage over the disciples that we know the later chapters of the story that saw them dispersed yet coming together again to found the Church. We have in our hands the testament they left behind, the testimony to the power of the Spirit, the right-ness of the Gospel. And we know that Jesus died and rose again and lives forever with you and in you.

We thank and praise you for all that you are and offer to you all that we can be. Accept the time we spend drafting, crafting, recording and distributing, listening to and sharing in our worship in these times. Reassure us when we lose hope and the vision for the future of the Church becomes less clear.

We turn again to the pattern of prayer for all times, for every day, that 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: 1 Kings 19.9-18

⁹ There he went into a cave and spent the night. And the word of the Lord came to him: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?'

¹⁰ He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

¹¹ The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. ¹² After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' ¹⁴ He replied, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too.'

¹⁵The Lord said to him, 'Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷Jehu will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazael, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel – all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.'

Reflection (1)

In his long poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, Walter Scott muses on how the pull of someone's country and birthplace can affect them when it becomes possible to return there after an absence, also despairs that anyone would never feel this way.

*Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,
This is my own, my native land!
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
As home his footsteps he hath turn'd,
From wandering on a foreign strand!*

I won't say that I spend my time in Coventry yearning to be in Scotland, even less itching to be back in Glasgow, but when I am, or more often when I pass central Glasgow on the M74 on the way up to the west coast, part of me is full of joy not just at being there but belonging. Despite the accent having thoroughly faded since leaving in 1966, I can say in the words of the old music-hall song, *I belong to Glasgow*.

Erica was born in Lancashire – her accent has gone the same way as mine after her own tour of England, and both of us now give away our 36 years in Coventry with the odd local turn of phrase. But the sense of belonging persists.

There's a worship song that reminds us the Jewish nation was a *travelling, wandering race*. After their departure from Egypt they came to rest – if you can call it rest – back in Canaan where Jacob and his sons had lived and farmed but where Abraham had himself been brought to settle – read all about it in Genesis 12. By the Old Testament account, everyone was related. Canaan was the name of one of Noah's grandchildren, the son of Ham. I won't digress, even if a discussion of the Jews as eternal settlers who never quite settled could be fruitful. My point is that along the way there were significant places that would always evoke feelings of belonging and significance in the Jews and Mount Horeb, the location of our story of Elijah was one of them.

The passage tells of a turning point in Elijah's career. He is on the run from Jezebel and her husband Ahab after bringing about the slaughter of the priests of Baal. He feels with some justification that everyone is out to get him. He hides. God speaks to him, you might think to give him some backbone – but that's unfair. He is at a low ebb, and for a prophet who is trying to get the nation to reinstate their former faith without dilution or deviation that would have been a lower ebb than most of us have to cope with, ever.

If you read further in the First Book of Kings you will find that however dramatically this passage concludes it was not yet the end of the road for Ahab. His reign staggers on for another couple of chapters and it is not until chapter 9 of the **Second** Book of Kings that Jezebel meets her grisly end. Elijah still had a part to play but it was his successors that were to oversee the reckoning with the last remnants of Baal-worship. It's not a pretty tale but then he and Elisha were not dealing with lovely people!

But Horeb, the scene of the delivery of the Ten Commandments to the Jewish nation, location of what should have remained one of the pillars of their faith, was where Elijah was taught a lesson about God that we can learn today as we feel overloaded and under the

cosh, not seeing a way through the problems of the day. God's message to each of us can and does come in the whisper, the undramatic communication, not necessarily in thundering revelation and lightning strikes. In the still, small voice of calm.

Music: *Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways.*
words by John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)
sung by Choir of King's College, Cambridge,
accompanied by Benjamin Bayl, conducted by Sir Stephen Cleobury

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways!
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind,
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise;
in deeper reverence, praise.*

*O Sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity
interpreted by love!
interpreted by love!*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word,
rise up and follow thee;
rise up and follow thee.*

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace;
the beauty of thy peace.*

*Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,
O still, small voice of calm;
O still, small voice of calm.*

Scripture Matthew 14.22-33

²² Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³ After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴ and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵ Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. 'It's a ghost,' they said, and cried out in fear.

²⁷ But Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.' ²⁸ 'Lord, if it's you,' Peter replied, 'tell me to come to you on the water.'²⁹ 'Come,' he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus. ³⁰ But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!'

³¹ Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' ³² And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Then those who were in the boat worshipped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'

Reflection (2)

Every now and then during the Galilee ministry of Jesus we hear of him getting into a boat, or of the disciples getting into a boat and fishing or passing from one side of the sea to the other – sometimes it's as if Jesus had his own personal ferry service. In today's passage the disciples are travelling from point to point rather than fishing, but they are at home in a vessel that was the regular workplace for some of them. A working boat. A familiar place and usually a comfortable one.

As we publish this edition of the podcast Erica and I are in western Scotland and off to visit the island of Coll for a few nights. It lies to the west of Mull, and so to the north west of Iona, which will be just in view if the weather is clear. We will get there by boat, by car ferry from Oban.

We encounter Simon Peter in today's Gospel reading in *his* boat. His place of work, his familiar place. Somewhere that he knew what he was doing, felt confident and competent.

I have admired in the past the way that professionals working boats of all sizes seem so capable. Let's think of where we are comfortable and know what we are doing, what we need to do next. Let's think of our comfortable place as our boat.

We have no doubt striven hard to be where we are. I am not saying that being in our respective figurative boats is an easy life. I am not saying that the navigation, the maintenance, the day-to-day running of our boat is straightforward. It often isn't. But if you think about it, the Christian life is a sequence of invitations or promptings from God and Jesus and God in Jesus to get *out* of the boat.

So far as I recall, Peter never walked on water again. Whether we should take anything from that, I don't know. But this episode was for him the ultimate move from comfortable to uncomfortable, and I like to think that, if he ever hesitated in later life, to respond to a sudden urging to take on a new challenge, the merest remembrance of this day would have been enough to help him take the next step. He went so far as to step out of the boat. He moved from safety to danger, because Jesus asked him to.

Why did he do that? He called out to Jesus – Lord, if that's really you, call me to come and join you. It might have been almost a joke, a brave one in the face of fear that the disciples were seeing a ghost. Let's get this ghost to address me directly – then we'll see what's real and what isn't. But Jesus took Peter at his word. He accepted this crazy offer.

Perhaps Peter wasn't joking. The disciples had just witnessed the feeding of the five thousand. They realised they were living in extra-ordinary times. Impossible things were possible. They were also living in dangerous times – the beginning of the chapter sees the reporting of the death of John the Baptist, murdered by Herod at his daughter's request. If Peter wanted to experience a miracle himself, or to live dangerously, he found a way of doing all of that, in stepping out of his boat.

In less dramatic fashion the other fisherman disciples had stepped out of their boats to follow Jesus. Those employed in other ways had left their own safe situations, the everyday and the normal. In effect they had stepped out of their boats.

What does your boat look like? What is the safe and familiar situation that Jesus challenges you to leave behind?

I love the way we can find resonances in scripture with things that happen to us now, or challenges we are faced with. Each day Erica and I read a Psalm – we are actually echoing the daily pattern of readings in the Abbey at Iona. Time and again in recent years we have come across words that are so evocative of where we have been and how God has sustained us through trouble. It's as if the words have been left there for us to notice.

It can't be coincidence that Gospel stories like this from two thousand years ago can be brought to bear on our own situation. We are not fishermen, but still Jesus calls us. We don't ply our trade on the water, but there is still a sense in which we should consider whether we should step out of the boat and into the unknown. We should certainly look and pray for the confidence to respond, if we see Jesus some way off – on the water, as it were - and want to close the gap.

So think of your own situation now as we pray:

Lord Jesus, I look to see if you are walking on the sea again. When you invite me to come to you across the water, help me to have the faith to step out of this boat in which I travel.

Amen

Music: *Bless the Lord* (from a Kenyan worship song)
sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community
from the album, *There is one among us*

Prayers of Intercession

We bless God for his creation of us and all that's around us, his gift to us of his Son, and his promise to us that when we act for good in his world he is with us and within us, guiding us and empowering us. Let us pray.

*Bless the Lord; bless the Lord;
bless the Lord; there is no other God.*

Lord, we thank and bless you for your being and for all you have done in and for your world. Now we pray you will help us to respond to your call, leave behind what is comfortable and step out onto the sea of uncertainty, but with our eyes set on you and confident you will support us.

Give us, give to your Church, a fresh challenge in these challenging times. Show us a new route through the waves of life and equip us to care for others

We bless you that even after persecution and suppression, even after wars between different sects, even after mass disillusion among those who were formerly faithful, the Body of Christ is still present in the world and ready to do your will on earth.

*Bless the Lord; bless the Lord;
bless the Lord; there is no other God.*

We thank you that our society and the world is still blessed with those whose calling is to care for others. In our hospitals and doctors' surgeries, in medical roles and in support. When the world waits and surveys the statistics we pray you will be with those whose work does not stop, whose times of respite are only a pause before resuming the fight.

We bless you that humanity contains this spirit, knowing it is your Spirit, knowing that your will for the world is that we should love one another.

*Bless the Lord; bless the Lord;
bless the Lord; there is no other God.*

Lord, the summer is for some a time of rest and holidays and we pray for the benefits to feed through into right relationships, calm decision making and fruitful resumption of work and education when it comes. We pray for those who have lost their employment, for those who are torn between obligations of work and family care, for those whose holiday plans have actually not worked out.

We bless you for the summer's opportunities, and where there is no respite and holidays are unknown we pray for those seeking the best way to share the earth's resources fairly, shrink the gap between rich and poor.

*Bless the Lord; bless the Lord;
bless the Lord; there is no other God.*

Lord we are members of overlapping and interacting families – our relatives, our close neighbours, our communities, the human family itself. We want to know the best way to reflect your love to all members of all of these families without wasting the resources we bring and without missing opportunities to make a difference.

Thinking of the disaster in Lebanon and those affected by it, through the loss of loved ones, the loss of their property or the prospect of economic problems and loss of access to imported food, medication and other supplies... we pray for those whose role or calling is to respond to this crisis. We pray for the people of Beirut and Lebanon. We pray for leadership with the right motivation and the inspiration to do good for all people.

We bless you for the work of the agencies that we can support and for your personal call to each of us to fulfill an individual vocation in your service.

*Bless the Lord; (my sisters...my brothers...you children...you elders...together)
bless the Lord;
bless the Lord; there is no other God.*

In Jesus' name we pray

Amen

Hymn

O love that wilt not let me go by George Matheson, 1842-1906
sung by the Scottish Festival Singers,
from the album *The Hymn Makers: Scottish Hymns*

O Love, that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
that in Thine ocean depths its flow
may richer, fuller be.

O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
and feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

O Light, that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
my heart restores its borrowed ray,
that in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
may brighter, fairer be.

O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
and from the ground there blossoms red
life that shall endless be.

Blessing

May the Lord Jesus call you from wherever you are to go to him, knowing that he is with us and will lift us up above the waves and the water.

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:

Highland Cathedral by Koeber & Korb, performed by the
Pipes and Drums and Band of the Royal Corps of Signals
From the album, *100 Greatest Military Band Favourites*

Thank you for listening to our podcast. Do feed back any comments and suggestions – they are always welcome. An archive of our previous editions is on our website.

Credits

An excerpt from the track *The Fifth Flight/Madame Neruda* composed by Jennifer Wrigley & J. Scott Skinner and performed by Jennifer and Hazel Wrigley was taken from their album *The Watch Stone*

Jesus calls us, o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea was sung by the St Michael's Singers, Coventry Cathedral, from the album *Morning Gladness*

Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways was sung by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge, accompanied by Benjamin Bayl, conducted by Sir Stephen Cleobury

Bless the Lord (from a Kenyan worship song) was sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community from the album, *There is one among us*

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Highland Cathedral by Koeber & Korb, was performed by the Pipes and Drums and Band of the Royal Corps of Signals and is on the album, *100 Greatest Military Band Favourites*

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ⁱⁱ Bible quotations are all taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition