

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – August 30 2020 ('Thirteenth after Pentecost')

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for the 30 August, the thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost, 2020. It is also our late summer Bank Holiday weekend and we hope anyone who has been able to take advantage finds it a time of relaxation and refreshment!

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and I would like to thank Erica, Alison and Elliot for their help in preparing this week's edition.

This is an anthem composed to be sung as part of the *Poldark* series on TV, but detached from that plot still gives us an introduction to our theme for this podcast episode: *Greater love*.

Introductory Musicⁱ – *Greater love*
composed by Anne Dudley & Debbie Horsfield
from the album *Poldark - The Ultimate Collection (Music from TV Series 1-5)*

Call to Worship: Romans 12.9-21

As we open our worship we are reminded of what love in action means – in words of Paul writing his letter to the Romans. Words from chapter 12

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practise hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud... Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

A hymn in praise of God and of the service of his people through the ages. Sung in a very echoey St Paul's Cathedral, *For all the saints*...

Hymn: *For all the saints*
St Paul's Cathedral Choir with Malcolm Archer
from the album *22 Great Hymns from St. Paul's*

For all the saints, who from their labours rest,
who thee by faith before the world confessed,
thy name, O Jesu, be forever blessed.
Alleluia, alleluia!

Thou wast their Rock, their fortress and their might;
thou, Lord, their captain in the well fought fight;
thou, in the darkness drear, their one true light.
Alleluia, alleluia!

O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,
fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,
and win with them the victor's crown of gold.
Alleluia, alleluia!

O blest communion, fellowship divine!
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;
Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.
Alleluia, alleluia!

From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,
through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,
singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost:
Alleluia, alleluia!

Words by William Walsham How (1823-1897)

Prayers

Let us pray

Lord, again we come to you, sharing your words even though we are hearing them at different times and in different places, reflecting on the lives of your ancient prophets and the experience of your Son's disciples, trying to echo their commitment in this world that is so much changed from their times and even transformed from our own norms of just a few months ago.

Be with us where we are. Show us how to do the right thing. Accept even this online worship as a sacrifice of praise. What can we give you? We give you our attention and our time. But we want this to represent our offer of our lives. Help us to work out what it means for each of us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus.

We praise you for all that you have been, even though our words will never do justice to your majesty and power.

We thank you for all that you have given, even though nothing we could give in return will ever match your love and care.

We confess that our attention is not always on you, that our priorities are often self-centred and that we fail to seek out opportunities to show love to our neighbours. Re-shape us in your image, guide us through your Spirit into the right paths and forgive us.

We offer this prayer to you in the name of Jesus, who himself was and is the Way, the path we should follow. And in his words we gather up all of our prayers into one:

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: Jeremiah 15.15-21

Lord, you understand;
remember me and care for me.
Avenge me on my persecutors.
You are long-suffering – do not take me away;
think of how I suffer reproach for your sake.

¹⁶ When your words came, I ate them;
they were my joy and my heart's delight,
for I bear your name,
Lord God Almighty.

¹⁷ I never sat in the company of revellers,
never made merry with them;
I sat alone because your hand was on me
and you had filled me with indignation.

¹⁸ Why is my pain unending
and my wound grievous and incurable?
You are to me like a deceptive brook,
like a spring that fails.

¹⁹ Therefore this is what the Lord says:
'If you repent, I will restore you
that you may serve me;
if you utter worthy, not worthless, words,
you will be my spokesman.

Let this people turn to you,
but you must not turn to them.

²⁰ I will make you a wall to this people,
a fortified wall of bronze;
they will fight against you
but will not overcome you,
for I am with you
to rescue and save you,'
declares the Lord.

²¹ 'I will save you from the hands of the wicked
and deliver you from the grasp of the cruel.'

Reflection (1)

Think of the Old Testament stories of those who were called to prophesy or speak truth to power for God. The most prominent of them see features I have talked about before. Jeremiah, the prophet whose name we associate with predictions of disaster, can be compared to Moses, Isaiah and Ezekiel. Like Moses he tries to get off the hook by protesting that he cannot speak well enough. Like Isaiah his mouth is touched to sanctify what comes out of it, and like Ezekiel he is literally given the words of God. Jeremiah 1.9 – *I have put words into your mouth*. That's where that one comes from.

And Jeremiah resolutely and faithfully follows his commission.

But like many faithful followers of God – and I wouldn't omit myself or anyone listening from that group – Jeremiah found it hard to persevere and keep at it. A prophet who was trying to speak the truth about a bad future in a society which had hopes of things getting better was never going to have an easy life. You can almost imagine his pronouncements being interrupted by banner-carrying crowds: 'Make Judah Great Again!' for now, it wasn't going to happen.

And although we can't assume the narrative of the book is completely chronological, by the time we get to chapter 15 you can see how Jeremiah is worn down. Verse 10:

*Alas, my mother, that you gave me birth,
a man with whom the whole land strives and contends!
I have neither lent nor borrowed,
yet everyone curses me.*

Does every prophet get to this point? Remember – and we used the passage a couple of weeks ago – how Elijah went and hid on Mount Horeb and told God everyone was trying to kill him? If life was going to be easy for the prophets I should think that would mean their work was not actually necessary. The story of Jesus includes set-backs or at least times of doubt. Times of temptation not to go forward or to choose an easy route.

Jeremiah continues to query why he should feel and be treated in this way. He accuses God of not giving him his just reward for his input, his perseverance and his adherence to the faith. He even cites his willingness to become Billy No-Mates.

*When your words came, I ate them;
they were my joy and my heart's delight,
for I bear your name,
Lord God Almighty.
I never sat in the company of revellers,
never made merry with them;
I sat alone because your hand was on me
and you had filled me with indignation.*

He suggests that he's been led up the garden path and what looked like a reliable promise from God will not be delivered.

*Why is my pain unending
and my wound grievous and incurable?
You are to me like a deceptive brook,
like a spring that fails.*

But then Jeremiah realises that God is giving him a boost, that his promise has not changed even if Jeremiah is weary of the whole thing.

*Therefore this is what the Lord says:
'If you repent, I will restore you
that you may serve me;
if you utter worthy, not worthless, words,
you will be my spokesman.*

*Let this people turn to you,
but you must not turn to them...
they will fight against you
but will not overcome you,
for I am with you
to rescue and save you,'*

It's about not compromising. It is about accepting that you may stand out from the crowd. Even being different is part of the sacrifice you make when you try to keep to God's standards of behaviour, try to set an example. But this is how God works in his world. Never since the story of Noah has he simply imposed change on the world without human agency – we are part of his purpose and the channels through which he communicates

his promise.

Jesus gives his disciples an even stronger version of this message in our Gospel passage for today – which Elliot will read after this Nicaraguan worship song, *Sent by the Lord am I*.

Song: *Sent by the Lord am I*
A worship song from Nicaragua, arranged and sung
by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community
from the album *Sent by the Lord*
Word from oral tradition translated by Jorge Maldonado

[Unfortunately our licensing arrangements don't permit the reproduction of the words of this song in this transcript.]

Scripture: Matthew 16:21-28

²¹ From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

²² Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 'Never, Lord!' he said. 'This shall never happen to you!'

²³ Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.'

²⁴ Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever wants to save their life^[a] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. ²⁶ What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?

²⁷ For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

²⁸ 'Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.'

Reflection (2)

Oh Peter! Just when it was going so well.

In adjacent paragraphs in our Bible. *You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church.*

Then *Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me.*

Poor old Peter. His life seems to be a catalogue of ups and downs. There are times when he just can't seem to get it right. I will not dwell on what must have been a grievous blow to his self esteem when Jesus told him in no uncertain terms that he was just an obstacle to his mission. But as ever – and I know I have said this before – it is indicative of Jesus choice of Peter and of us as disciples that he and we are ordinary human beings first of all, with all our natural flaws and failings. And perhaps saints afterwards.

But it is the second phase of this passage I want to say more about – this has a resonance with Jeremiah's complaint we spoke about earlier.

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Jesus lived at a time when the Romans, with their deterrent punishment of crucifixion, were dominating the known world. Perhaps 'take up your cross' was a well-known metaphor for accepting a hard time as part of the deal. Taking the rough with the smooth, or even taking the rough with the rough.

But the message is clear. There is a price to be paid, a sacrifice to be made along the path to the promise of eternal life. Giving demanding service to God. Some jobs are known as sinecures. From the Latin words meaning care-free. The job of Christian is not like that. Taking up your cross does not mean being subject to Christ's death even if for some it has. But our approach should track all the way back to the words that David spoke to Araunah the Jebusite when he offered David land for an altar, building materials and oxen for free – in 2 Samuel 24 v24. David said 'I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God offerings that cost me nothing.

Today in the daily morning prayers of the Iona Community the same words are repeated as the service ends. *We will not offer to God offerings that cost us nothing.*

I love the way that our Church's recently-retired General Secretary John Proctor put it in his commentary:

Carrying the cross will mean different things for different people – it depends on our circumstances. But whoever we are, and whatever the life we lead, we have not signed up for a cost-free Christianity.

Where might the cost be for you and me today? It might come from adding to or varying the time that we do the church-type things. Small fry but costly to someone who thrives on order and routine. It might come from accepting that there are some jobs we don't get to do without training. It might come from realising that we can not pick and choose who we are in company with as we travel this road. For God calls the fishermen as well as the tax collectors, the zealots and the quiet contemplative sorts.

A more major sacrifice would be to postpone or abandon some possible secular career options because of a commitment we feel called to make to God.

I have known all of the above occur in the local church, and they will again. Let's try to welcome whatever way God calls us to serve, and the sacrifice that will go with it. God will surely welcome our response, and use it to make his world a better place.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

We join together in prayers for ourselves, for those we love, for the Church and the world.

God said to Isaiah, *who will go for me, and whom shall I send?*

Lord, we are waiting for your call, the direction in which you want us to travel, our next destination on our journey to you. Accept our offering of ourselves, and help us to see that when you call us to service you have already spotted potential we may not know we have. You will show us how to find strength we didn't know we possessed and you will

not be frustrated by our false starts and slip ups.

God said to Jeremiah, *Let this people turn to you, but you must not turn to them.*

Lord, once we have accepted your call, help us to reject compromise. When we set standards for ourselves, help us to keep to them. We know you want a response from your people. May ours be true and constant. Give us stamina in the race that lies ahead of us and all who follow Christ.

God said to Moses, *I will help you speak and will teach you what to say*

Lord, none of your ancient prophets and patriarchs who took up your work and guided your people were flawless. None of them were immune to self doubt. Some tried to run away. None were word perfect all the time. Yet you gave them words, you set them tasks and they became strong in your service and true to your purposes. May we be successors to their commitment and constant in your service. Put words into **our** mouths.

Together may we constitute a purposeful part of the Body of Christ – your Church at work in the world. May our efforts be given focus as we try with all your people to overcome the challenges of this pandemic year. May we not be so enmired in administration that we neglect the commission of Christ to take the Gospel to all and serve our fellow women and men across your world.

Lord, the world so needs the influence of men and women of integrity and purpose, working to bring equality where it is lacking, resolution where there is conflict and healing where there is hurt.

We pray for those whose stories come and go but whose suffering endures far longer than headlines. This week the population of Kenosha, Wisconsin, reacting with anger to violence. Give those who are in positions of power the inspiration to bring together in peace all races, faiths, communities. Jesus spoke of loving our neighbours. Show us who our neighbours are, and what love can be.

In our own community and nation may the decision makers find a way to converge on solutions and policies that bring hope where there is so much despair and frustration, putting people before politics.

In all of this show us what we can offer, what we ought to sacrifice for the common good as we make a fresh commitment each to take up our own cross.

In the name of Jesus who died on the cross yet rose and lives and reigns with you, Father, and the Holy Spirit. One God for ever.

Amen

A hymn based on Psalm 90, seeking God's help, as freely given now as it always has been. *O God, our help in ages past.*

Hymn: *O God our help in ages past* (by Isaac Watts, based on Psalm 90)
sung by the Choir of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, with
the Congregation of The Royal Naval College Chapel Greenwich, its
Brass Ensemble and Gordon St. John Clarke
from the album *20 Favourite Hymns*
from the Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich.

*O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
our shelter from the stormy blast,
and our eternal home;*

*A thousand ages in thy sight
are like an evening gone,
short as the watch that ends the night
before the rising sun.*

*Under the shadow of thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure.*

*Time, like an ever-rolling stream,
bears all its sons away;
they fly forgotten, as a dream
dies at the opening day.*

*Before the hills in order stood,
or earth received her frame,
from everlasting thou art God,
to endless years the same.*

*O God, our help in ages past,
our hope for years to come,
be thou our guard while troubles last,
and our eternal home.*

Blessing

May God who reassured Jeremiah and put words into his mouth give us resources to be advocates of love in his world.

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: *Nocturne, Op. 9: No. 2 in E-Flat Major* by Frédéric Chopin
performed by Arthur Rubinstein
from the album, *Chopin: Nocturnes*

Thank you for listening to our podcast, and thank you for all comments and feedback. A full archive of all of our podcasts is on our website [<https://revdbill.uk>].

Credits

The anthem *Greater love*, composed by Anne Dudley & Debbie Horsfield was taken from the album *Poldark - The Ultimate Collection (Music from TV Series 1-5)*

For all the saints was sung by the St Paul's Cathedral Choir with Malcolm Archer, and taken from their album *22 Great Hymns from St. Paul's*

Sent by the Lord am I, a worship song from Nicaragua, was arranged and sung by the Wild Goose Worship Group of the Iona Community and taken from the album *Sent by the Lord*

O God our help in ages past was taken from the album *20 Favourite Hymns from the Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich* and performed by the college's Choir, congregation and brass ensemble, conducted by Gordon St. John Clarke

and

Nocturne, Op. 9: No. 2 in E-Flat Major by Frédéric Chopin was performed by Arthur Rubinstein and taken from his album *Chopin: Nocturnes*

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