

+ Crowe Hill + Fordingbridge + Horton Heath + Ringwood +

## Sunday Service 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020

### Welcome to this Sunday's Service

Theme: Proclaiming Difficult Truths

### Lectionary Texts:

Jeremiah 20:7–13 Psalm 69:7–18 Romans 6:1b–11 Matthew 10:24–39

### Keeping in Touch

We are finding out how to safely re-open our five church buildings. Our church leadership groups are discussing what needs to be done and exploring our readiness to move on. Risk assessments are being written. We must not compromise health and safety, and we should not undertake half-baked activities just because we could. But, there are probably things we could do in the near future, which might be different to what we used to do. We need to be open to one another, to help each other discern what God is saying to us today.

“Mission is finding out what God is doing and joining in.” (Former Archbishop Rowan Williams)

At the moment groups of up to six people can meet outdoors with social distancing. Mike and Louise invite you to phone us and arrange to come round to the manse garden for an open-air drink and a chat (Tel: 473407). You will be most welcome.

I'm not a great fan of special Sundays. There can be so many competing themes! Today I am aware of the following: 1) Father's Day, 2) Midsummer's Day, 3) Windrush Sunday, 4) closing day of Refugee Week.

### Call to Worship

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever;  
with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations.  
I will declare that your love stands firm forever,  
that you have established your faithfulness in heaven itself. (Psalm 89:1-2 NIV)

# Hymn: 'As water to the thirsty' (STF 441, SOF 2/659)

*A hymn to begin our worship, with poetic themes chosen to fit in with mid-summer's day.*

<https://youtu.be/DwTrgFUSFZI>

1. As water to the thirsty,  
as beauty to the eyes,  
as strength that follows weakness,  
as truth instead of lies,  
as songtime and springtime  
and summertime to be,  
so is my Lord,  
my living Lord,  
so is my Lord to me.

2. Like calm in place of clamour,  
like peace that follows pain,  
like meeting after parting,  
like sunshine after rain,  
like moonlight and starlight  
and sunlight on the sea,

so is my Lord,  
my living Lord,  
so is my Lord to me.

3. As sleep that follows fever,  
as gold instead of grey,  
as freedom after bondage,  
as sunrise to the day,  
as home to the traveller  
and all we long to see,  
so is my Lord,  
my living Lord,  
so is my Lord to me.

Words: Timothy Dudley-Smith (b.  
1926)

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## Prayers:

Father God thank you for your perfect fathering –  
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;  
Shepherded and nurtured; disciplined and challenged  
So I can flourish in your purpose and plan for me  
And bear my Father's image more fully still.

Father God thank you for your perfect example –  
I praise you because you show all fathers how to love;  
To shepherd and nurture; discipline and challenge  
So their sons and daughters can flourish in this world as you have planned,  
And carry your presence to all they meet.

Father God, bless all fathers today  
with wisdom, with patience, with courage  
And above all with love for their children.

Father God, bless all children today  
with eagerness to learn, with a desire to please  
And above all with love for their fathers.

Father God bless our memories of our own fathers  
Help us to be thankful for the best that they could do  
For the love which we shared in good and in difficult times. Amen

*Another Father's Day prayer on Youtube:*

<https://youtu.be/y17k8weOjz4>

## 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

## Hymn: Speak O Lord (STF 161, SOF 4/2032)

*A song to help us approach difficult texts from today's lectionary.*

<https://youtu.be/ubRIJj8xkds>

1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you  
to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;  
shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen  
today  
in our acts of love and our deeds of  
faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all your purposes, for your glory.

2. Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes

in the radiance of your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes  
to see  
your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;  
help us grasp the heights of your plans  
for us.  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of  
time  
that will echo down through eternity.

And by grace we'll stand on your  
promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with  
us.  
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built

and the earth is filled with your glory.

Words: Keith Getty (b. 1974) and  
Stuart Townend (b. 1963)  
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## Prayer for Illumination

Gracious God, as we turn to your Word for us,  
May your Holy Spirit rest upon us.  
Help us to be steadfast in our hearing, in our speaking,  
In our believing, and in our living. Amen

## Bible Reading: Jeremiah 20:7-13 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup>O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.

<sup>8</sup>For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!" For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long.

<sup>9</sup>If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.

<sup>10</sup>For I hear many whispering. Terror is on every side! "Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my close friends, watching for my fall. "Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him."

<sup>11</sup>But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten.

<sup>12</sup>O Lord of hosts, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.

<sup>13</sup>Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.

## Bible Reading: Matthew 10:24–39 (ESV)

<sup>24</sup>"A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master.

<sup>25</sup>It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.

<sup>26</sup>“So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.

<sup>27</sup>What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops.

<sup>28</sup>And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

<sup>29</sup>Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father.

<sup>30</sup>But even the hairs of your head are all numbered.

<sup>31</sup>Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.

<sup>32</sup>So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven,

<sup>33</sup>but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.

<sup>34</sup>“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

<sup>35</sup>For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

<sup>36</sup>And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.

<sup>37</sup>Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

<sup>38</sup>And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

<sup>39</sup>Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

# Sermon

## Introduction

Today the lectionary leads us to difficult passages of Scripture. But, since we are in difficult times, perhaps we need to engage with difficult texts?

## Jeremiah

You can feel the anguish and pain of Jeremiah as he writes about his situation. He feels compelled by God to be God’s prophetic voice, he must speak out, he cannot hold his message in. He speaks to the people of Jerusalem as the city faces the crushing force of the Babylonian army. Jeremiah preaches doom and destruction.

This is not going to go well for the people. Jeremiah calls to them to repent and change their ways and become the people God wants them to be, or failing that, he advises them to give in to the inevitable, to submit to the Babylonians, to surrender and negotiate for peace terms, to discover what good might eventually emerge out of the terrible purging process which lies ahead. This is not a popular message! Yet through it all, despite Jeremiah's many worries, he affirms that "The Lord is with me." (v. 11) Jeremiah finds comfort and strength in the assurance that God is with him, both through the difficult times he endures along with all the people, and through his task as God's prophet.

## Jesus

The words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel make a good pairing with the reading from Jeremiah. Jesus also talks about the cost of sharing an unpopular message. But what is the message? It isn't stated in the text itself. Jesus refers to the message, it is his teaching (v.25); it is what he has told them (v.27); and it is about acknowledging Jesus in public (v.32); so you need to look elsewhere in the gospel to read all the teachings of Jesus which make up the content of this message. Jesus did summarise it a few verses earlier: "The kingdom of heaven has come near." (Matt 10:7)

The other thing this reading doesn't explain is why the message is going to be unpopular. What makes this 'Kingdom of Heaven' so detestable? It is surely the fear of the new and the different. We don't like change, even if the old ways have their faults, we have become comfortable with them. The saying goes; 'Better the devil that you know, than the devil that you don't know.' And that is exactly how the people feared Jesus and his new ways and new teaching (Matt 9:34, 10:25, 12:24-28). This fear re-echoes in our world today, as we contemplate how our emergence from the coronavirus pandemic around the world might re-emerge into something different, a 'new normal' for society and for the church. We fear the change as much as we fear the virus. Some people around the world have defied the lockdown guidance primarily because they want to deny the risk of social change. And some people hope that what we re-emerge into might be the same, unchanged and unchallenging, familiar and comfortable.

Jesus sets out for his disciples the task he has for them. They should have no fear (v.26). They should speak and proclaim (v.27). They should publicly acknowledge him (v.32). Last week we read the beginning of the chapter where Jesus listed the broader task he had for them in greater detail (v.5-8), but today our reading focusses on the message itself and its impact.

The consequence of proclaiming this message is fearful. We don't like to read this passage. It isn't 'gentle Jesus meek and mild.' Jesus lists lots of nasty things for his disciples to fear: they will be identified with the devil (v.25); their body can be killed (v.28); they might fall to the ground (v.29); Jesus brings a sword (v.34); families will be divided (v.35-37); they need to carry their cross (v.38); they might lose their life

(v.39). And if you go on to read the verses before and after today's reading you could add more to this list. There is plenty here to fear.

And yet Jesus offers assurance. "Do not be afraid," he says (v.26, 31). Their souls will be saved (v.28). And then there are the beautiful and much-quoted verses about the sparrows which are known and cared for by God, and the assurance that God loves us and knows us so well that it is as if God could count every hair on our heads (v.29-31). They will be acknowledged before their heavenly Father (v.32). And they will find life (v.39). And as I said before, if you read on before and after there are more words of comfort and assurance by Jesus to accompany his other words of warning.

### **Us today**

As we plan for the planet to re-emerge from the lockdown brought about by the coronavirus pandemic, we need to proclaim difficult truths. People are speaking a message into the political and social and economic spheres about our need to do things differently. If as a global society we could agree to invest so much money and time and ingenuity into enduring the pandemic itself; and managed to do these things so fast and relatively smoothly; then surely it will be possible to continue to invest in a future which will not be the same as before, but will be different to what life was like before the pandemic. We have proved as a global community what we can do. Now we need to keep on.

Therefore many organisations, groups and campaigns are proposing new programmes for the way ahead. They have a message to proclaim. And will we fear what we hear, or will we agree to go boldly on into new ways? In the United Reformed Church two key discussion documents have been produced: 'Ready for the new "normal"'<sup>1</sup> and 'New reality, same Mission'<sup>2</sup> both excellent thought-provoking possibilities for the way ahead for the church. Most Methodist publications by contrast have tended to be very practical, but a recent blog by Jude Levermore catches that sense of visionary possibilities.<sup>3</sup> One of the best bits of writing I have come across is by TearFund, I highly recommend their 'Rebooted' material. The website resources are good, and the main paper 'The World Rebooted' is an excellent read.<sup>4</sup>

I attended a national Zoom meeting a couple of days ago. It had an environmental theme, but we reviewed the proposed papers and campaigns concerning the challenges of re-emerging from lockdown which were in the pipeline. They are not all exclusively environmental in their theme, but they all acknowledge that no matter what our concern for economics, or trade, or racial justice, etc, we cannot ignore our dependence on a harmonious connectedness to the natural world around us which

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<sup>1</sup> <https://urc.org.uk/new-normal.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://urc.org.uk/same-mission>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/news/the-methodist-blog/the-spirit-might-be-asking-us-to-be-brave-to-not-cling-to-the-old-but-to-be-the-pilgrim-people-of-the-moment/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.tearfund.org/about-you/action/the-world-rebooted/>

sustains all of life. Some were Christian, some were multifaith, and some were multi-agency. Not all have been published yet, so watch out for future publications. For example, I think a significant letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury and other major faith leaders will soon be on its way to the Prime Minister. I point you towards the wide-ranging Climate Coalition and its Green Recovery Plan and its recent letter to Boris Johnson.<sup>5</sup> Also see the big 'Build Back Better' Campaign.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, due to devolved responsibilities it is becoming more difficult to campaign to the UK government about these issues, many concerns now have to be address to our devolved governments. In Scotland the Build Back Better movement is proposing a 'Just and Green Recovery'. It has very broad support and endorsement, and here is a link to the Friends of the Earth website.<sup>7</sup>

### Conclusion

If you were to preach that: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near' what would it look like to you? Is it the comfortable same old way of doing things? Or is it scarily and daringly new and thrilling? Jesus preached to the lost, harassed and helpless sheep, he offered them a new future because he had compassion on them. What do we have to say to our churches, to our neighbours, to our communities, and to our governments? Is it bold and scary enough? Remember: "Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."

**Song:** Will you come and follow me (STF 673, R+S 558, SOF 2/1120)

<https://youtu.be/pnXOEUS7BBM>

1. Will you come and follow me  
if I but call your name?  
Will you go where you don't know  
and never be the same?  
Will you let my love be shown,  
will you let my name be known,  
will you let my life be grown  
in you and you in me?

2. Will you leave yourself behind  
if I but call your name?  
Will you care for cruel and kind  
and never be the same?

Will you risk the hostile stare  
should your life attract or scare?  
Will you let me answer prayer  
in you and you in me?

3. Will you let the blinded see  
if I but call your name?  
Will you set the prisoners free  
and never be the same?  
Will you kiss the leper clean,  
and do such as this unseen,  
and admit to what I mean  
in you and you in me?

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theclimatecoalition.org/recoveryplan>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.buildbackbetteruk.org/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://foe.scot/campaign/just-green-recovery-for-scotland/>

4. Will you love the 'you' you hide  
if I but call your name?  
Will you quell the fear inside  
and never be the same?  
Will you use the faith you've found  
to reshape the world around,  
through my sight and touch and sound  
in you and you in me?

5. Lord, your summons echoes true

when you but call my name.  
Let me turn and follow you  
and never be the same.  
In your company I'll go  
where your love and footsteps show.  
Thus I'll move and live and grow  
in you and you in me.

Words: John L. Bell (b. 1949) and  
Graham Maule (1958-2019)  
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Community

## Song: Shelter me

*Last week we used Michael Joncas' song 'On Eagles Wings'. He has also written a lovely song for these difficult times, which will lead us into our prayers.*

<https://youtu.be/F3KifN7Jfpc>

1. Shepherd and sheep, my God and I  
To fresh green fields you led my steps in days gone by  
You gave me rest by quiet springs  
and filled my soul with peace your loving presence brings.

### *Chorus*

*O shelter me, O shelter me  
The way ahead is dark and difficult to see  
O shelter me, O shelter me  
All will be well if only you will shelter me.*

2. Yet now I tread a different way  
Death dogs my path with stealthy steps from day to day  
I cannot find your peaceful place  
But dwell in dreary darkness, longing for your face.

3. I will look back in days to come  
and realize your faithfulness has led me home  
Within your house I'll find my peace  
trusting that in your mercy you have sheltered me.

Words: Michael Joncas  
Copyright © 2020. The Jan Michael Joncas Trust

# Prayers of Intercession



Jesus, when you spoke of times of trial to come, you didn't mince words:  
hatred, betrayal, persecution, hidden secrets revealed,  
sparrows falling, hairs counted,  
a sword, and family division.

During this time of trials  
pandemic threat, political divides,  
unemployment and insecurity  
created chaos and violence around the world  
calm our hearts and clear our minds  
as you open our ears to hear you say again, "Do not be afraid."

Be with Christians around the world,  
the missionaries, evangelists, preachers and teachers,  
and the frightened faithful in their care.  
Strengthen those who are working for a just peace,  
Confuse the plans of those who are working for anything less.

Fill all faithful people of goodwill with the confidence to speak the truth  
and the willingness to serve one another  
in ways that bring hope where there is despair,  
food where there is hunger,  
healing where there is brokenness  
and life where there is death.  
Begin with me, my master, teacher, Jesus.

And assure us all,  
particularly those I love and worry about the most  
that we are more dear to you than even a little sparrow.  
You know us and love us so intensely  
that you have caressed and counted every hair on our heads.  
Be with us dear master and friend. Amen

## Song: God's Spirit is in my heart (STF 404)

<https://youtu.be/sr4JsPe6n2g>

1. God's spirit is in my heart;  
he has called me and set me apart.  
This is what I have to do,  
what I have to do:

### *Chorus*

*He sent me to give the good news to the  
poor,  
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no  
more,  
tell blind people that they can see,  
and set the down-trodden free,  
and go tell everyone  
the news that the kingdom of God has  
come;  
and go tell everyone  
the news that God's kingdom has come.*

2. Just as the Father sent me,  
so I'm sending you out to be  
my witness throughout the world --  
the whole of the world:

3. Don't carry a load in your pack;  
you don't need two shirts on your back;  
God's workers can earn their own keep  
can earn their own keep:

4. Don't worry what you have to say;  
don't worry, because on that day  
God's spirit will speak in your heart --  
will speak in your heart:

Words: Alan Dale and Hubert Richards  
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## A final poem to bless you on your way

### **With Our Eyes on the Sparrows**

keep your eye on the sparrow  
she says as she watches my face

sparrows?

burrowed into church eaves  
nesting in the backyard camellia bush

fence picket perchers fussing in  
damp dirt behind a too-full raincatcher

no stand-out solo serenades or fiery  
flashes like cardinals in springtime

no soaring hawk-winged shadow puppets  
sickling dew-drenched summer grass

a copper coin for a pair of sparrows  
jesus said as he watched their faces  
sparrows?

the creating-one knows every wing-beat  
fashions and fastens every feather

delights in each hair on each head  
relishes every strand silvered by winter suns

so i watched today as a plucky sparrow  
sat on the deck rail and watched me

i imagined being able to fly away—  
to escape sorrows gone viral

she nods a gentle blessing  
i think i'll keep my eyes on you

Words: Jill Crainshaw