

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:
**Telephone Service for Sunday 13th February 2022 – The Third Sunday
before Lent**

The service can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley Benefice for Sunday 13th February which has been put together by Liz Howlett. We worship together across the valley in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We begin with verses from Psalm 1, taken from the Voice version.

Psalm 1, verses 1a and 3a (The Voice Bible)

God's blessings follow you and await you at every turn: when you don't follow the advice of those who delight in wicked schemes... You are like a tree, planted by flowing, cool streams of water that never run dry. Your fruit ripens in its time; your leaves never fade or curl in the summer sun.

Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of mankind

1 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.

3 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.

2 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.

4 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.

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) (Public Domain)

Invitation to Confession

The grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all. Let us come to him, in sorrow for our sins, seeking healing and salvation.

Prayers of Penitence

God be gracious to us and bless us, and make your face to shine upon us:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

May your ways be known on earth, your saving power among the nations:

Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You have made known your salvation, and reveal your justice in the sight of the nations:

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Eternal God, whose Son went among the crowds and brought healing with his touch: help us to show his love, in your Church as we gather together, and by our lives as they are transformed into the image of Christ our Lord. Amen.

First Reading

Jeremiah 17: 5-10

Thus says the LORD: Cursed are those who trust in mere mortals and make mere flesh their strength, whose hearts turn away from the LORD. They shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see when relief comes. They shall live in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. The heart is devious above all else; it is perverse— who can understand it? I the LORD test the mind and search the heart to give to all according to their ways, according to the fruit of their doings.

Gospel Reading

Luke 6: 17-26

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out from him and healed all of them.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. “Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. “Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you who are full now, for you will be hungry. Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.”

Reflection

Mother Julian of Norwich

At the Othona Community, in a couple of weeks' time, I shall be co-facilitating a Quiet Week. A friend and I are leading it together and we are drawing on the lives and teaching of two of the great wise and hopeful humans from medieval times – St Francis of Assisi – known by all no doubt – and Mother Julian of Norwich. I wonder how many of you are familiar with or have heard of Julian. We don't even know her name – she was strongly connected with a church in Norwich dedicated to St Julian and that is likely how she became known as Julian herself. She was the first woman to write a book in the English language. I have known of her and her teaching for many years, but it has been during the last couple of years that I have been drawn back to explore her more fully. She was someone who lived in the 14th century in Norwich – a turbulent time of war and local agricultural disasters and also the Black Death – a deadlier pandemic than the one we have experienced and with nothing to protect themselves against it. My interest in her has been rekindled more recently I am fairly sure because of this link between her uncertain times and ours. For them, they had no idea where the black death came from, or why it kept coming back. It devastated the population of England – perhaps a third, or maybe even a half of the population was wiped out by this terrible plague. She herself was on the point of death at the age of thirty – the priest had given her the last rites – but then she received a series of visions which she believed were given her by God. She recovered and spent the rest of her life reflecting on the visions, writing her book and living as an anchoress. An anchoress was someone who lived a life dedicated to God, not in a monastery, but in a room attached to a church (for her, St Julian) with a window looking out directly onto the street. In this way, her life was also dedicated to the well-being of those around her. She wasn't in any way turning her back on life and her fellow human beings – by choosing the life of an anchoress, she was allowing herself to be available to anyone who wanted to talk with her and receive her counsel – they knew where to find her. And what was her message? For one thing, it was in contrast to many of those of her contemporaries. Perhaps in such terrible times, it was not surprising that some were convinced that the plague was a punishment for sin – there were groups who would go around and beat themselves in public as an extreme form of penance. Others were very pessimistic about the natural world – the plague suggested to some that the world was something to turn away from. Julian's message was different – very different and full of hope. This is not a Pollyanna-ish type of approach – she was fully aware of the difficulties all around, but she also had a deep sense that this was not all there was to life. What

comes through strongly in her writing is the sense that at the heart of everything is God – not an angry, wrathful God, but a God who is love. She also says that the deepest longing of every human is to be connected to God. She created her own word for this – she talks about the desire to be ‘oned’ with God.

The following is one of her visions and reflections upon it:

‘Our good Lord gave me a spiritual vision of his simple loving. I saw that he is everything that is good for us, everything that soothes and helps us. He is our clothing; he wraps himself around us, enfolding us in his love. His tender love is our shelter; he will never leave us.

Then he showed me a small thing, the size of a hazelnut, nestled in the palm of my hand. It was round as a ball. I looked at it with the eyes of my understanding and thought, *What can this be?* And the answer came to me: *It is all that is created.* I was amazed that it could continue to exist. It seemed to me to be so little that it was on the verge of dissolving into nothingness. And then these words entered my understanding: *It lasts, and will last forever, because God loves it. Everything that is has its being through the love of God.*

I saw three attributes of this small thing: the first is that God made it; the second is that he loves it; and the third that he sustains it. But what did I behold in that? Well, I saw the creator, the lover, and the sustainer. And I recognized that until I am completely oned with him I shall never have deep rest nor full joy.’

‘Until I am completely oned with him I shall never have deep rest nor full joy.’ This resonates for me with today’s passage from Jeremiah, in which we find a vivid image of the two trees and how they survive or not in the very different terrain. The shrub, on the one hand, struggles to live in the desert – there is no source of water for it to draw on and the land is overdone with salt and the sun is beating down relentlessly. It is ‘cursed’, not because it is ‘bad’ but simply because it is not rooted in what is ultimately life-giving for it. On the other hand, the tree planted by a stream can get bedded in, putting its roots deep into the water. There are no guarantees of a trouble free existence, but when the drought does come and the heatwave beats over it, the tree can still draw on the life-giving properties of the water in the soil beneath to live – and not just to survive but to put forth its fruit too. It is ‘blessed’ simply because it is planted in the ideal place. **Amen**

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded

1 All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

2 Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

3 God's great goodness ay endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,

beauty springeth out of nought.
Evermore, from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

4 Daily doth the almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

5 Still from man to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Meine Hoffnung stehet feste Joachim Neander (1650-1680) Paraphrased Robert Bridges (1844-1930) CCLI Licence 2370586

Prayers

Jesus said: ‘Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.’
Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Unless you change and become humble like little children, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.' Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them.'

Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Love one another, as I love you; there is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends.' Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

Jesus said: 'Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples, and I will be with you always, to the end of time.' Saviour, we hear your call. **Help us to follow.**

God of mercy, **you know us and love us and hear our prayer: keep us following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

And as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

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

Blessing

May God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the source of all goodness and growth, pour his blessing upon all created things and upon you, that you may use his gifts to his glory and the welfare of all peoples; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you now and always. **Amen.**

Hymn: Beauty for brokenness

1 Beauty for brokenness, hope for despair,
Lord, in your suffering world this is our prayer.
Bread for the children, justice, joy, peace,
sunrise to sunset, your kingdom increase!

3 Refuge from cruel wars, havens from fear,
cities for sanctuary, freedoms to share.
Peace to the killing-fields, scorched earth to green,
Christ for the bitterness, his cross for the pain.

2 Shelter for fragile lives, cures for their ills,
work for the craftsmen, trade for their skills;
land for the dispossessed, rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak:

4 Rest for the ravaged earth, oceans and streams
plundered and poisoned -our future, our dreams.
Lord, end our madness, carelessness, greed;
make us content with the things that we need.

*God of the poor, friend of the weak,
give us compassion we pray;
melt our cold hearts, let tears fall like rain;
come, change our love from a spark to a flame.*

God of the poor ...

5 Lighten our darkness, breathe on this flame
until your justice burns brightly again;
until the nations learn of your ways,
seek your salvation and bring you their praise.

God of the poor ...

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Quotation from *Mother Julian taken from: Julian of Norwich: The Showings: a contemporary translation*. Mirabai Starr (Canterbury Press; 2014) p13.