

TAKE TIME OUT – *Pastoral Retreat*

Half Acre, Horton Heath, Wimborne, Dorset, BH21 7JS
Tel: 01202-824834 – Email: janice.morgan@methodist.org.uk

Sunday Scriptures: 3rd January 2021

Jeremiah 31:7-15 *The promised return from exile*

⁷For thus says the Lord: “Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations; proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘Save, O Lord, your people, the remnant of Israel.’ ⁸See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, among them the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labour, together; a great company, they shall return here. ⁹With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back, I will let them walk by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they shall not stumble; for I have become a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn. ¹⁰Hear the Word of the Lord, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away; say, “He who scatters Israel will gather him and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.” ¹¹For the Lord has ransomed Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him. ¹²They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the Lord, over the grain, the wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; their life shall become like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again. ¹³Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry. I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow. ¹⁴The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfil the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ¹⁵In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

Reflection:

Jeremiah proclaims a time for reconciliation of God with His faithful remnant. The people of Israel were God’s people and Ephraim was one of the major tribes of the Northern Kingdom. Although most had sunk into the lowest and most degrading sins, and others had tolerated it by remaining silent, God still loved the people and longed for reconciliation. The recurring use of *return* (shubh) and *salvation* (yesha) reveals the prophet’s spiritual insight and heartfelt plea. Throughout Jeremiah’s message there run these connected thoughts and the fullness of God’s emotion is revealed through many a tender detail. God reaches toward His people with loving kindness motivated by a deep love. He is eager to do the best for His chosen *if* they will only let Him. They have been given many words of warning about sin, now this reminder of God’s love is a relieving breath of fresh air. When we do wrong or fail to do right and our conscience is pricked, we may think of God with dread and fear of punishment. However, if we look carefully we can see the opposite; God lovingly continues to draw us toward Himself, despite our disobedience and sin.

Bill and I have seen our own children and now grandchildren hide under a table or behind furniture when they have done something wrong. Often we are unaware of what they have done and this is the first sign of a misdemeanour! We find it hard at such times not to laugh at their expression when asked what they have done wrong! Our love for them is stronger than their wrong behaviour and although they must be taught right from wrong, they are instantly forgiven before a word of correction is spoken. If we as imperfect human parents have this much forgiving love for our children, how much more so does God have in His heart for us, His children?

The preparation for reconciliation is repentance, which requires genuine sorrow for wrongdoing and a commitment not to make the same mistake again, as best as humanly possible. Reconciliation requires that the injured party forgives the one causing the injury. The one must come before the other for True healing and wholeness to be achieved. This is what New Year resolutions should be about, resolving to live by a code of conduct and remaining faithful to our promise to do so. Have you made yours yet? Before you do, remember that it is not so much about giving something up but more about a commitment to live in a right relationship with our Father in heaven. No one is perfect; God is always straining to hear our repentance and His love is always ready to forgive and to bless us with joy and abundance. God here promises that a remnant would *return* to Him repenting of their sins, and He would forgive and *save* them. Do we demonstrate the characteristics of God's remnant people?

This all reminds me of how dogs respond when they have done something wrong. They come back to their master or mistress in crouching submission with tail between their legs and big pleading eyes looking up hoping for forgiveness. Then the change to exuberance comes when they are given the loving and forgiving pat they were hoping for. But it is the look of guilt and sorrow that entreats us to forgive, then all is forgotten and joy abounds once more. God still loves us no matter what we have done or become and longs always to be reconciled with us. He will forgive us and *save* us *if* we *return* to Him. At this transition between 2020 & 2021 we stand, more than ever before, facing a future that is largely in our own hands and raises some vital questions for us to ponder. Will we obey the rules for the good of all people or selfishly ignore them? Will we acknowledge that ALL lives matter or selfishly focus on our own? Will we bend the knee to God alone or selfishly worship the ideals of false gods? The choice is ours according to our God given free-will to live in the presence and power of God or subject ourselves to the ever changing whims of a secular world. God wants to be reconciled with us and save us, if we will but let Him. Amen!

Hymn/Song: And did those feet in ancient time *William Blake (1757-1827) music – Elgar: can be found on YouTube (Jerusalem the hymn-the unofficial 'anthem' of England - a tribute)*

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?
And did the countenance divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among those dark satanic mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold!
Bring me my arrows of desire!
Bring me my spear! O clouds unfold!
Bring me my chariot of fire!
I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant land.

Poem: AN AFFIRMATION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD ©Janice Morgan-1994

Hush now! For the Lord is here;
Can you sense His presence? Can you feel Him near? For He lives inside you!
Listen for His voice as He speaks into your mind;
Linger in the warmth of His love inside your heart;
Recognise the touch of His guidance in your life;
Hush now! For the Lord is here.

Be still! We stand on holy ground;
He is omnipotent and omnipresent and cannot be denied;
Bow before Him now be submissive to His power;
Encounter His might crowned in glory and splendour;
Radiant, awesome, His light dissolving our darkness;
Be still! We stand on holy ground.

Look! He is working here;
His Spirit is life, the breath of creation, divine mystery;
An inspiration that defies all description;
A wind that's unseen impossible to harness;
Holy fire that burns in the hearts of those who love Him;
Look! He is working here.

Give thanks! He is love incarnate;
Compassion, forgiveness; the hand of all mercy extends by His grace;
He strengthens the weak and gives hope to the helpless;
The bound He sets free restoring and redeeming;
His waters of life bring our cleansing and healing;
Give thanks! He is love incarnate.

We KNOW! The Lord is with us;
He lives, He breaths, HE IS; He is the Alpha, He is the Omega;
His touch can be felt breathing faith into our hearts;
His work can be seen reclaiming that which was lost;
Yes He walks with us, and He talks with us, of love.
We KNOW! The Lord is with us.

Let all who have eyes to see, and all who have ears to listen,
STOP! Allow yourself to receive, and experience His love.

Prayer: Let us repent of our mistakes in the past and resolve to start this New Year afresh;
Let us make our New Year resolutions with the commitment to be faithful to our promises;
Dear God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, help us to go forward into the unknown trusting in
Your mercy and grace, determined to make the new start God longs for in us, and mean it!
Amen!
