

Written worship for 17th. January 2021, Revd Elizabeth Rundle

Welcome:

Its good to know that even in these days of lockdown we can share together in worship. Whatever this week has been for you, let's take this time to pause, to be still in God's presence - to find strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

Here is a prayer from this year's Methodist Prayer Handbook, p.4:

Come and sit beside me while I pray, Lord.

I need to feel as though you are close enough to hear.

Lately, you've seemed distant and far away from the bustle of my busy life, but now I pause, and at last I realise that you have been there all the while.

Throughout all my distractions, you have been with me,

Patiently waiting for my focus to return to you.

You invite me to come and sit beside you, not because I am worthy but because I am in need.

Now, I am still,

And in the peace that enfolds me, I know that you are God. Amen.

(Lyn Gennoe, local preacher Bromsgrove and Redditch Circuit.)

Meditate on StF 20 : listen if you can on YouTube the recording of Aled Jones singing

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here,

Come bow before him now with reverence and fear:

In him no sin is found – we stand on holy ground.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;

He burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned:

How awesome is the sight – our radiant King of light!

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;

He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace:

No work too hard for him – in faith receive from him.

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.

(David J. Evans)

Prayer:

Eternal God, source of life and love, in the quiet of our individual homes, we come to worship you in spirit and truth. Help us to feel united with our own church family, united with the great company of heaven and joined with the worldwide church family.

Lord Jesus Christ, divine Healer, lift us from the heaviness of lockdown and fears of infection, calm our minds that we may be able to count our many blessings.

Holy Spirit, support and comfort us through these isolated days that we may find ways to support and comfort family and friends. So renew us in this time of worship and build us up in faith, hope and love. Amen.

We say together the prayer of all Christ's followers:

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.

Reading: John 1: 43-49

Intro: Jesus has been baptised by John, marking the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Two of John's disciples, Andrew and his brother Simon Peter had already decided to follow this Jesus. Now the story moves on:-

The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me.' Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote – Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'

'Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?' Nathanael asked.

'Come and see,' said Philip.

When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, 'Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.'

'How do you know me?' Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, 'I saw you while you were still under the fig-tree before Philip called you.'

Then Nathanael declared, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God;'

This is the Good News – Thanks be to God.

Reflection –

If we think back to how crowds flocked to Billy Graham crusades, and the number of people who walked out 'to the front' in public testimony, then we have a glimpse of how people travelled to hear John the Baptist. The brothers Andrew and Simon Peter along with Philip had left Galilee travelling some 80 miles to hear the great preacher, John. Andrew had become one of John's disciples but, with John's implied endorsement, Andrew became one of Jesus' first disciples.

We can imagine Philip hanging around, his friends were following Jesus, perhaps his heart was stirred as to what he should do. When Jesus said to him: "follow me", it seems Philip jumped at the invitation and excitedly went to find his friend Nathanael.

It's easy to dismiss Nathanael as a cynical grump. He'd heard rousing words from John the Baptist, he'd witnessed crowds professing repentance - but nothing had changed. The Roman army still occupied and oppressed his beloved land. What of all those wonderful promises in scripture about a Messiah? Hundreds of years and – nothing. His friends had latched on to a stranger and he faced the long walk home. To top it all, Philip prattled on about a Messiah from **Nazareth** !

For my first ministerial post I was stationed in the Camborne Circuit in West Cornwall. The major subject in Camborne at that time was rugby. And their arch rival was four miles away in another Circuit, Redruth. I'd never met such open rivalry and hostility between the supporters. Nathanael's home of Cana was four miles from Nazareth. They may not have played rugby but there was certainly inbuilt antagonism between the two areas. And, let's face it, we still tend to jump to conclusions and pigeon-hole people and places.

Philip persevered: "Come and see" – and dispirited Nathanael tags along to meet Jesus.

So what changed Nathanael from cynical grump to devoted disciple? Meeting Jesus. Realising Jesus understood him, knew his hopes and dreams for freedom, peace and prosperity – for that was the biblical meaning of sitting under a vine or fig-tree. Jesus knew him better than he knew himself. His scepticism vanished and he became a disciple. Most biblical scholars agree that Nathanael in John's gospel, here and in the resurrection appearance John 21: 2, is the same man as Bar-tholomew, Bar meaning son of Tholomew, mentioned in the other gospels and Acts 1:13.

The calling of Philip and Nathanael is a heart-warming picture, but has it got anything to do with us, as we sit discouraged by the oppressive lockdown, sceptical of all the promises we have been given, hoping and dreaming of better days to come, of freedom, peace and prosperity? Let's hear words from a Psalm known to Jesus and to Nathanael

Reading: from Psalm 139 835 in StF

O Lord, you have searched me, and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.
You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.
Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens you are there;
If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,
Even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

For this assurance – thanks be to God.

Concluding thoughts:

Such a tremendous affirmation that God is ever present. It's a mystery and a miracle that God, knows and understands us. Nathanael found in Jesus- the human embodiment of God's unconditional, renewing love and understanding. Following Jesus revived his sagging spirit and restored his faith. But he was not just a follower, after Jesus' death, and resurrection, both Nathanael and Philip were there at Pentecost. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we know Philip evangelised in Samaria and legend has it Nathanael travelled as far as Albania.

Well, I know at the moment we can't even travel to church, but the good news is that wherever we are or whatever happens – God is with us, He knows and understands and holds us in everlasting love. Amen.

Hymn StF 391 O breathe of life come sweeping through us

www.youtube.com/watch from Aberystwyth

O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
Revive your Church with life and power;
O breathe of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
And fit your Church to meet this hour.

O wind of God, come, bend us, break us
Till humbly we confess our need;
Then in your tenderness remake us,
Revive, restore; for this we plead.

O breath of love, come, breathe within us,
Renewing thought and will and heart;
Come, love of Christ, afresh to win us,
Revive your Church in every part.

Elizabeth Ann Head 1850-1936

Prayers of Intercession

Together in faith, let us pray –

As Jesus looked over Jerusalem and wept, so he must weep over the world today.

Lord, we too would weep over the world; for the hungry and dispossessed, the frightened and abused, victims of war, earthquake, fire and flood. We pray for all who work for peace and reconciliation, for those working with humanitarian organisations, leaving their own comforts to serve and help strangers.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

Our television news and newspapers seem full of anguish and tragedy. We pray for our country, especially at this time for all working within the health service, emergency

services and social services. We give thanks for devoted dedication, the kindness and selflessness shown by so many. We pray for all engaged in public services.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

We pray for our communities – for those whose lives have been devastated by Covid 19, where financial pressures, strained relationships or bereavements have caused heartache. We pray for young people with the disruption in schools, colleges and universities. We pray for our families, friends and neighbours and all who, previously have been part of our days. We pray for our minister Rev Pauline and church officers keeping us safe and connected.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayer.

We bring to God's love those we know who are struggling with health or other problems at this time. Quietly speak their names.

Lord, in your mercy – hear our prayers, spoken, read and from the silence of our heart.

We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

We turn to our closing hymn

Hymn 455 StF (YouTube St. Alban's Church, Bristol, 2016)

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.

Human pride and earthly glory, sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil we fashion, tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour is my temple and my tower.

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.

Still from earth 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. Amen.

Robert Bridges 1844-1930

Based on Joachim Neader 1650-1680

Blessing:

May we know the God of Hope with us each day,
Filling our lives with the blessings of Love and Joy and Peace. Amen.