

ST ANDREW'S, PARTRIDGE GREEN & LONDON ROAD METHODIST CHURCHES
WORSHIP AT HOME MATERIALS FOR SUNDAY 25TH JULY 2021

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us bring ourselves to God,
whatever our age and gifts.
Let us prepare to share in worship,
giving thanks for all that God shares with us.
Let us open our hearts and minds
to know more of God's unconditional love and care,
and be ready to share it with others.

PRAISE MY SOUL THE KING OF HEAVEN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60JgQoJK9J8>

PRAISE, my soul, the King of heaven;
To his feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like thee his praise should sing?
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise the everlasting King!

Praise him for his grace and favour
To our fathers in distress;
Praise him, still the same for ever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise him! Praise him!
Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like, he tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame he knows;
In his hands he gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise him! Praise him!
Widely as his mercy flows.

Angels in the height, adore him;
Ye behold him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise him! Praise him!
Praise with us the God of grace!

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847) based on Psalm 103

PRAYERS

God, our generous provider,
as the young boy offered all he had to Jesus –
five loaves and two small fish –
we come today offering you everything we have:
a pocketful of faith, a bit of time,
ourselves, our gifts, our talents.
And we know that, however small our gift or offering,
you will do amazing things with it,
far more than we can ever hope, believe or imagine.
Thank you, awesome God.

Hospitable God,
extravagant provider,
we worship you because we can.
You take our inadequacies, our limitations,
and pour out your blessings upon us.

We stand in awe of you,
sensing your presence among us.
Overwhelmed by your kindness,
we fall at your feet.

So, we confess our struggles to God:

With our time and with our money:

forgive us, Lord, when we have not been generous.

In helping others, and being hospitable:

forgive us, Lord, when we have not been generous.

When we have been blessed with so much:

forgive us, Lord, when we have not been generous.

When we could have gone the extra mile and shared what
we have:

forgive us, Lord, when we have not been generous.

In using our resources, gifts and talents:

forgive us, Lord, when we have not been generous.

Most generous God,

help us to be more like you.

God, you forgive us when we make mistakes,
when we have not shared what you have given us.

We come to the cross knowing that we are healed and
forgiven, and given a second chance to be the people you
call us to be.

Thank you, Lord, that you go ahead of us into our
communities;

you are there pouring out your generosity and your
hospitality in our neighbourhood.

Thank you that as you are transforming our homes, our
streets, our schools, our places of work, you are
transforming us so we can play our part.

Thank you that we can come together as one,
sharing all that you have given us.

Thank you, Lord.

Amen.

SCRIPTURES:

Ephesians 3:14-21 & John 6:1-21

IN THE DARKNESS OF THE STILL NIGHT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOl8EHvJmio>

In the darkness of the still night
In the dawning of the daylight
In the mystery of creation
Creator God, You are there
In the breath of every being
In the birthing and the growing
In the earth and all its fullness
Creator God, You are there

In the homeless and the hungry
In the broken and the lonely
In the grieving of Your people
Creator God, You are there
In the tears and in the heartache

In the love through which we serve You
In the anguish of the dying
Creator God, You are there

In our hearts and in our thinking
In the longing and the dreaming
In the yearning of our heartbeat
Creator God, You are there
In the love for one another
In the sharing of our being
In receiving and forgiving
Creator God, You are there

In our joys, our hopes, our healing
In awakening to revealing
In Your call and our responding
Creator God, You are there
In our prayer and in our service
In our praise and in our worship
In Your love that is eternal
Creator God, You are there

Margaret Rizza (b. 1929)

SERMON

Today's gospel reading is interesting as, for this week and the four that come after, we move away for a little while from working our way through Mark, which is the focus of this year, year B, in the cycle of set bible readings for each Sunday, called The Lectionary.

One of the key stories included in this section from John – is that of the feeding of the large crowd, and it is in Mark, but the lectionary compilers presumably decided that it was better to switch to John for a time, at this point, and explore his extended reflections on Jesus as the Bread of Life.

We're told there were about 5000 people present; some bibles read 'Men' – so in that case I think we can assume there would have been some others present too – women, children, servants, others on the fringes of society that the nice people didn't talk about, include or even notice – but it's not the detail of the crowd that really matters here but Jesus – all we need to know, is that there are a lot of them in this crowd and they're in need!

The reading we heard today comes after an extended section of Jesus' teaching in Chapter 5 of John's gospel, where Jesus' Sabbath observance, identity and authority are being challenged.

John then gives us this key passage in Chp 6 which displays Jesus' desire to meet people's need, in this case both physical and spiritual hunger; who Jesus really is, the worker of miracles, the provider and prophet, the calmer of storms (and later on, which we'll come to in other weeks – The Bread of Life, Son of Man, Holy One [or Son] of God), and then also graphically explains his authority over people, the basic needs of life and the natural elements of the world.

It's also interesting to me, that I think Jesus is making another point to those that feel challenged by him, persecute him and seek to undermine him or even do him harm (see John 5:15-18), in the manner with which he wields this authority – it's with a care and compassion for the crowd, provision for their basic needs (food, rest and spiritual nourishment), he involves others (he converses with Philip about what they might do – growing that disciple as a future leader, perhaps? As well as the boy with his five loaves and two fish), using their gifts (graciously accepting what we assume to be the small boy's packed, lunch, the disciples' ability to organise the crowd and the distribution of the food), withdrawing at the right moment when the people get carried away and wanted to take him and set him up as their King. (Not now, not yet!)

Then we go off into the little interlude on the boat and Jesus coming to the frightened disciples in the storm with his words of reassurance (Here I am – don't be afraid!) and his presence with them.

Jesus is clearly showing to those who need to know – that he is something the like of which they have never seen before, the Son of Man, Son of God - and to those who had been charged with caring for God's people over time, that this what how it was meant to be done!

I've read this passage many times, as I expect many of you have done too and we often end up thinking about Jesus' miracles: feeding the large crowd of people with such small pickings; being able to walk across the water to the scared witless disciples in the boat on the sea, in their storm; and bringing them quickly to land and safety. We try to work out how that all happened and get stuck in the complicated world of biblical interpretation and our understanding of exactly what constitutes a miracle?

This time a few, seemingly ordinary, very ordinary words struck me, and I couldn't initially work out why:

In verse 10 Jesus is recorded as saying: 'MAKE THE PEOPLE SIT DOWN'.

Why? I wondered.

Why does he say that?

Why is it recorded in the gospel of John here? What does it bring to the story? Or, if you like, in the mode of one of the tutors on my training course for ministry – 'Where's the Good News?'

I don't know if any of you have seen the material that has been produced for this year's Bible Month but it's looking at Mark's gospel (as I said earlier – this is a Mark year!) and approaches that gospel in four sections:

- Mark Chps. 1-3 'Identity & Mission'
- Mark 4-8:21 'Mission & Boundaries'
- Mark 8:22- Chp.10 'One the Way' (i.e. to Jerusalem/The Cross)
- Mark Chps.11-16 'Passion Week'

In looking at these different sections of Mark's gospel the Bible Month material also utilises 4 different approaches to understanding scripture, one of which is the idea of THE BIG PICTURE – pulling back from an over-detailed, scrutiny of everything to a place where the bigger themes and message can be seen more clearly.

And I wondered if this could be why these words of Jesus stood out for me – 'Make the people sit down'...

What happens when you sit down? You settle in one place for a while, I suppose it made it easier for the food distribution but I think, from my 'macro perspective', the BIG PICTURE, is that you can see better. With Jesus still standing (I'm assuming he is as we're not told he was amongst those that sat and he had to give thanks to God and then share out what he'd blessed, so I see him still standing before them) and with the people seated they could see Jesus, hear him, see what he did – in looking to Jesus, in this clear moment of a statement of intent, identity and authority they would 'see' what God desired, had offered and was doing in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

They sit, they see, they receive...they will, in time, understand.

So, what about us – sharing in worship today? What's the BIG PICTURE here for us?

I think it's about sitting down that we might 'see Jesus', spending enough time sitting at his feet, a bit like dear Mary at Bethany (the Mary that upset her all-too busy, all too-distracted sister Martha) to grow closer to him and his way of being and doing, so that we might seek to emulate that in our being and doing too.

In this one short passage we have Jesus – seeing a need and responding, and the people receive – in the first instance, bread and fish for their sustenance, or in the second, the case of the frightened disciples in the boat, reassurance and safety.

Maybe that's the simple BIG PICTURE for us to see and act upon – see the need and respond, be like Jesus – care enough to notice and then be willing to find a way to provide, not only what is needed but abundantly so, that others might not be in want or fear and life in all its fullness.

That's all well and good Sam, you might say – but HOW!?!

Well, so far I've not made a single mention of the Ephesians passage at all but here, in conclusion, I will, as an answer to that question – HOW DO WE DO THAT?

READ – Ephesians 3: 14-21 to end.

BEAUTY FOR BROKENNESS

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MO1G-o7Yj-c>

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!

Shelter for fragile lives,
Cures for their ills,
Work for the craftsman,
Trade for their skills;
Land for the dispossessed,
Rights for the weak,
Voices to plead the cause
Of those who can't speak.

*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.*

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.

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,...

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,...

Graham Kendrick.
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WE PRAY FOR OTHERS

Lord, what you can do with so little! Yet many of us feel our contributions to be so meagre.

We lift up, Lord, all who feel they have nothing worth bringing to your table.

We think of the broken, in mind, body and spirit.

Broken by ill health. Broken by bereavement, divorce or separation.

Those broken by poverty, redundancy or bankruptcy.

Lord, we offer you our prayers for the broken. Take. Touch. Bless.

Lord, you multiplied the loaves and fishes, producing a big lunch for thousands.

We bring before you those supplying our loaves and fishes today.

We pray for fishermen struggling to maintain their livelihoods.

We lift up all farmers and the harvest of crops.

We think of the effect of climate change which, if nothing alters, will mean major adaptations for farmers in how and what they can farm.

Many places are experiencing the effects of climate change now.

We think of our own high temperatures of late and the unprecedented high temperatures in Canada. The wild fires in America. The floods in Western Europe.

All these destroy lives and livelihoods.

We lift before you all those affected.

Lord, we offer you our prayers for fishermen and farmers. All those involved in the food chain. And the effect of climate change on the world. Take. Touch. Bless.

Lord, you feed your hungry people in more ways than one. During these past months many ordinary people whose businesses were closed stepped up to feed others within their communities.

We pray now for your hand on the recovery of all businesses, particularly those in hospitality. May our highstreets and communities flourish once more.

Many charities have found donations dwindling. Lord, multiply what little they have.

Lord, we offer you our prayers for all businesses and charities in need of your blessing. Take. Touch. Bless.

Lord, we pray for your church. Pray that all in leadership will be guided by Godly wisdom at all times.

As we gather again after lockdown keep us mindful of the challenges and opportunities our freedom brings. May we always have uppermost in our hearts our care for one another and for the visitor in our midst. Help us to show forth your praise in caring concern and hospitable welcome. In a moment of silence we remember those who covet our prayers the most.

Lord, we offer you our prayers for the church, for your people of all ages. Take. Touch. Bless.

Amen

LORD'S PRAYER

LET US BUILD A HOUSE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W3Pb77ylz_Q&t=198s

Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell

how hearts learn to forgive;
built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

*All are welcome,
all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.*

Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.

Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

All are welcome,...

Let us build a house where love is found
in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground,
where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus,
is revealed in time and space,
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:

All are welcome,...

Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

All are welcome,...

Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.

Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

All are welcome,...

Marty Haugen (b.1950)

BLESSING

Lord, help us to remain thankful for even the simple things.
Keep us focused on your loving, generous nature,
so that we can freely share what we have and who we are.
Let us be cheerful givers and humble receivers,
that all may have enough and be satisfied.
Amen.