

LONDON ROAD, PARTRIDGE GREEN & ST ANDREW'S METHODIST CHURCHES
WORSHIP AT HOME MATERIALS FOR SUNDAY 1ST AUGUST 2021

CALL TO WORSHIP

We are the people of The Word,
And we gather this day, to hear words, to pray in
words,
And to connect with The Word who is all around us.
In Jesus name we pray,
Amen.¹

PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING, FATHER, WE OFFER

(Tune: Morning has broken)

Praise and thanksgiving
Father we offer
For all things living
You have made good
Harvest of sown fields
Fruits of the orchard
Hay from the mown fields
Blossom and wood

Lord bless the labour
We bring to serve You
That with our neighbour
We may be fed
Sowing or tilling
We would work with You
Harvesting milling
For daily bread

Father providing
Food for Your children
Your wisdom guiding
Teaches us share
One with another
So that rejoicing
Sister and brother
May know Your care

Then will Your blessing
Reach every people
Each one confessing
Your gracious hand
When You are reigning
No one will hunger
Your love sustaining
Fruitful the land

Albert Frederick Bayly (1901-1984)

OPENING PRAYERS

God of all wisdom, we give you thanks for the times
in which we have experienced
your wisdom in our lives.
Let us be still and gather ourselves in the space.
Let us seek to open ourselves out to connect with the
Spirit of God who comes
amongst us, by some mystery.
[Pause]
Forgive us for those times where we've failed to
recognise your presence and give
us the courage to walk away from situations that
prevent us and others from
receiving all that you have to offer us.
Open our eyes to new and exciting ways of being so
that all who we encounter, will
experience your wisdom and love.
Amen.²

We say together the LORD'S PRAYER

HOW SWEET THE NAME OF JESUS SOUNDS

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
it soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds
and drives away our fear.

It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
it satisfies the hungry soul,
and gives the weary rest.

Dear name, the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding-place;
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace!

Jesus, my Shepherd, Brother, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest and King;
my Lord, my life, my way, my end –
accept the praise I bring.

Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see you as you are,
I'll praise you as I ought.

Till then I would your love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Ramona Samuel

and may the music of your name
refresh my soul in death.

John Newton (1725-1807)

READINGS:

2 Samuel 11:26 - 12:13a; John 6:24-35

REFLECTIONS ON THE READING

Recently, our household experienced what I'd like to call 'The Case of the Mysteriously Mouldy Bread'. A fresh loaf of bread, stored in the bread bin in the kitchen, suddenly, and apparently inexplicably, went mouldy overnight. Initially, as you might imagine, there was a good deal of frustration at the loss of the bread and the need to acquire another loaf before lunchtime. Frustration gave way a little to a desire to find fault: we examined the loaf's packaging, checked the 'best before' date, and scoffed a little about 'dodgy batches'.

It was only a few days later, as I saw my husband carry a (different!) new loaf of bread out of the kitchen and place it onto the dining room table that I realised that he had worked out what had happened. As he carried the loaf of bread from the kitchen, I was popping on the heater under the kitchen cabinets to give a load of drying laundry a little kick start at the end of a rainy day... just as I had done a few days earlier.

I had created the perfect environment for the bread to mould, releasing a lovely damp, warm air into the kitchen in the hope of my laundry drying a little quicker. As eager as I had been to find the fault somewhere, I hadn't stopped to consider that it may have been as a consequence of my own action that the bread had gone mouldy.

Today's lectionary readings speak of bread, and of needing to recognise the consequences of actions, so I hope our unfortunate incident with 'The Case of the Mysteriously Mouldy Bread' may help us to reflect on these accounts, one from the life of King David and the other from the life of Jesus.

Let's turn then to our first passage, from 2 Samuel chapter 11 verse 26 to chapter 12 verse 13a. It's not an easy part of David's story that we pick up here. King David, the golden boy, has taken another man's wife, Bathsheba, to bed and she is pregnant. Her husband, Uriah, is one of the military men under

David's command, and David has chosen to send Uriah to a particularly dangerous battlefield in the hope that Uriah will die in battle before he discovers the betrayal and pregnancy. Uriah does indeed die in the fighting, and perhaps David breathes a sigh of relief: he won't be caught out.

As you might expect, this behaviour offends and angers God. God sends the prophet, Nathan, to speak with David, and Nathan approaches the King and tells him the story of the rich man and the poor man. As Nathan speaks, David's anger burns against the fictional rich man who abuses his power and takes the precious ewe lamb from the poor man. He is quick to express how awful he considers this behaviour to be, and how harsh the punishment ought to be for the rich man. He fails, though, to see that he himself is the rich man in his own story. David took from Uriah what was so precious to this man who had not much, abusing the great deal of power and wealth that he himself had, and yet struggles at first to identify his own behaviour in the allegory Nathan tells. When Nathan reveals the truth to him, David is confronted with the reality of his own judgement, and indeed that of God's too.

There are clear lessons for us to learn from this story about honesty, integrity, fidelity and the right use of power and authority. But perhaps there is also a great lesson for us to learn here about how we situate ourselves in the stories of our faith. David was told a story from which it was intended he would learn. Scripture is the word of God given to us, that we might learn more about God and more about ourselves.

When you read this story from 2 Samuel, do you instinctively try to situate yourself in the story, as one of the main characters? Does the character of Nathan resonate well with you, or that of Bathsheba or Uriah or one of the fictional characters from the story Nathan tells? Or do you feel yourself confronted by King David in his darkest hours? How ready am I, are we, to acknowledge that sometimes our behaviour most closely matches the wrong doer in the parts of Scripture which are tough to tackle? I imagine I'm not writing to many kings who have had soldiers killed to cover infidelity, but I expect a good number of us have been guilty of a good many acts we would

criticise in others, and share the story of a privileged person using their power and authority in ways which contradict the law of love. When we do that, we take from the more vulnerable the things precious to them which are incidental, disposable, taken for granted by those of us who have more. We need to ask ourselves as individuals if we are guilty of this, and we need, too, to ask when we have been guilty of this as Church. Because even if we can't personally identify with the most vulnerable in the story, others would, and sometimes we have been the ones to cause pain.

Like David confronted by Nathan's words, are we ready to be confronted with the devastating reality that we have done things that have hurt others and displeased God?

The good news is that David repents, is forgiven, and he is still the famed King David of whose line Jesus is born. When we recognise and repent of our sins, however grave, we find in God a forgiveness we can hardly begin to comprehend. How can we respond to forgiveness and faithfulness from God when we so often make mistakes?

Jesus' disciples ask the pertinent question in John 6, verse 28: 'What must we do, to do the work God requires?', and surely this is the most important question. 'What can we do, for God who has done so much for us?'. And Jesus responds 'This is the work of God: to believe in the one he has sent.'

There is no work we can do perfectly, but we can believe. We will make mistakes, get things wrong, sometimes in the full knowledge that what we're doing is not right. Sometimes we will work hard to do what we believe God wants, and sometimes we'll knowingly turn away. Often we'll get it a bit wrong however well-intentioned we are. But if we believe in the one whom God sent, we believe in a faithfulness beyond any we could begin to demonstrate. We believe in a bread that will sustain our living and loving, that will never stop feeding us.

God who provided manna in the desert gives to us, in Jesus, a bread that doesn't disappear overnight, or that goes mouldy and becomes useless when we create the conditions to make it spoil. Christ is the bread of life who will continue to feed us when we get things right, and when we get it wrong. There is

nothing that can separate us from Christ's love and faithfulness to us.

When we read the stories of God through the Bible, are we ready to make ourselves vulnerable, ready to see mirrored back to us our own vulnerabilities or wrong behaviours? And when we do that, are we ready to turn, repentant, and find the outrageous, wonderful presence of Christ sustaining us for ever? When we break bread, are we ready to receive and accept that we are indeed the broken body of Christ, pointing always to the bread that will never spoil or run out?

Who are we, when we read the stories? Whichever character we are, we are always the people who believe in the one whom God sends. And that's enough.

THERE'S A WIDENESS IN GOD'S MERCY

There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.
There's a kindness in His justice,
which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than up in heaven.
There is no place where earth's failings
have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.
And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

But we make his love too narrow,
by false limits of our own,
and we magnify His strictness
with a zeal he will not own.

There is plentiful redemption
In the blood that has been shed;
There is joy for all the members
In the sorrows of the Head.

There is grace enough for thousands.
Of new worlds as great as this;
There is room for fresh creations
In that upper home of bliss.

If our love were but more simple,
We should take him at his word;
And our lives would be all gladness

In the joy of Christ our Lord.

Frederick William Faber (1814-1863)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray.

God of all grace, we bring you ourselves.

We bring you our lives, as they currently are, with all that is broken and wrong, but

also much to be grateful for and to celebrate.

Use us, O God, to build your kingdom, to seek peace in our world, to build communities of love.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our churches, Caught in this strange 'in between' time, as we reflect on the painful experiences of lockdown, and how we can best serve our communities and our world over this summer and into the year ahead.

Show us how to create safe spaces, spaces where people can grieve, can find healing, can meet with you and be transformed by your grace.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we bring you our nation, We bring to you all who have been working overtime to see us through this time of crisis, and all who will need to work overtime as we seek to rebuild our communities, our economy, our relationships and our livelihoods. We bring you our leaders and all who must face difficult decisions or face up to inadequacies in our systems exposed by the process of lockdown and pandemic.

Show us how to be a people of grace.

May we follow in your way, O God.

God of all grace, we pray for our world.

As we look out on a global pandemic, and a world in which we have gone backwards in tackling poverty and reaching those most in need during this time of pandemic, which has affected the most vulnerable in our world more than many of us.

As we rebuild, show us how to build a world in which every person's needs are

provided for. A world where every person's potential is fulfilled.

May we follow in your way, O God.

May I follow in your way, O God.

Show me what is mine to do.

We bring this, and all our prayers, in Jesus' name, Amen.³

I, THE LORD OF SEA AND SKY

I, The Lord Of Sea And Sky,

I Have Heard My People Cry.

All Who Dwell In Dark And Sin,

My Hand Will Save.

I Who Made The Stars Of Night,

I Will Make Their Darkness Bright.

Who Will Bear My Light To Them?

Whom Shall I Send?

Here I Am Lord, Is It I, Lord?

I Have Heard You Calling In The Night.

I Will Go Lord, If You Lead Me.

I Will Hold Your People In My Heart.

I, The Lord Of Snow And Rain,

I Have Borne My People's Pain.

I Have Wept For Love Of Them,

They Turn Away.

I Will Break Their Hearts Of Stone,

Give Them Hearts For Love Alone.

I Will Speak My Word To Them

Whom Shall I Send?

Here I Am Lord, Is It I, Lord?...

I, The Lord Of Wind And Flame

I Will Tend The Poor And Lame.

I Will Set A Feast For Them,

My Hand Will Save

Finest Bread I Will Provide,

Till Their Hearts Be Satisfied.

I Will Give My Life To Them,

Whom Shall I Send?

Here I Am Lord, Is It I, Lord?...

Daniel L. Schutte (b. 1947)

BLESSING

Arise from this place and go out into the world.

A world of so much division and pain,

A world crying out for love,

You, each one of you, can be that bit of love for someone this week.

Amen.⁴

³ Prayers of intercession written by Tim Baker

⁴ Additional prayers by Tim Baker