



Personal service for 8th November 2020

This Sunday is recognised as Remembrance Sunday

Call to Worship (from Psalm 78): ... we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.

Hymn: StF 455; HP 63 All my hope on God is founded

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord God Almighty, Creator and Father of all, we adore you for your eternal goodness, calling our hearts to be your own. You are our perfect guide through all the uncertainties of life, and we praise you.

Loving Creator and Father of all, we adore you for your infinite power. You remain steadfast as the stars in heaven, and you are our rock at all times of day and throughout our lives.

Lord God we adore you for your wisdom. We see your splendour, light and life in the beauty of each new day and the details of shapes and colours of trees, flowers and living creatures, and we praise you.

Gracious God we adore you for all your loving gifts to us bringing us joy, but most of all for the gift of Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

We come to Him now, confessing that

- we have not shown His love and compassion in our caring for others;
- we have been blind to, or pushed aside, the needs of the world. There is still hunger and homelessness, and also greed in our daily lives,
- we have denied your grace and power and missed opportunities to serve you.

We praise you, Lord, for your sacrifice on the cross which assures us of your forgiveness freely given to those who ask for it, so we come asking you Lord, to forgive all our shortcomings, and to renew us to work afresh for your kingdom. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Joshua 24: 1-3a; 21-34

I don't know if you have ever read through the book of Joshua. I cannot remember ever doing so before, but I thought I ought to because of this lectionary reading coming from the final chapter.

The first chapter is the account of Joshua being called to follow on from Moses, to lead the people of Israel into the promised land.

Perhaps as a child you were taught this catchy chorus which was written using the words that God used in his call to Joshua?

If so, you may like to sing it now:

Be thou strong and very courageous for I have commanded thee:
'Be not afraid! Be not dismayed! Thou shalt have victory!
I shall be with thee whate're betide, Captain and Leader, Friend and Guide'.

The Israelites were camped at the River Jordan ready to enter and take possession of the land of Canaan, and Joshua's first task was to get the people packed up and ready for the crossing. When reading about it in Joshua Chapters 3 and 4 one cannot but be reminded of the escape of the people of Israel from Egypt and of the leadership of Moses as the people crossed the Red (or Reed) sea, This would be deliberately done by the author who wanted Joshua to be seen as another great leader. Another reminder is at the end of Chapter 5 when Joshua meets the 'commander of the LORD's army' who tells him to remove his sandals because he is on holy ground (just as Moses was told to do the same thing when he saw the burning bush Exodus 3: 5)).

Perhaps the most dramatic story in the book of Joshua is in Chapter 6, about the defeat of the city of Jericho. Children are often taught the words of the song 'Joshua fought the battle of Jericho and the walls came tumbling down' and they enjoy acting out the story with its ritual significance of the number 7 (7 trumpets, 7 priests, 7 days, 7 circuits around the city). They love it especially if there are some walls of boxes or bricks which can crash down at the end. What is less often mentioned, however is the destruction that followed. When the walls had fallen down the soldiers rushed in with their swords and killed all the occupants (except the family of the prostitute, Rahab, who had been rescued because of the help she had given the spies who had previously visited the city.) Then if that wasn't enough, the city was burnt down to a ruin. There are 5 more chapters full of dreadful stories of destruction, bloodshed and annihilation which are accomplished according to the author by the power of God (The Lord fought for Israel [10: 14]). The second part of the book (chapters 13-24) is perhaps easier to accept as it describes how each tribe received its land. Scholars have raised various suggestions which should, of course, be considered. The text in its final form may not be significantly rooted in history. It could be understood as an imaginative creation designed to provide a theological-ideological claim upon the land. What counts is that the narrative provides a suprahistorical warrant for Israel's claims upon the land. Certainly it seems to have been able to override the claims of other populations.

Many problems are avoided if the book is recognised as one of prophecy rather than history. It can then take its place with other old testament books telling the long and chequered story of Israel's rise to predominance in Canaan. It claims that what was promised was indeed fulfilled and Israel did indeed inherit the promised land, but it is also the prelude to Israel's failure to respond to the goodness of God. We see so often how our loving God offers his people a rich life in the right relationship to himself, and how his people time after time throw away their chances and end up in disaster. Our

reading for today in the final chapter of Joshua is a challenge to the people of Israel and to us. Joshua gathers them together at Shechem, the region strongly associated with the covenantal choice between blessings and curses, symbolised by the two mountains on either side of the valley (Deuteronomy 11.29; 27.1-26; Joshua 8.30-35). He retells the story, beginning 'long ago', and asks them to 'choose this day' between 'the gods your ancestors served' and 'The Lord, the God of Israel'.

Our awesome God has done so much for the Israelites and for us. Are we prepared to put Him first in our lives and abandon the other things we worship like money, power, fashion, fame, reputation etc.? The Israelites say 'Oh Yes, we shall serve the Lord', but Joshua reminds them of the holiness of God and the idols that they still have that they need to get rid of... perhaps we too need to be reminded of our idols ... things which may be interfering with our relationship with God. Perhaps there is the idol of 'wanting to be liked' preventing us from speaking to others about our faith, or the idol of 'holding onto grudges' preventing us from experiencing forgiveness... Whatever idol we may possess, from which we need to be free, we can take comfort from the knowledge that we have a loving God who knows us better than we know ourselves, and who has sent his Son to save us. It is interesting that the name 'Joshua' means 'saviour', the same as the name 'Jesus'. Perhaps the rest that Joshua achieved for his people in Canaan is just a foreshadowing of what Jesus can offer us now and in the future.

Our next hymn speaks more about this almighty love

Hymn: StF 459; HP 62 Captain of Israel's host and Guide

Act of remembrance - 2 minutes silence

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.*



Now let us pray:

On this Remembrance Sunday, we remember past wars:

those who fought in them; those who lived through them; those who died in them.

Silence

We pray for the victims of past wars, remembering before you, loving God, those who died in battle, or from the consequences of injury or disease and those who mourned or still mourn them.

We remember those permanently maimed or disabled, and those psychologically scarred or disturbed.. We pray for an end to the suffering of war.

Silence

We pray for the victims of current conflicts, remembering before you, loving God, children trained to hate and to fight, families turned into homeless refugees, and lands laid waste and made barren.

We remember those blinded or crippled, and those driven insane by nightmare experiences. We pray for an end to the destructive hatred of war.

Silence

We pray for the peace of the world remembering before you, loving God, areas where there is armed conflict ...and all those who are working for peace.

We remember that you have called us to strive together for the coming of your kingdom of love and peace. We pray that you will equip us for the task with the faith that knows that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

In the name of Jesus, Prince of Peace.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 132; HP 358 O God, our help in ages past

Reading: Matthew 25:1-13

How do we make sure we are ready? Think about our readiness for everyday things, such as tomorrow's activities, skills we might need at work, or for helping friends, or coping with family matters. Which group of bridesmaids might we be compared to? Are we like the foolish ones – looking forward, but perhaps not having done all we should, and in danger of being caught unprepared? Or are we like the wise ones – 'good to go' in anticipation of what might be needed.

Are we ready for what God may be calling us to do? Do we have that hush of expectation when we pray? Are we ready to be his angels showing love to others?

Hymn: StF 188; HP 246 There's a light upon the mountains

May today prepare us for tomorrow.

May we be prayerful in our preparation, and strong in our doing.

And may all our experiences be enriched by the knowledge that we are loved by God Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,

and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,

be with us all now and evermore. Amen.