



## Worship for 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020 - first of connexional year.

Call to worship Psalm 117

**Hymn** 'O worship the King all glorious above' HP 28, StF 113, 528MP

Prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, and repentance.

Loving Lord as we join together for worship, may our hearts be stilled,  
and our minds focused on you, Amen

Lord God of the Universe, who created the sun moon and stars and set the planets in their orbits, we marvel at all your hand has created. As we enjoy the flowers and fruit of late summer, we praise you for our world in all its generous detail.

Creator God, all we have, all we are, all we want to be, comes from you - you answer our every need. If you seem distant, it is just an illusion, for in Jesus, you are closer than our next breath. Thank, you for all your gifts for shelter and food, for families and friends, for our work, rest and play. Most of all, we thank you because you gave us your most precious gift, your only son Jesus Christ, sent to buy us salvation.

Loving Lord we are aware that we have not always done our best for your creation, or for all the people you love. We are aware, that our actions have caused damage, and we know, that there is an unfair division of the good things you give to us.

We pray that in future we will live in a way that promotes wellbeing and opportunity for others.

Dear Lord, we bring our thanks and praise, for the forgiveness you offer.

.....for giving us another chance to be better people. As we accept that forgiveness, we remember the sacrifice you made, so that we may be saved

Our loving heavenly Father, as we pray in the words Jesus taught to his disciples, we offer all our prayers to you, knowing that they are heard and will be answered according to your will. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

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

Background to Readings

### **a) Today's OT reading- is Exodus 12 :1-14**

In the past few weeks we have travelled through the book of Genesis, tracing the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Patriarchs of Israel. We left that story, at the point where Jacob's son Joseph had become an important man. When famine struck Canaan he invited Jacob and the rest of his family, to move to Egypt.

Now we are in the book of Exodus. Generations have passed, and Jacob's family have multiplied. The Egyptians threatened by increasing numbers of foreigners, have enslaved God's people. God- a voice from a miraculous bush that burned but was not consumed has already called a reluctant Moses to leadership. Although Moses knew his birth right (in spite of his Egyptian upbringing), he still asked who this God might be, who accosted him as he shepherded his flocks. The answer he received was 'I am that I am..... the God who was, who is and who will be forever.'

God sent Moses to petition the Egyptian King to let the people leave for God's promised land. Moses asked Pharaoh to allow the Hebrew people to leave. The people watched Pharaoh's constant changes of mind, followed by God's punishing plagues.. Now, salvation is at hand...!

## Our Gospel reading- Matthew 18 :15-20

In our reading from Matthew, we find Jesus advising his disciples. The times are not easy. God's people are controlled by the Romans, people whose values are alien to Judaism. As at the time of the Passover, God's people are longing for change. There is an undercurrent of dissension, as parties such as the Zealots, seek to ferment rebellion.

Prayer - May your Holy Spirit guide our thoughts today dear Lord as we seek to find your vision for our future. Amen

### Address

So dear friends, our first reading found God's Hebrew people at a time of great change. Since the Bible mentions three or four generations, between the move to Egypt and God's call to Moses, I am going to assume for this talk, that there might still be people in Egypt, who remembered, parents or grandparents, talking of the past, and of God's amazing leadership - Let's imagine how God's people might have approached this moment of personal and national change, as they prepared to follow God's call. Some people, those faithful, who worked to keep the knowledge of a living God alive, and his people, as a separate group, may well have had such shining faith in the timelessness of their God, that they influenced younger people - inspiring them, when it came to the ultimate trust needed to follow God's call?

But on the other hand, some people may have felt 'There is safety in the status quo. I will stay here, where I know what each day will bring. I will still worship my God quietly in my own surroundings but a 'new normal? I just couldn't face that!'

Of course, there would be the old and the very young, the pregnant and the handicapped, all, no doubt terrified, at the thought of the unknown. And what of people who simply followed family tradition who had no real walk with God?

We can imagine the differences of opinion, the 'factions' in favour of going or staying, the wavering of faith, each time a plague seemed to change Pharaoh's heart, only for hopes to be dashed yet again.

But now, the moment has come - God will annihilate the first born of Egypt. His people will escape during the chaos and confusion which, follow. So 'Pack up' they are told 'prepare your last meal and go out into the unknown - salvation is coming!

We can imagine the different terrors of that final night in Egypt!

And then there is our group of disciples, following Jesus, at a time when many factions pulled their country in different directions? There must have been discussions, perhaps differences of opinion as to how the future should look. The group of twelve, included Simon, called Zealot. Did he look to Jesus to lead a rebellion against the Romans - or was he simply a zealous Jew? We don't know. However, we can see, that like the Israelites in Egypt, each would have come with ideas and preconceptions of how the future should look. What we can say, is that those men were daily experiencing, through Jesus, miracles that confirmed the might of God's hand. The difference, this time was that they witnessed positive healings, not negative plagues; acts of love and not of revenge.

Scholars think, that Matthew, writing after the resurrection, (**when God's first born died, to bring salvation for the whole world**), is really speaking through Jesus words, to a fairly new congregation of Jewish converts. Jesus' advises that 'When problems occur and people cannot agree, involve others in the discussion'. That seems sound advice for all difficult situations! So, we may ask, what have these passages to say to us at the beginning of this connexional year '20-'21?

2020 has turned reality upside down. Six months, of almost constant changes of outlook and possibility, finds us groping slowly forward, to a church future that we trust will be Covid safe. Return to the past is not an option. We think of the Hebrews and the disciples who would soon face a 'new normal' and, we say to ourselves, 'History repeats itself!'

God's people spent forty years on the march. Life was not easy, they got side tracked many times and not all who began the Exodus saw the fulfilment of God's promise. Moses and his motley band - thousands strong - would have included many levels of faith and people of no

faith at all. We know there were strangers included – strangers who would experience God's might for themselves.

Moses, when overwhelmed by dissension and rebellion, turned to God in desperation. 'I can't cope alone!' he said, and so God gave him elders filled with his Spirit to share the load. God's people preserved what was good from their past - their oral witness and their tribal structure and built on that, growing closer to their God as they discovered his plans for them.

They did not know how they were going to get to the place God wanted them to be, but they trusted God for their daily needs. Led by a column of smoke by day, and fire by night, they moved in the light of God's presence

The disciples did not know what the future would look like, but they saw God's hand at work in their daily lives and they were given the **promise** of the Holy Spirit.

Today as before, some looking to the future, will remember the past, knowing that God **is** with us yesterday today and forever. They will even have found positive opportunities in the past months. Others, may say, as their safe tradition crumbles round them 'The status quo has served me well, and I just can't face all this change!' Those who have followed tradition blindly, or not at all, will still need to discover the guiding hand of God as a presence in their lives.

Like Moses flock and Matthew's embryo group we are struggling to find what will keep us together for the future. Yes, it is challenging - but the church of God – unimaginable to Moses and his flock, and still in the future for those disciples – has, throughout the centuries, changed and changed and changed again. It has overcome disaster and persecution, building on the best of the past yet always adjusting to new circumstances.

We do not know how our 'new normal' will look, but the pin point of light at the end of the tunnel, assures us that God is in charge and that he has an almighty plan. We, in addition, have knowledge of the Resurrection and of millennia of God's guidance to fall back on,

Yes, we will have many new recommendations to follow for health's sake, and church will not look or feel the same for a while at least. We will disagree at times on the best way forward 'but if two can't agree said Jesus 'involve a third, then others, and finally – everyone. So, although we may come to this point, by different paths, and with divisions of opinion, on how the future should look, we can join as one, in the desire to move forward in faith. Forward towards God's purpose for our new normal. If we are joined by the Spirit, (that power given to the elders in the desert and the Apostles at Pentecost) great things can be accomplished. The Spirit is there for us to share.as we ask God for a vision for our future, both as individual churches and as a circuit.

As, circuit, congregations and individuals, it is for us to pass on the story of God's people. The God who was and is and will be. We must witness to his unending care and to the saving grace of the resurrection. Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever! It is for us to carry the Christ light forward.

As we plan our socially distanced churches, we are instructed, to keep places for strangers – those seeking faith at this difficult time - people who may 'come in from the street' - folk we can witness to in God's name.

May there be many Lord and may they be warmly welcomed! - an appropriate prayer for the beginning of our connexional year! Let's think about, the road ahead, as we sing the next hymn. Amen

**Hymn** Captain of Israel's host HP 62

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Jesus you told us that you will take and carry our burdens  
When we are worried and careworn, draw us close to you,  
help us to forget ourselves as we seek to serve others.

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

Lord in the face of widespread drought, danger and disease.

we pray today for the people of your world.  
So many are threatened by, homelessness and poverty,  
oppression, war and displacement that our struggles with Covid seem small  
And so we lift your world to you, praying for healing of many sorts.

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

Loving Lord, we pray for our United Kingdom  
for the amazing variety of people in these islands.  
We pray for an end to division and dissension as we accept  
that God loves everyone and longs for each individual to know and love him.  
Help us to remember God's people on the march,  
as we seek places for desperate immigrants.

Lord in your mercy - hear our prayer

Lord God we pray that you will guide our country  
at this difficult time, inspiring our leaders  
with the clarity of vision, that only comes through faith in you.

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer

Lord God who connects the entire universe.  
we pray for Christians throughout the world,  
for our Methodist connexion and for our district of West Yorkshire.  
As we welcome Pete and Debs, Guy and Sara to our Circuit,  
we pray that their ministry here will bless us and be a blessing to them.  
As individual churches in our Leeds South and West circuit  
move towards a new normal, we pray for each congregation  
and those leading them.

Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.

Caring Lord at a time when many are full of fear, give those with faith  
strength, and opportunity to witness to those who do not know you.  
We pray for **all** who show the love of God through every day actions  
We thank you for all who work to keep lives safe, in hospital and care home,  
and for those caring for family or friends at home.  
May they reflect the love of Jesus through encouraging words and gentle touch

Lord in your mercy - hear our prayer.

Loving Father, we remember those we have loved and lost  
secure in the knowledge that they are safe in the arms of Jesus  
We thank you that through his sacrifice, we too look forward to a place in heaven.  
In Jesus name – Amen

**Hymn** Great is thy faithfulness HP 66, StF 51, MP200

Let's share the grace together –  
'May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.