

North West Wiltshire Pastorate
Worship for Sunday June 21st 2020
Led by the Revd Sarah Simpson

Good morning and welcome to worship today.
Let us join together as the people of God.

In the challenge of call and commissioning,
We seek neither applause nor affirmation,
Save only to know the right road has been chosen,
And the signs read correctly,
Whatever difficulties we may encounter,
With your love and guidance
We will prevail.
Let us worship God.

We will now sing together, 'Lord, for the years'.

Let us pray,
Almighty God,
You call – and we hear you.
You lead – and we see the way ahead.
You guide – and we look for reassurance.
We enter into a relationship with you,
We find an abundant love
Which flows to our hearts,
We learn of your forgiveness,
Which shapes our actions,
We know your unending presence,
Which moulds our service in your name.

Eternal God,
We thank you for our calling,
For the trust you have shown in us,
For the privilege to be your people,
For the difference we can make in your world.
Amen.

Our readings come from the book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 20, verses 7 – 13 and from Matthew’s gospel chapter 10, verses 24-39

O Lord, you deceived me and I was deceived, you overpowered me and prevailed.

I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me.

Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction.

So the word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long.

But if I say, “I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,” his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones.

I am weary of holding it in; indeed I cannot.

I hear many whispering, “Terror on every side! Report him! Let’s report him!”

All my friends are waiting for me to slip, saying, “Perhaps he will be deceived, then we will prevail over him and take our revenge on him.”

But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior; so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail. They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced, their dishonour will never be forgotten.

O Lord Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord! He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked.

And from Matthew’s gospel:

A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher, and the teacher like his master. If the head of the house has been called Beelzebub, how much more the members of his household?

So do not be afraid of them. There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.

Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

This is the word of the Lord,
Thanks be to God.

A few thoughts ...

Monday was the 24th anniversary of my Ordination, a good friend remembered and sent a message congratulating me, following it up with a phone call. As we talked I reflected that had I been told on that day that I would minister during a global pandemic and lead virtual services, I would have wondered what sort of parallel universe was being discussed. “But”, said my friend, “You would still have said yes to God”.

He was right – even in the toughest of times and there have been a few, that sense of call has never diminished, it has taken much out of me, the personal cost has been great; but I wouldn’t have changed anything.

Whilst I am usually reflective about this time, this year and its peculiar circumstances has magnified that and these lectionary readings have further done so, I have put both the Prophet and the gospel together because they comprise different parts of the picture.

Jeremiah, working in the last years before exile and then into its beginnings found relating God’s message a thankless task. The people either ignored him or the ruling elite used their power to punish the messenger, his words are a cry of anguish to God, yet despite everything, even his friends turning against him, he cannot keep silent, instead he continues and looks forward in hope to the day when he will be vindicated; hope through adversity could be the strapline throughout this prophecy.

In some ways Jeremiah's plight was less than that being endured by Jesus. The slander thrown at him accused him of being in league with the devil, hardly an encouraging picture to those chosen to work with him and to continue his mission! Yet Jesus points out to them that if God cares for the very least of his creatures, they have nothing to fear, whatever may lay before them. To bring family into this was quite risky, in these times the family relationship was over and above all, family support was essential, and yet Jesus is warning that support may not be there, indeed any opposition may be family-led, yet Jesus' call to them must prevail. Anyone who says yes to a call, and then adds conditions will be disappointed to find negotiation isn't an option.

To be called can be both general and specific, both corporate and individual – but whatever the description, there will always be a cost and saying that at the beginning means less of a shock later on.

The hymn, 'Lord, for the years was sung at my Ordination and subsequent Inductions, the final verse I feel goes to the heart of what call is, "Past put behind us, for the future take us, Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone".

Tough times happen and they are hard, but they have an end, as much as they have a beginning; I believe they teach us more about ourselves, our calling and our commitment than the easy times, and I say that not to gloss over the cost, but as someone who knows it firsthand.

Amen.

We will now sing together, 'In heavenly love abiding'.

Our prayers of Intercession.

Today our prayers of Intercession come
From the United Reformed Church
Prayer Handbook
Let us pray,

Let us hold before God
The family life that we have shared-
Its rivalries, its untidiness,
Its mixture of hope and struggle –

And let us pray for wisdom to navigate the years,

In love that lives through troubles and testing,
In faith that rises above difficulty and division.

Then let us pray for families in hard times,
Who have no place to call home,
Who look at the world through a curtain of tears,
Who are wounded by the sharp edges of quarrel,
Who are anxious for their children's future.

And let us give thanks to God,
Who sees possibility beyond tragedy,
Who speaks into places of distress.
And who offers life from a cross.
Amen.

We say together the Lord's Prayer,

Our Father,
Who art in heaven,
Hallowed by 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.

Let us share remotely in the grace, to and for each other,
May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
Be with us,
And remain with us,
Now and forever
Amen.

Until we meet again,
Keep going – this time will pass.
Amen.