

Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon
Sunday 3 January 2021



Order of Service for Worship at Home
including the celebration of Holy Communion

led by Mark Dennis

Trinity Elder & Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher

Gathering in God's presence

Call to Worship

This is the day that the Lord has made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

It is good to give thanks to the Lord

For his love endures forever

God is love; and his love was disclosed to us in this,
that he sent his only Son into the world to bring us life

Hymn – Brightest and best of the Sons of the morning
(Tune: Epiphany Hymn)

Brightest and best of the Sons of the Morning,
Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid,
Star of the east, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid!

Cold on his cradle the dewdrops are shining,
Low lies his head with the beasts of the stall;
Angels adore him, in slumber reclining,
Maker, and Monarch, and Saviour of all.

Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,
Odours of Edom and offerings divine;
Gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,
Myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?

Vainly we offer each ample oblation,
Vainly with gifts would his favour secure;
Richer by far is the heart's adoration,
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.

Brightest and best of the Sons of the Morning,
Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid,
Star of the east, the horizon adorning,
Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid!

Reginald Heber (1783-1826)

Prayer of approach

Almighty and loving God,
 in the name of your Son Jesus,
 we join together to worship you.
Through his coming you have blessed us
 with the light of your love,
you have filled our world of darkness with your light,
you have illuminated our hearts with Good News,
you have made your glory shine upon us,
so that nothing shall ever overcome it.

So now we come,
 with glad thanksgiving,
 with eager expectation,
 with heartfelt praise.

Help us as we sing your praise and hear your word,
 to kneel before the manger in our hearts,
 to offer our gifts
 to bring our worship,
 to recognise you are with us now

And so help us to go on our way
 glorifying and praising you
 for all that we have seen and heard.
In the name of Christ. **Amen.**

Prayer of confession

Lord God most merciful,
we confess that we have sinned,
through our own fault and in common with others,
in thought, word and deed,
and through what we have left undone.

We ask to be forgiven.

By the power of your Spirit turn us from evil to good,
help us to forgive others and keep us in your ways
of righteousness and love;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Use either of these forms, or a different version/language if you prefer:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be
done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive
those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.

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.

Listening to God's Word

Bible reading: Psalm 16: 1-11

*The Bible reader will say all the words. The congregation is invited to respond by joining in saying the words in **bold** print*

- 1 Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge.
- 2 **I say to the Lord, "You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you."**
- 3 As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight.
- 4 **Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips.**
- 5 The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.
- 6 **The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage.**
- 7 I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.
- 8 **I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.**
- 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.
- 10 **For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.**
- 11 You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Bible reading: Matthew 2: 1-12

¹ In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising and have come to pay him homage." ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage." ⁹ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹² Having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Sermon

Introduction

It can be challenging to decide what to preach on at this time of year. Are we still in the season of Christmas? Generally, Christmas is regarded as 'officially' ending on Wednesday, 6th January, which is 12th Night. However, there is a little celebrated festival called Candlemas. Some churches regard Christmas as going on until then.

Candlemas commemorates the Jewish tradition of presenting the first male child born in a family to God in the temple. This happened 40 days after the child was born. If you count 40 days from 25th December, you arrive at 2nd February. That's the date on which Candlemas is still celebrated (if at all)! But, if, in today's world, you tell people that Christmas is going to go on until 2nd February, they don't like it. It can get quite challenging! Perhaps even more so this winter, when people started putting up Christmas decorations in November, to relieve the

tedium of lockdown. If you did that, 2nd February probably seems a long way off.

So, instead of a Christmas sermon, we're going to have a look at verse 8 of Psalm 16. This offers us a New Year's resolution, which, on this first Sunday of 2021, is worth considering: "I keep the Lord always before me". In this verse we find three things to which we should give priority. We're going to look at those now.

(a) The best person

First, the Psalmist tells us that the best person to put at the centre of our New Year resolution is "the Lord". "I keep the Lord always before me". The best person. There is a lesson for us here. God - 'the Lord' - must have priority above all else in our lives. Of course, people are important - no-one is denying that. All people; women and men; young or old are made 'in the image of God'. But, as with so many things, it comes down to a question of priorities. In our life, who is most important to us? Is it our wife or husband; our son or daughter; our father or mother; our brother or sister; our boyfriend or girlfriend - or is it God?

Perhaps this sounds like a hard message? It is not intended to be unfeeling or insensitive. In the end, it is a matter of priority. Are we really prepared to resolve to give God the central place in our lives? Is he, ultimately, for us 'the best person'?

In our New Testament reading from Matthew's Gospel we heard about some people who visited Jesus soon after he was born. Different versions of the Bible describe them differently: 'Magi'. 'Wise Men' 'Scholars'. 'Men who studied the stars'.

Whoever they were, they clearly went to a great deal of effort to visit Jesus and worship him. Presumably, for them, Jesus was 'the best person'.

We can read in Luke's gospel what happened when Jesus (in adult life) called people to follow him: "One man said: 'First let me go and bury my father.'

Jesus said to him; 'Let the dead bury their own dead; but you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.' Another said, 'I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.' Jesus said to him: 'No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.'" (Luke 9: 59-62)

Lots of people over many years, have found this (and similar) teaching of Jesus very difficult to accept. But, in the end, we have a choice to

make. Who is most important in our life? It can be a difficult choice; but we have to make it. Does God have the number one place in our life - or not?

Here is a quote from *Being Disciples* by Rowan Williams. It is a book worth considering if you've got any gift cards or vouchers you haven't decided what to do with. It is a slim volume, which increases the possibility of actually finishing the book!

"Being with the Master is recognizing that who you are is finally going to be determined by your relationship with him. If other relationships seek to define you in a way that distorts this basic relationship, you lose something vital for your own well-being and that of all around you too. You lose the possibility of a love more than you could have planned or realized for yourself. Love God less and you love everyone and everything less."

Really, we know, somewhere deep down inside, that we need to be saying, with the Psalmist, "I keep the Lord always before me".

(b) The best place

So, we have seen that the best person is "the Lord" and this leads on to the second point, which is the best place. "I keep the Lord always before me". The best place.

Normally, at this time of year, a lot of people go to see a pantomime. This year, of course, has been different. But we all know what a pantomime is like. There's always a hunt going on for the villain in a pantomime. And whenever the question is asked, 'Where's the villain?', the answer is always: 'Behind you!'

This leads us to one of the great dangers that faces us in the church. Looking backwards! Living in the past. Of course, Christianity is a historical religion, rooted in events that took place in the past; in history. The birth, ministry, teaching and resurrection of Jesus - although of eternal meaning - all happened at particular times in the past.

(c) The best plan

So, we have seen that we should give priority in our lives to God; 'the Lord', who is the best person; and we have seen that the best place for him is 'before' us. This leads to the third priority which this verse gives us: The best plan.

Surely the best plan is to "keep [the Lord] always before me". And please notice particularly the word: "always".

It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking that there are parts of our lives in which God is not interested. Jesus should be the Lord of the whole of our life, without exception. Do you remember what holidays were like? Well, if we compare the Christian life to a summer holiday, we can think of it as a truly fully inclusive package deal. "keep....always."

The truth is, we set aside areas of our life where we don't think God has a part to play. We carry on on our own, making choices and decisions, without involving God in any way.

The support and uplifting power of the Lord is freely available to us; but we don't use it. This is madness, really, isn't it? We're not self-sufficient in any area of life, even though we may like to think that we are.

Too often, we go to the point of exhaustion, piling burden upon burden, before we call upon God. In modern books, plays, films, television programmes, we see characters brought to the very depths of despair, through a tragedy of some kind. It's at that point, so often, that "God" is invoked. In a really great crisis, almost everyone will pray.

There is a strange perverseness or stubbornness in all of us that prevents us from keeping the Lord always before us. One of the great Christmas readings is the prologue to John's gospel. You probably know the words of verse 11: "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (KJV)

For all his power, God will not force himself upon us. We must "keep the Lord always before us". We must invite him into our lives. Each one of us has our own story. Each one of us has places in our life where we need him to walk. Each one of us needs his healing touch, his words of forgiveness, his liberating power.

Conclusion

So, if we are looking for a good New Year's resolution, we could do worse than look at verse 8 of Psalm 16: "I keep the Lord always before me."

This means three things:

1. Giving God the central place in our lives.
2. Looking to what He is planning to do in the future; not only to all He has done in the past; and,

3. At all times – always - call upon God and invite him in: into our church; and into our lives.

"I keep the Lord always before me."
Amen

Responding to God's grace

Prayers of concern

Please join us in prayers of concern –

Dear Lord,

Across the world, to a greater or lesser degree, the threat of Covid 19 continues. We pray for everyone working to end it. We pray for medical staff and all the support workers exhausted after months of such hard work. We pray that a vaccine will soon be available everywhere, not just in rich countries.

We pray that everyone will find the courage and the hope to continue as the pandemic rages on. Please help us to remember and value the positive in the current situation, the selfless work of so many, the community spirit which has been shown and the increased understanding of our mutual dependency.

Sometimes it seems that the world is going backwards. In so many places we see injustice, such as wrongful imprisonment, the oppression of minorities and the treatment of refugees. We pray that you will give support to those who are working without violence to change the world for the better, bringing about the peace and justice which all deserve.

We pray for the USA as a new president prepares to take office. We pray for him as he aims to reduce the divisions in US society and commit anew to working together with other countries on climate change.

At home the New Year brings not only an increased threat of the virus but changes as we leave the EU. We pray that here too divisions in society about this will come to an end. We pray in particular for those in organisations which have only a short time to ensure a smooth transition. We pray that although we are no longer part of the EU the links we have had with other Europeans will remain and we will continue to work with them towards a shared aim of a better world for us all.

We pray for all the organisations trying to support the homeless on our streets and struggling families. We pray in particular for the night shelter, Faith in Action and the Wimbledon Food Bank.

We pray for our church and for support for all who are working to continue its work and bring us together. In particular we pray for Catherine and Sam and all the elders who have such a huge responsibility in what is a very difficult situation. Strengthen them in their work and show us all how we can play our part.

Lastly we pray for ourselves. We pray for families who may have lost someone dear to them and have had to face a first Christmas without them. We pray for the many young people whose education has been disrupted and for their mental health which has been so severely affected. May they get the support they need.

In a moment of silence we pray for everyone who has asked for support and for those known to us who need our prayers.

All these prayers we bring you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen

Offertory

*This is an opportunity to set aside your regular financial contribution to Trinity's ongoing work and witness. Call to mind your gift now as you share in the prayer below. At home, you should also **uncover the bread and wine now.***

Almighty and most merciful God,
out of the fullness of your gifts
we bring before you our gifts and our lives.
Blessed be your holy name forever
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Celebration of Holy Communion

As we gather in spirit, although physically dispersed,
we remember that Jesus was born of Mary;
he lived an ordinary life on earth;
he suffered and died for us; on the third day he rose again;
and he is always present through the Holy Spirit.

In his presence, and in the company of all the people of God,
past, present, and to come, we celebrate the Supper of the Lord.

Hymn: Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim:
Gold of obedience and incense of lowliness
Bring and adore him, the Lord is his name.

Low at his feet lay thy burden of carefulness,
High on his heart he will bear it for thee,
Comfort thy sorrows and answer thy prayerfulness,
Guiding thy steps as may best for thee be.

Fear not to enter his courts in the slenderness
Of the poor wealth thou would'st reckon as thine:
Truth in its beauty and love in its tenderness,
These are the offerings to lay on his shrine.

These, though we bring them in trembling and fearfulness,
He will accept for the name that is dear:
Mornings of joy give for evenings of tearfulness,
Trust for our trembling and hope for our fear.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness,
Bow down before him, his glory proclaim:
Gold of obedience and incense of lowliness
Bring and adore him, the Lord is his name.

J.S.B. Monsell (1811-75)

Hear the gracious words of our Lord Jesus Christ:
'Come to me, all who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.
I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who
believes in me shall never thirst. Him who comes to me, I will not cast
out'.

Let us hear again the words of institution of this feast, as they are given
by the Apostle Paul:-

"The tradition which I handed on to you came to me from the Lord
himself: that on the night of his arrest the Lord Jesus took bread, and
after giving thanks to God, broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is
for you. Do this in memory of me'.

In the same way, he took the cup after supper, and said: 'This cup is the
new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this in
memory of me.' For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you
proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes.

Let us pray:

With joy we give you thanks and praise,
almighty God; source of all life and love: that we live in your world;
that you are always creating and sustaining it by your power;
and that you have so made us that we can know and love you;
trust and serve you.

We give you thanks that you loved the world so much
that you gave your only Son,
so that everyone who has faith in him may not die; but have eternal life.
We praise you that he took our nature and was born as the child of Mary,
that he might share our life, reveal your love, reconcile us to yourself,
and give us power to become your children

Holy Lord God, by what we do here in remembrance of Christ,
we celebrate his perfect sacrifice on the cross;
and his glorious resurrection and ascension;
we declare that he is Lord of all;
and we prepare for his coming in his kingdom.

Accept our sacrifice of praise; and, as we eat and drink at his command,
unite us to Christ, wherever we are, as one body in him,
and give us strength to serve you in the world.
And to you, one holy and eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
we give praise and glory, now and for ever.
Amen

The bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ.

Take, eat, this is the body of Christ, broken for you.
Do this in remembrance of him.

The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of Christ, shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin: drink of it.

A short time of silence

Accomplished and concluded, O Christ our Lord, is the mystery which you
have ordained. For we have tasted your death, seen your resurrection;
and have been filled with your unending life.

Let us pray:

Most gracious God, we praise you for what you have given; and for what you have promised us here. You have made us one with all your people in heaven and on earth. You have fed us with the bread of life and renewed us for your service. Now we give ourselves to you and we ask that our daily living may be part of the life of your kingdom; and that our love may be your love reaching out into the life of the world; through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded (Tune: Michael)

All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
Only good and only true
God unknown,
He alone
Calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
Sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil is builded,
Tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power
Hour by hour
Is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
Deep his wisdom, passing thought;
Splendour, light and life attend him,
Beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore
From his store
New-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth the almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth
Pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand
At his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
Sacrifice of praise be done,
High above all praises praising
For the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call
One and all;
Ye who follow shall not fall.

Robert Bridges (1844-1930) altd.
Based on Joachim Neander (1650-80)

Blessing

Let us go now,
strengthened by grace, held in love, and nurtured through fellowship,
to do God's will and to be God's people.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
be upon us, and among all who are dear to us, whether near or far,
today and always.
Amen