

# Trinity United Reformed Church Wimbledon

Sunday 21 March 2021

## Order of Service for 'Worship from Home'



*Led by Grace de Grouchy, Su Lambert, Pam Rostron, Peter Smith and Alison Trehearn*

### ***Call to Worship***

You are the descendants of the prophets and of the covenant that God gave your ancestors, saying to Abraham, "And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed".

### ***Prayer of approach***

Let us pray.

Almighty God, infinite and eternal in wisdom, power and love: we praise you for all that you are, and for all that you do for the world. You have shown us your truth and your love in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Help us by your Spirit to worship you in spirit and in truth; Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

### ***Hymn 518 – Father I place into your hands***

Father, I place into your hands  
the things that I can't do.  
Father, I place into your hands  
the times that I've been through.  
Father, I place into your hands  
the way that I should go,  
for I know I always can trust you.

Father, I place into your hands  
my friends and family.  
Father, I place into your hands  
the things that trouble me.  
Father, I place into your hands  
the person I would be,  
for I know I always can trust you.

Father, we love to see your face,  
we love to hear your voice.  
Father, we love to sing your praise,  
and in your name rejoice.  
Father, we love to walk with you  
and in your presence rest,  
for we know we always can trust you.

Jenny Hewer (1975)

### ***Prayer of confession***

And now a prayer of confession and assurance of pardon.

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.

In repentance and in faith, receive the promise of grace and the assurance of pardon. Here are words you may trust, words that merit full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. To all who turn to him he says "Your sins are forgiven". He also says "Follow me".

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Let us now join together in the prayer that Jesus taught us, the Lord's prayer, using whichever language is most familiar to us:

### ***The Lord's Prayer***

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.

## ***Introduction to Bible Readings***

Today in our service, we are reflecting on God's 'Covenant'. Although the word may be familiar to us, it is not used every day – it seems fixed in the past, part of a bygone era – or confined to legal terminology.

In the Scriptures we first hear of God's Covenant with his promise to Abraham. We also see it expanded and set in stone in the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai. Much later, Jesus declares the start of the 'New Covenant' when he pours the wine at the Last Supper – something we remember during Holy Communion, in fact a keystone of our Christian faith.

But what is new in this Covenant? How do we understand these terms? And what is their meaning for us in our daily lives? Let us listen to today's readings, first to hear what the prophet Jeremiah foretold, and then to turn our attention to what the author of the Letter to the Hebrews says to his Jewish audience about the prophecy's fulfilment.

### ***Jeremiah 31:31-34 – A New Covenant***

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

New Revised Standard Version, Anglicised

### ***Hebrews 8:1-7 & 13***

What we are saying is this: Christ, whose priesthood we have just described, is our High Priest and is in heaven at the place of greatest honour next to God himself. He ministers in the temple in heaven, the true place of worship built by the Lord and not by human hands. And since every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices, Christ must make an offering too. The sacrifice he offers is far better than those offered by the earthly priests. (But even so, if he were here on earth he wouldn't even be permitted to be a priest because down here the priests still follow the old Jewish system of sacrifices.). Their work is connected with a mere earthly

model of the real tabernacle in heaven; for when Moses was getting ready to build the tabernacle, God warned him to follow exactly the pattern of the heavenly tabernacle as shown to him on Mount Sinai. But Christ, as a Minister in heaven, has been rewarded with a far more important work than those who serve under the old laws because the new agreement that he passes on to us from God contains far more wonderful promises. The old agreement didn't even work. If it had, there would have been no need for another to replace it. God speaks of these new promises, of this new agreement, as taking the place of the old one; for the old one is out of date now and has been put aside forever.

Living Bible (Paraphrase)

### ***Hymn 650 – God with humanity made one***

God with humanity made one  
is seen in Christ, God's only Son:  
in you, Lord Christ, the Son of Man,  
we see God's reconciling plan.

To save a broken world you came,  
and from chaotic depths reclaim  
your whole creation, so we share  
your reconciling work and care

In you all humankind can see  
the people God would have us be.  
In you we find how God forgives,  
through you, the Spirit in us lives.

Through us God calls the world again;  
and constantly his love remains  
with arms outstretched, to heal and bless  
the refugees of emptiness.

Where race or creed or hate divide,  
the Church, like God, must stand beside  
and stretch out reconciling hands  
to join, through suffering, every land.

Then give us strength, great Lord of life,  
to work until all human strife  
is reconciled, and all shall praise  
your endless love, your glorious ways. (Amen)

David Fox (1956- )

## **Reflection**

I've called this address "the New Covenant" for obvious reasons, but I toyed with calling it, "What's in a Word" which is not so obvious.

Our first reading was from Jeremiah and I suspect that most people aren't familiar with the book; I certainly wasn't. I must have read it about forty years ago, but far too quickly and I definitely missed the impact of this small section from chapter 31. Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible. The first thirty chapters are highly repetitive and are basically the Old Covenant; God saying that if Israel obeys the law he will look after them, if they don't he will punish them.

This is precisely my dictionary definition of covenant: "A mutual agreement between two or more persons to do, or refrain from doing, certain acts". Note the "mutual"; both sides have to do something for it to work.

The next twenty-two chapters of Jeremiah are, essentially, more of the same with a bit of added gory detail.

But chapter 31 is completely different; although written in about 600BC it's an uncannily accurate prediction of what Jesus would do. There is a complete change of tone. In Deuteronomy, the law is written on tablets of stone and then the people write it on their own hearts. But Jeremiah foresees a time when God will put the law within people, he will write it on their hearts. God seems to have given up all hope of people obeying the law of their own accord and he will take a far more active role. And, astonishingly, Jeremiah goes on to say ".....they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more". This is the Gospel in a nutshell.

Our second reading was from the Letter to the Hebrews, and is far more familiar. It's about the Old and New Covenants, and contrasts the work of the priests with the work of Jesus. The priests followed the law – worship, sacrifice and offering – but limited it to within the four walls of the Temple. Jesus's work – and bear in mind that this was written after the Resurrection – is completely and absolutely unlimited in both earth and heaven. It's a free offer to all people for all time, whoever and wherever they are.

It's almost a misnomer to call this a covenant; instead of it being a mutual agreement, God is now doing virtually all the work.

In The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus shows ways in which he is extending the Covenant saying, "It was said that ....., but I say to you that.....". For example, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart'." Jesus always looks beyond the letter of the law to keeping fully both the letter and the spirit. He

summarises it as, "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets".

But the great bulk of the sermon is simply ethical teaching about what we should do in our ordinary, secular lives.

A piece in the paper by the Dean of Lichfield, where the Cathedral is being used as a vaccination centre, made the same point. He said that we shouldn't place boundaries between our religious and secular lives, and that much of Jesus's ministry was to demonstrate the devastating consequences of sealing off God from the sheer mess, pain and brokenness of human life. He said that the church finds itself being most authentic when it not only proclaims but also becomes a channel for God's grace to touch the world.

I think all this means that what really matters is what we do in the real world – in our secular lives. And something struck me that I had never thought of before, even though it's blindingly obvious. I'm sure it's not an original insight, but Jesus spent nearly all his life and ministry in the secular world. Although he spent some time in temple and synagogue, he lived most of his life working and talking, eating and drinking with ordinary people in the real world; using the language they understood – no archaic or "religious" language. And we should do the same.

In other words, do what's right, and others will notice, and realise you are inspired by something special. This is a very practical aspect of the New Covenant.

I've finally returned to that word "covenant", and I have a very real problem with it. I've already quoted the definition in my dictionary, but it went on to add "now mainly legal or theological". And if you use a word that is only in the language of lawyers and theologians, you're likely to have problems communicating it.

Whenever the words "New Covenant" are used in the New Testament, they are being addressed to Jews for whom they are simply a useful shorthand. Most famously, of course, Jesus referred to "the blood of the New Covenant" after the Last Supper, something we remember during Holy Communion, in fact it's a keystone of our Christian Faith. But although I agree completely with what it expresses, I don't think I would ever use such words in either a church setting or a secular one.

However, I've never really thought about what words I would use instead of "The New Covenant". It would make a good brainstorming exercise for a group; throw out lots of wordings and write them down without any discussion or comment. It might look something like:

- New covenant/testament/promise
- I have an instinctive feeling of God being with me

- Whatever the vagaries of my behaviour, God remains stable and secure on his side of the relationship.
- I nothing lack if I am His and He is mine forever
- Jesus, and all in Him, is mine!
- .....and so on

Now, anyone looking at such a list might say "I think those bits are wrong, those bits leave me cold, but these bits really strike a chord with me". And we will all have different reactions and insights; there's no single right answer.

So, I'm going to end by asking you all to do two things in the coming week.

Firstly, imagine how your understanding of God, and your relationship with him, is probably different from that of a Jew 2,000 years ago.

And secondly, try to find words to express that in a conversation with someone in your secular life. Your feelings and thoughts will almost certainly be right, don't worry if your words feel inarticulate or even wrong. A person you are talking to will appreciate your obviously sincere words, even if they are a bit stumbling, far more than a pat quote from someone else's lips.

Amen

### ***Prayer of Concern***

In two days' time it will be a year since our country was first put into lockdown. That, and the subsequent lockdowns, have relied on covenants between people and government, and between family, friends, neighbours and strangers. In our prayers of concern we will think of all those we continue to rely on, and those for whom this has been a difficult and challenging year.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, to whom all things are possible, we bring before you our concerns for the world, your incredible creation, and for all who struggle to enjoy the good things that we can so easily take for granted.

Bless all those who have mourned the loss of a loved one, taken too soon, and without the comforting presence of family or friends. In their sorrow, may they know your healing grace. Give strength and fortitude to all who work in health professions throughout the world.

Where those in leadership have chosen to prefer power over protecting their people, we ask that your Spirit speaks to them of justice and mercy.

May those who are the poorest in our world and in our own society have their fair share of the earth's resources and riches, and a just share of protection and prevention against both Covid and other threats to physical health and mental well-being.

During that first lockdown we had the chance to pause our busy lives, and in the quiet that came over the land, for many people there was a chance to listen, to hear birdsong and to see afresh the wonders of the natural world. We pray for the people and organisations who are trying to raise awareness of the threat posed by the climate emergency and the damage we are doing to the planet.

May your blessings be poured on those who have kept us going during this time: the medical and support staff; care homes and carers; shop assistants, delivery drivers and transport workers; teachers and school staff; central and local governments; TV and radio stations, and those working in the arts; voluntary organisations and charities.

The year has taken its toll on us all, yet the light will always conquer the dark, and we have seen how you have worked through others in our communities to bring hope and to demonstrate your all-encompassing love. As we journey towards a second Easter under restrictions, let us take hope from all that has been accomplished since last March and in Jesus's name give thanks for the work of all those who have kept us united as a worshipping community and church.

After a moment of reflection for us all to pray for any people and needs which are known to us, let us say together the prayer which we will be asked to join the nation in praying this coming Tuesday during the day of national reflection.

**God of Love,**

**As we think about all that has changed this year, help us to trust that you are always with us. As we remember those who have died,**

**help us to trust they are at peace with you.**

**As we reach out to others with kindness and care, may hope shine out in every heart and home. Amen**



***Hymn 509 - Oh Jesus I have promised (Tune: Wolvercote)***

O Jesus, I have promised  
to serve thee to the end;  
be thou forever near me,  
my Master and my Friend;  
I shall not fear the battle  
if thou art by my side,  
nor wander from the pathway  
if thou wilt be my Guide.

Oh, let me feel thee near me;  
the world is ever near;  
I see the sights that dazzle,  
the tempting sounds I hear;  
my foes are ever near me,  
around me and within;  
but, Jesus, draw thou nearer,  
and shield my soul from sin.

Oh, let me hear thee speaking  
in accents clear and still,  
above the storms of passion,  
the murmurs of self-will;  
O, speak to reassure me,  
to hasten, or control;  
O, speak, and make me listen,  
thou Guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised  
to all who follow thee  
that where thou art in glory  
there shall thy servant be;  
O guide me, call me, draw me,  
uphold me to the end;  
O, give me grace to follow,  
my Saviour and my Friend.

J E Bode (1816-74)

***Dedication and Prayers of Dismissal and Blessing***

We are about to go back out into the world around us and, as Peter reminded us, Jesus spent nearly all his life and ministry in the secular world. During these last months, it has been difficult or impossible for many of us to engage in some of our usual opportunities for sharing our faith and offering service to those around us.

And, while we may still be offering our money by whatever means, it has been difficult sometimes to know how we should offer gifts of time and talents. We pray that God inscribe His ways within us, as we find new paths to interact and offer ourselves — and we now dedicate all our contributions to Him.

May we now go in peace, to love and serve the Lord, to search for the needs of all God's people, to serve in whatever ways we can, to share in Christ's ministry of love. And may the blessing of God Almighty, our Creator, our Redeemer and our Sustainer be with us and in us, today and always.  
Amen