

St Mary's Church Watton
Sunday Worship (4th Sunday @ 10)
Lent 2
28th February 2021

“How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?”

Welcome to our Sunday worship service on zoom for the second Sunday in Lent. Everyone will be ‘muted’ except for those who will be speaking or reading, but we encourage you to join in with Andy who is our responder for today, and respond with him by saying everything written in bold. We shall (hopefully) provide singing accompaniment to our two hymns for today so that you can sing along!

There are some questions/challenges highlighted in our service today which may provide the stimulus for some ‘after service’ discussion. This will be the time when notices are given so, please stay on afterwards and ‘virtually’ socialize.

And so, we now take a few moments to gather ourselves as we prepare to worship, giving thanks for this opportunity to come together as community in love and faith.

(silence)

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you.

And also with you

This is the day the Lord has made.

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

We have come together in the name of Christ,
To offer our praise and thanksgiving,
To hear and receive God's Holy Word,
To pray for the needs of the world
And to seek forgiveness of our sins,
That by the power of the Holy Spirit
We may give ourselves to the service of God.

We pray together:

Loving Lord

**Fill us with your life-giving, joy-giving presence,
that we may praise you now with our lips
and all day long with our lives.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.**

Our hymn, familiar to many of us, written by that great hymn writer Charles Wesley, echoes the pattern of many psalms – the transformation of sorrow into joy through song. Rev'd Kyla will lead us with the tune if you wish to sing along.

**Jesu lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly
While the nearer waters roll,
while the tempest still is high:
Hide me, o my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
safe into the haven guide;
O receive my souls at last.**

**Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on thee;
Leave, ah leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me:
All my trust on thee is stayed;
All my help from thee I bring;
Cover my defenceless head
With the shadow of thy wing.**

**Thou O Christ, art all I want;
More than all in thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick, and lead the blind.
Just and holy is thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.**

**Plenteous grace with thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.
Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of thee;
Spring thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity.**

Words: Charles Wesley/ Music Joseph Parry

We now come to a time of confession. We all wander from God, and in these difficult times we may feel distant, disconnected and separated from those we care about, and maybe even from God's love. We are made in God's image and in that image we are made to be in community with each other and with him, so we

find ourselves struggling in our isolation. We come then in that reality, to bring our confession to the one who came to save us.

Confession

Brothers and sisters, we come to our Lord as one from whom no secrets are hidden, to ask for his forgiveness and peace.

Christ came in humility to share our lives;

Forgive our pride.

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy.

Christ came to bring us good news for all people

Forgive our silence.

Christ have mercy

Christ have mercy.

Christ came in love to a world suffering;

Forgive our self-centredness.

Lord have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love

Bring us back to himself,

Forgive us our sins,

And assure us of his eternal love

In Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

“How shall we sing the LORD’S song in a strange land?” Ps 137

Rewind – 2,500 years ago – the defeated Israelites find themselves exiled in an unfamiliar land. According to the Psalmist, in their pain and anguish, they sit down together and weep by the waters of Babylon. They lament everything they have lost – everything they had once held dear. They are cut off from everything that is familiar and sacred – a wilderness experience in every sense of the word. They realize that they have not appreciated just what they had of real value in their lives, until it was gone. Added to this misery was the constant taunting of their gloating captors: “Sing your victory songs of Zion now then!”

After two generations in Babylon, they are losing a sense of their own identity. They are experiencing hardship – yes- but they are being sucked into a decadent society, with all its pleasures and temptations. In their ‘lostness’ they are becoming susceptible to individual and societal displacement activities, which are designed, or have the effect of, numbing their pain and anguish. What now?

With hindsight we know that God hasn’t let go of his vanquished, inconsolable people, but it must have felt like it to them.

By the rivers of Babylon, 2,500 years ago, there was a voice crying in the wilderness - a prophet that we know very little about, who, through visions, was given a song for his/her people:

Words from Isaiah 40:

**Comfort, comfort my people,
Says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem
And proclaim to her
That her hard service has been completed,
That her sin has been paid for,
That she has received from the Lord’s hand
Double for all her sins.**

A voice of one calling:
in the desert prepare
the way of the LORD.
Make straight in the wilderness
A highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up.
Every mountain and hill made low.
The rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the LORD will be revealed.
And all mankind together will see it.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

Why do you say, O Jacob,
and complain O Israel.
My way is hidden from the LORD,
My cause is disregarded by my God?
Did you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not tire or grow weary
And his understanding no one can fathom.
He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
Even youths grow tired and weary,
And young men stumble and fall;
But those who hope in the LORD
Will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
They will run and not grow weary,
They will walk and not grow faint.

Words of comfort and hope: you will be delivered from this. You may feel small and forgotten; you may feel worn down by life's hardships, and distracted by the temptations of destructive behaviour. You may be burdened by your own weakness and collective sin, but, as the mouthpiece of God, I am giving you a bigger vision. My song will fill your hearts and minds with a vision of your God, who is deeper and greater, beyond time and the universe; mover and sustainer. God of majesty and power, who transcends the worldly conflicts of victor and vanquished.

Forward 2,500 years. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?

We sit and weep for we find ourselves on unfamiliar ground. A land of loss and sudden changes, hopes, dashed dreams ripped away.

We sit and weep for the 'real' world not the digital reality of today.

We sit and weep for our vulnerability to contagion which requires us to isolate and distance ourselves from others.

We sit and weep for we find ourselves in the strange land of hoarding, and emptying foodbanks. Greed alongside generosity. Frantic buying alongside faithful giving. Humanity at its worst and at its best.

We sit and weep in this strange land - **and God sits with us.**

Isaiah understood the 'two-sided' nature of God's character: mercy and judgement, grace and discipline, justice and forgiveness, exile and salvation – each held in tension. Destruction and renewal?

I wonder – if a prophet in the vein of Isaiah delivered such words to us in our present context, would we recognize and embrace them as a messenger from God? Would we listen and take heed of their words of comfort and hope? Would we have listened to Isaiah's contemporary, Ezekiel's, words of warning? Would we dismiss the words as those of an eccentric? **Does God use people in this way today? If so, are they permitted a 'voice'?**

“A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight, in the wilderness, a highway for our God.....and the glory of the Lord will be revealed”. Amen.

Song : Knowing You

**All I once held dear,
built my life upon.
All this world reveres,
And wars to own,
All I once though gain
I have counted loss;
Spent and worthless now, compared to this:**

*Knowing you, Jesus.
Knowing you,
There is no greater thing,
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord.*
**Now my heart's desire
is to know you more,
to be found in you
and known as yours, to possess by faith what I counted loss;
spent and worthless now, compared to this:**

*Knowing you, Jesus.
Knowing you,
There is no greater thing,
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord.*

**Oh, to know the power
Of your risen life,
And to know you in your sufferings,
To become like you in your death, my Lord, so with you to live and never die.**

*Knowing you, Jesus.
Knowing you,
There is no greater thing,
You're my all, you're the best,
You're my joy, my righteousness,
And I love you, Lord.*

Words and music: Graham Kendrick

Affirmation of the Christian Way:

As we follow the way of Christ,
We affirm the presence of God among us,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
God calls us to share in worship.
*Jesus said, where two or three are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.*

Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share in prayer,
Jesus said, remain in me, and I will remain in you.
Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

*God calls us to share the scriptures.
Jesus met his disciples on the road
And opened the scriptures to them.*
Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share in communion.

Jesus said, do this in remembrance of me.

Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share in service.

Jesus said, as you do it for the least of these, you do it for me.

Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

God calls us to share the Good News.

Jesus said, go and make disciples of all nations.

Jesus, you are the Way: guide us on our journey.

Prayers

Loving God, in your goodness

Teach us to reach for you in everything we think and say and do

That we may be at one with your purpose.

Living God, in your goodness

Show us that you are with us in all our joys and in our suffering.

That we may feel your living presence in our lives.

Loving God, in your goodness

Help us to be connected with others, in prayer and in care.

We will pause for a time of silence to pray for those known to us who are on our hearts today

That we may continue to serve you in the everyday.

Living God, in your goodness

Guide our actions, that we may be always seeing beyond our prejudices.

That we may see everyone as your loved children.

Loving God, in your goodness

Be with us, with our families and friends and in our communities.

That we may be safe and held in your loving embrace.

Living God, in your goodness
Draw closer to all your children around the world.
That they may know your transforming, healing love.

**In your love make all things new
In your love make us new.
In your love make all things new.**

We end our prayers today with a special prayer for Lent which is on the leaflet distributed in the Lent bags, written by Anglican Franciscan monk Fr Andrew, who worked in London during the Blitz:

We say together:

**“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief”.
But let no part of it stay in me.
If my life brings me darkness, help me to meet it with faith;
If pain, with courage;
If bereavement with hope;
If joy, with gratitude;
All things with love and patience.
So, let my life indeed be the expression of my faith.
Amen.**

How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?

We draw our worship to a close with an extract from the Old Testament book Song of Songs, a collection of poetry purported to be written by King Solomon.

“Arise my darling, my beautiful one, come with me. See, the winter is past, the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth, the season of Spring has come.” Song of Songs 2; 10-12



Photo taken of daffodils emerging from winter ‘hibernation’ at St Mary’s courtesy Mick & Janet Selvey.

Blessing

Be with us, Lord, as we go out into the world.
May the lips that have sung your praises always speak the truth;
May the ears which have heard your word
Listen only to that which is good.
And may our lives be always pleasing in your sight,
For the glory of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

In the name of Christ, Amen.