

Worship for 19th Sunday In Ordinary Time (complete text. A video version is also online)
Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.

Welcome: to worship for 9th August 2020

Welcome to worship with the South Warwickshire Methodist Circuit this morning. Whether you are in your home, out enjoying the fresh air, or maybe on a staycation, you are most welcome.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to our service: Nigel Saxton for choosing the hymns; Russell Blackwell and Margaret Weir for the readings; Anne Howe for the Sermon and to Audrey Simpson and Anne Oliver (that's me!) for the prayers. Kate Tennyson and Tim Pearson have done the technical work putting this all together, thank you.

If you would like to take part, then please get in touch with the Circuit Office on swc.katetennyson@gmail.com

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

Jesus said: 'Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid.'
Our God is a powerful God,
who does things way beyond our understanding.
But we have no need to fear,
for we know we are safe in God's presence.
Let us come to our God now.
Let us bow down and worship.

Amen

Hymn: Stf 51 Great is thy Faithfulness

- Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee:
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail
not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:
*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy
faithfulness!***

*Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have received thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.*

- 2. Summer and winter, and springtime and
harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love
*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy
faithfulness!*
*Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have received thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.***
- 3. Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for
tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy
faithfulness!*
*Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have received thy hand hath provided
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.***

Prayer of approach

As we approach you today, Lord,
we probably feel pretty much like Peter –
full of bravado to begin with,
but then just not quite so certain of ourselves.
We come to you, Jesus,
trusting that even if we feel ourselves
beginning to sink under the pressures that we face,
we know you are still there holding us up.
Please reassure us that you won't let go,
no matter how we feel.
Thank you, Lord.

Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

God of the earth and the waves,
we praise you that you more than meet all our needs.
You call us out from our security

to experience your adventures and blessings.
You don't want us to be like a becalmed ship,
or stuck in the harbour.

You want us out in deep water –
and you'll be with us.
We praise you, Lord.

Amen

Prayer of confession

Lord God,
I'm sorry for the times I take my eyes off you,
and seek to do things in my own strength.
I'm sorry for the times I doubt that
you can keep me on the straight and narrow.
I'm sorry for the times I ask you for signs.
Lord, I pray that you will forgive
my doubts and hesitations,
show me your loving presence,
especially when I most need it,
and teach me to trust you at all times.

Amen.

Declaration of forgiveness

Here is good news for all who put their trust in Christ.
Jesus says: "Your sins are forgiven".
Amen. Thanks be to God.

Hymn: StF 161: Speak, O Lord, as we come to
you

- 1. Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness, that the
light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and deeds of faith. Speak, O
Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.**
- 2. Teach us, Lord, full of obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.**

- 3. Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time that
will echo down through eternity. And by grace
we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your church is built and the
earth is filled with your glory**

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

1 Kings 19:9-18
(New International Version)

⁹There he went into a cave and spent the night.

The LORD Appears to Elijah

And the word of the LORD came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"¹⁰He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."¹¹The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. ¹²After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. ¹³When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"¹⁴He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, torn down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."¹⁵The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. ¹⁶Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet. ¹⁷Jehu

will put to death any who escape the sword of Hazeal, and Elisha will put to death any who escape the sword of Jehu. ¹⁸Yet I reserve seven thousand in Israel—all whose knees have not bowed down to Baal and whose mouths have not kissed him.”

Psalms 119 v1-12,23-24

¹Blessed are those whose ways are blameless,
who walk according to the law of the LORD.

²Blessed are those who keep his statutes
and seek him with all their heart—

³they do no wrong
but follow his ways.

⁴You have laid down precepts
that are to be fully obeyed.

⁵Oh, that my ways were steadfast
in obeying your decrees!

⁶Then I would not be put to shame
when I consider all your commands.

⁷I will praise you with an upright heart
as I learn your righteous laws.

⁸I will obey your decrees;
do not utterly forsake me.

⁹How can a young person stay on the path of
purity?

By living according to your word.

¹⁰I seek you with all my heart;
do not let me stray from your commands.

¹¹I have hidden your word in my heart
that I might not sin against you.

¹²Praise be to you, LORD;
teach me your decrees

²³Though rulers sit together and slander me,
your servant will meditate on your decrees.

²⁴Your statutes are my delight;
they are my counsellors.

Gospel Matthew 14:22-33
(New International Version)

Jesus Walks on the Water

²²Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. ²³After he had dismissed them, he went up on a

mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, ²⁴and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it. ²⁵Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. ²⁶When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear. ²⁷But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ²⁸“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.” ²⁹“Come,” he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. ³⁰But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!” ³¹Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” ³²And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. ³³Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

Sermon

God’s Caring Hands

Did you know God has a tattoo?
Just like some people have a tattoo of the name of the one they love, God has your name engraved on the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49:16). You are the one he loves.

As a teacher in a Special School, there were times when we had to hold a pupil to prevent them from harming themselves or others, to calm them down, and only when we had no choice because other strategies weren’t working. We had rigorous training, which was re-visited regularly (and which has completely changed since I stopped working).

But we were told to use caring ‘C’ hands. Two adults working together. Not a clenched fist, not a smack, not a wagging finger and certainly not a knee on a neck!

But hands which form a letter ‘C’ were used in a caring, supportive, safe hold until the emotional storm was over and everything was calm.

We could say God's hands are caring 'G' hands. Verse 5 of Psalm 139 says God's caring 'G' hands 'hem us in behind and before; you laid your hand on me'.

He has his hand on us, enclosing us in a safe place, hugging us. God is a reassuring presence. He knows and understands us.

We can't escape from God's Spirit: If we could climb right up to the sky, God is there; or if we find ourselves in the deepest, darkest place of the soul, God is there.

Verse 10 tells us his hand is guiding us and holding us safely.

In verses 23 and 24 the Psalmist tells us that God understands our anxieties and leads us in his way. Nothing can separate us from the Love of God.

2

The 2 familiar stories we heard just now also show God's Caring 'G' Hands:

Had you noticed before that the Calming of the Storm took place in the dead of night?

In the previous episode, Mathew had told us about the Feeding of the Five Thousand.

Maybe Jesus had given out everything he had; maybe he was emotionally exhausted, because he'd just heard the news that his cousin, John the Baptist had been beheaded in prison. He got in a boat to go to an isolated spot, where he could be quiet for a bit; but crowds of people heard he was there and turned up, so he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As afternoon began to turn into evening, we have the whole miraculous feeding event.

Then again, Jesus went to get away to a quiet place; he sent the disciples on ahead by boat in the gathering darkness, dismissed the crowd and went up the mountainside to pray alone.

In a time when we are experiencing darkness in our life, a rough, stormy time when we just can't make headway, we can't battle it through, Jesus comes...

And maybe we don't even realise it's him!

Peter recognised it was Jesus, responded, got up and stepped out of the boat.

But he took his eyes off Jesus and remembered how ridiculous it was to try to walk on water! He began to sink and cried out, 'Master, rescue me'.

But Jesus reached out his Caring 'G' Hand and caught him!

3

Elijah, too was experiencing the storms of life.

Elijah had been used by God to do amazing things:

He'd brought a boy back to life;

He'd been fed by ravens;

He'd proved God who answers by fire, in front of 450 prophets of Baal;

He'd seen prayer for rain answered, to prove who was the Living God to Ahab;

but now Queen Jezebel was threatening his life and he was left exhausted and depressed. He was suffering burn-out.

He thought his work was futile. He'd felt he was the only one of the Lord's prophets left, compared with 450 of Baal's prophets.

God refreshed him with miraculous food and drink (again) which sustained him for a 40 day and 40 night hike (that might be a euphemism for a long time), 300 miles over rough terrain to Mount Horeb, aka Sinai.

But he'd fled and, from God's questions, it probably was not in God's plan, but he'd fled into the safety of isolation.

Was he hiding from Jezebel in that cave, or just needing to get away for a bit? Or did he purposefully go to seek God in that special place?

And ...

God met him there on that mountain where Moses had also met with God. The Sinai Peninsula was the site of Burning Bush; it was where Moses received the 10 Commandments and now God spoke to Elijah – out of the stillness.

Do you have a special place? A safe-haven? Your own home or garden, where we are shielded

from risk of infection, maybe? A National Trust Garden? North Devon beaches? A quiet retreat? Somewhere you can be restored, where you can respond with awe and wonder and say “Wow!”, again.

I don't actually think God is always only in the Gentle Whisper, the Still, Small Voice. I can be restored in, loud, exuberant praise to God in a big event like one of the Christian Festivals, where we join in worship and talks with thousands of others. (Many have accessed online versions of those this year.)

Or I may see God's magnificence in nature, “Oh Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder – I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder – How great thou art”. Sometimes, I hear him in the quiet. Looking out over the rocky, shore to the Atlantic beyond, or in the contemplative peace of our 'happy place', our holiday home caravan by the river Alne.

On Monday last week it drizzled and showered all day, then about tea time it turned into heavy rain, then that stopped and the wind became really strong and I went for a stroll around the campsite, while Graham fished from the peg he built. And eventually we sat together by the fire-pit and realised the wind had calmed down and the evening had become peaceful. A gentle, pretty pink sunset coloured the fluffy clouds and we experienced calm restoration in our hearts.

The Lord knew what Elijah needed at that moment.

4

He could have brought earthquake, wind and fire to deal with Jezebel and her army; but Elijah recognised God in the gentle whisper, responded, got up and stepped out of the cave, where God 're clothed' him 'in his rightful mind', commissioned him for the next part of his 'life of service' and provide Elisha as a trainee apprentice in succession planning.

He also said Elijah wasn't alone. At the end of our reading, God told him he had 7,000 (that

may be a symbolic number again) who had remained faithful and not worshipped Baal.

Elijah had heard God in the 'still, small voice of calm' and found peace again.

Jesus himself went up the mountainside alone to pray and escape from the stresses of life for a while to be refreshed and equipped for the next task.

And just as Jesus reached out and took Peter by the hand, when Peter had taken his eyes off him, so God himself came, too for Elijah when he was at his lowest, in Divine revelation.

When we're exhausted to the point of depression, when everything mitigates against us, when the storm is blowing and we're experiencing the storms of life, we can know that nothing can separate us from the loving, caring 'G' hands of God.

Let's pray

Thank you that nothing can separate us from your caring hand,
from your reassuring presence.
Even in the darkest, stormiest places when we feel most distant from you,
When we are burnt out, anxious, exhausted or depressed,
you are there,
you guide us and hold us safe in your love.

AMEN

We sing

Hymn StF 628 – Faithful One

**Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you again and again.
I call out to you again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.**

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of thanksgiving

We thank you, O God,
each time we see that creation speaks of your
greatness
and resounds with your power.

We thank you, O God,
when in our own living we recognise that we are
touched by your mercy
and grace.

We thank you, O God,
when your sense of justice compels us
to speak out and act for others in their need.

You O God are near to all who call on you
You struggle with us to reshape us,
you hear our cry and uphold us when we fall,
you watch over us and keep faith with us

You give us food for the journey
Thanks be to you.
In Christ's name.
Amen.

Hymn

StF 663 - I the Lord of sea and sky

**1. I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin
my hand will save.
I, who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?
*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.***

**2. I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain;
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.**

**I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?**

*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart.*

**3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?**

*Here I am, Lord.
Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

Prayers of intercession

Let us pray for the kingdoms of the world,
for the countries, nations and states
—as all face economic and health issues
Heightened as a result of the pandemic.

Let us prayer for the kingdoms of the world,
for cooperation across borders in medical
advancements
as nations look to their own.

We pray for those who face increasing food
poverty.
We ask your blessing on the work of Foodbanks
and food share Group everywhere.
Prompt each of us to share what we have with
the hungry.

We pray for all whose lives are pressured at this
time through illness and loss.
Surround with your love those who feel alone
and desolate.

In silence we pray for ourselves.

We pray, Lord, that your kingdom
will come here on earth as it is in heaven.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

We say 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 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**

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: I want to serve the Lord

I want to serve the purpose of God
In my generation
I want to serve the purpose of God
While I am alive
I want to give my life
For something that will last forever
Oh, I delight, I delight to do Your will
*What is on Your heart?
Show me what to do
Let me know Your will
And I will follow You (rpt)*

I want to build with silver and gold
In my generation
I want to build with silver and gold
While I am alive
I want to give my life
For something that will last forever
Oh, I delight, I delight to do Your will
*What is on Your heart?
Show me what to do
Let me know Your will
And I will follow You (rpt)*

I want to see the kingdom of God
In my generation

I want to see the kingdom of God
While I am alive
I want to live my life
For something that will last forever
Oh, I delight, I delight to do Your will
*What is on Your heart?
Show me what to do
Let me know Your will
And I will follow You (rpt)*

I want to see the Lord come again
In my generation
I want to see the Lord come again
While I am alive
I want to give my life
For something that will last forever
Oh I delight, I delight to do Your will
*What is on Your heart?
Show me what to do
Let me know Your will
And I will follow You (rpt)*

(People of Destiny International/Word Music)

Prayer & blessing

As the followers of Jesus let us go into a new week resolved to be generous of spirit. Let us share of any bounty that is ours.

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us now and for ever.
Amen.