



Morning Worship

26 July 2020

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our Morning Worship here at the Parish churches of Coxley with Godney, Henton, and Wookey. Although we are currently apart due to COVID-19 (Coronavirus) it is hoped that following this liturgy knowing that others in the benefice will be doing so at the same time might help provide a spiritual connection between us.

It is suggested that alongside this liturgy you have a means to listen to the suggested hymns which have links to videos with lyrics within this document. There is a mixture of traditional hymns and contemporary worship songs. If you do not know the tune then why not listen to the hymn/song and worship through reading the words alone.

The service is designed to be used easily by one person. If there is more than one person participating, either one can lead with others joining in with the responses in **bold** OR everyone present may join in with all the words.

The sections in *red italics* are rubrics: these explain what needs to happen at various points.

Materials in this booklet are drawn from *Common Worship: Times and Seasons* which is copyright © The Archbishop's Council of the Church of England 2006; *New Patterns for Worship* copyright © The Archbishop's Council of the Church of England 2002. All Bible quotations are from the English Standard Version.

MORNING WORSHIP

GREETING

Praise God! For even though we are apart the Lord is in our midst!
Let us rejoice and be glad and give him the glory.

CALL TO WORSHIP

The Lord is here!
His Spirit is with us!

Though we find ourselves isolated
in homes, apartments, and residential places,
**we look out our windows and remember,
the heavens declare the glory of God,
all creation rejoices in our creator.**

Psalm 19:1

Though we cannot reach out and touch
our friends and neighbours,
**we rejoice that Christ is in our midst,
he is with us always, until the end of the age!**

Matthew 28:20

Though we have to stand at a safe distance from others,
giving space to those who pass us by,
**we recall we are all made in the image of God,
connected to one another,
connected to God.**

Genesis 1:27

HYMN: ALL CREATURES OF OUR GOD AND KING

[Listen here](#)

CONFESSION AND WORDS OF COMFORT

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world
and knows our every word and deed.
Let us then open ourselves to the Lord
and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

**Father, we have sinned against heaven and against you.
We are not worthy to be called your children.
We turn to you again.
Have mercy on us,
bring us back to yourself as those who once were dead
but now have life through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

A period of silent reflection follows

Hear the words of comfort, our Saviour Christ says to all who truly
turn to him:

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,
that whoever believes in him should not perish
but have eternal life.*

John 3:16

COLLECT

Let us pray.

A period of silent prayer is kept.

Generous God,
you give us gifts and make them grow:
though our faith is small as a mustard seed,
make it grow to your glory
and the flourishing of your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

HYMN: BE STILL FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

[Listen here](#)

THE WORD OF GOD

Hear what God is saying to his people according to the prophet Ezra.

5¹¹ And this was their reply to us: 'We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and we are rebuilding the house that was built many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished.¹² But because our fathers had angered the God of heaven, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this house and carried away the people to Babylonia.¹³ However, in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree that this house of God should be rebuilt.¹⁴ And the gold and silver vessels of the house of God, which Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple that was in Jerusalem and brought into the temple of Babylon, these Cyrus the king took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;¹⁵ and he said to him, "Take these vessels, go and put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let the house of God be rebuilt on its site."¹⁶ Then this Sheshbazzar came and laid the foundations of the house of God that is in Jerusalem, and from that time until now it has been in building, and it is not yet finished.'¹⁷ Therefore, if it seems good to the king, let search be made in the royal archives there in Babylon, to see whether a decree was issued by Cyrus the king for the rebuilding of this house of God in Jerusalem. And let the king send us his pleasure in this matter."

A REFLECTION

By Revd Guy

I wonder if you have ever thought about how the closure of our church buildings looks to those who are not part of our church? What does it say to them? Does it tell them that the Church is of no use at this time? Or is it worse than that, does the closure tell them that God has no power or that he doesn't even exist?! We know that this is not true, we know that although the buildings are closed the Church itself is still very much open, but it is amazing what meaning people can take from a closed building and apply to God or the Christian faith. In fact, this situation is not really that new, people have always been judging the Church based on what is seen on the outside - whether it was the grandeur of a cathedral drawing people to God, or an old church building being converted into a nightclub saying that God is being replaced. It even extends beyond the buildings to the Church as a body of people - Christianity is the religion of the elderly, God isn't relevant to young people because we never see any young Christians, Christianity is only for the middle-classes or as it is often thought about regarding the Church of England - only for white people. Perception has, is, and will always be an issue for the Church, but as the old saying goes - "You should never judge a book by its cover" because the Church is not primarily about its people but about its God and you shouldn't judge God based on his people!

We are sinful, broken, imperfect people whereas God is our holy, mighty, powerful, creator, redeemer and saviour - the two cannot be compared. Yet, we are God's people, his representatives on earth who have been given the mandate to share the good news of Jesus Christ to the whole world and so what we say and do will always be reflected back on God. God is what defines our faith, not the buildings or the people and so who God is is what we as Christians need to be communicating in all we do.

More on that in a bit, for the moment let us return to chapter 5 of the book of Ezra. Last time we came across a few new characters 'Tattenai the governor of the province Beyond the River and Shethar-bozenai

and their associates' (Ezr. 5:3) who for sake of brevity we called "the governors." These governors were concerned about the re-building of the temple and whether it might signify a threat to the Persian empire and so they asked the Jewish leaders "Who gave you a decree to build this house and to finish this structure?" What we have in Ezra 5:11-17 is the response the Jews give to this question and although it seems on the surface to be quite a dry and factual response, when we dig a little deeper we see that the entire response is one that glorifies God.

OUR IDENTITY

The Jewish leaders responded to the question in a manner that is typical of the time: they declared who they were and then answered the question at hand. There is nothing particularly unusual about their response until we take a closer look at the details within the declaration of their identity. If we were introducing ourselves to someone we might give reference to our profession or where we live, for example, "I'm the vicar from Coxley." We might make reference to a common acquaintance saying something like "I'm Guy, friends with your neighbour Simon." A couple of generations ago we might have referred to ourselves by referencing our parents or grandparents, a style of introduction we see in the Bible (c.f. Gn. 24:24; Jo. 17:4; 1 Sm 17:58; Est. 8:5). On the international stage we refer to ourselves by our homeland or our leaders. There are many ways to introduce yourself but the Jews choose not to follow any of these conventions.

Instead of saying, "we are the Jewish people who have returned to our land after exile in Babylon," a perfectly accurate description by all accounts, they declare their identity not in terms of where they live, or who their ancestors and kings were but rather by their relation to God himself, that they are 'the servants of the God of heaven and earth' (Ezr. 5:11). The Jews define their identity not by the things of this world but by their relationship with God.

In the world today there are so many things that we could use to define our identity. We might define ourselves based on our bodies such as our race or our gender; we might define ourselves based on our lifestyles such as our wealth, our achievements, or our sexuality; or

we might define ourselves based on our flaws such as our addictions or our anger. Perhaps we define ourselves based on our experiences - the fact that we beat cancer, or have diabetes, or that we are divorced. The list is pretty much endless, but in each case our sense of identity comes detached from God, the one who actually defines us.

God defines us because he is the one who created us. This has fundamental implications for our identity. For example, as the creator of life, he is also the one who sustains us day by day. This means that we are dependent on God for our daily existence, something we affirm each time we say the Lord's prayer ("Give us this day our daily bread"). God is also the ruler of creation 'the God of heaven and earth' as the book of Ezra defines it. In declaring their identity as 'servants of the God of heaven and earth' the Jews were saying that God was their primary authority. This means we, as God's people on earth, are his servants who have God as their primary authority. Our identity as human beings is tied up in our connection to God. As we explore who God is we find out more about ourselves. The book of Ephesians tells us that God is our Father as we are adopted into his family by Christ, this means we are his children and as his children we need his parenting everyday, we need his guidance, his patient instruction, his loving care. The gospel story tells us that God is merciful and loving, with the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ removing the power of death and sin from us and giving us the gift of eternal life. This reminds us of our imperfect state, that no matter how well we might think we have life sorted we are still in need of God's love and forgiveness. I could go on but I hope you can see the pattern that is emerging. Our identity as human beings expresses our need for God and once we know our identity in God then we are best placed to live the life that he has called us to. We become generous and merciful to others because we continually receive these things from God. We learn how to best protect others, because we know we find refuge firstly in God. We develop into leaders because we have served under the leadership of God. We become more caring because we have experienced the shepherding of God. We need to be those who see their identity in God because that is the only way that we will become

the people that God is calling us to be.

OUR STORY

The response of the Jews not only reminds us that it is God who shapes our identity but it also reminds us of our story. In verse 11-16 we get a picture of the story of God and his people, one characterised by rebellion, judgement, repentance and grace. In Ezra 5:11 we see God's grace in providing for his people the means to build the temple and the provision of 'a great king of Israel;' in 5:12 the Jews recall the destruction of the temple which in the context of God's pig picture showed that a time of rebellion and judgement had occurred and that a time of repentance and grace was approaching. The time of repentance occurred during the Jews time exiled in Babylon, and the act of grace is what we saw at the very beginning of Ezra when God stirred the spirit of King Cyrus (Ezr. 1:1) and we see here in verses 13-16 with God stirring up of the spirit of Cyrus and him subsequently decreeing that the Jews could return to Jerusalem to rebuild the house of God, the temple. Not only this but the decree allows for the temple's former glory to be restored with the return of its sacred vessels.

Within these six verses we get an example of the bigger picture of God's story of redemption for his people. That bigger story starts with love and grace, with God creating the world and placing mankind as its pinnacle. But the story moves quickly to rebellion through mankind's want to make itself Lord of all rather than following God's rule and so creation is subject to the judgement of God. This judgement meant mankind could not live forever but was subject to death. That is until God himself came became man in the person of Jesus Christ, an act of grace. Jesus lived the perfect life on our behalf, and when he died and rose again he broke the power that death had on us. This is the Christian story and it is a story that we can all be a part of. When we repent of our desire to live life according to our own rules and submit instead to our creator, the one who knows the best way for us to live, then we become Christians and can claim the victory over death that Christ has won.

Ezra 5:11-16 reminds us, as Christians, of our place in God's story. It reminds us of our sinfulness but at the same time reminds us of the grace of God. It shows us that God has always been this way and will forever be that way - a God who is our ruler, our judge, but also our saviour. God is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.

KNOW WHO YOU ARE, KNOW YOUR STORY

At the beginning of today's message I spoke about how the appearance of our church buildings and our congregations communicate something about our faith to the rest of the world but how it was God who actually defines our faith and that we need to be communicating who God is in all we do. What our exploration of Ezra 5:11-17 has done is give us two ways to communicate to the world who God is: through knowing who we are and knowing our story.

When we know that our identity is found in who God is, as we grow in our knowledge and understanding of who God is we grow in our understanding of who we were made to be. This provides the foundation for our lives to be lived in a way that is how God intended them to be lived and so our lives then glorify God and display his ways for the rest of the world.

When we know our place in God's great story we can see how that story has been worked out in our own lives. We can see the life we led before we knew God and notice how it always pointed us towards our need for God. We can also see the moments of grace and love that we have received from God and how they direct us toward God's great story of grace and love. When we live our lives within this great story, everyday encounters can become moments that edify God and point people to him. And so when we know our story in relation to God we put ourselves in the best place to share God's story with others.

We might not be able to change what our faith and our God looks like to others, but in knowing who we are and our place in God's story, we put ourselves in the best position to show and tell others all about our loving, grace-filled, merciful God. Amen.

HYMN: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND FOREVER

[Listen here](#)

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us declare our faith in God.

**We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith, and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us with power from on high.**

**We believe in one God;
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

INTERCESSIONS

Use the silence to bring before God your own concerns around that topic.

Jesus, our exalted Lord, has been given all authority.

Let us seek his intercession that our prayers may be perfected
by his prayer.

Jesus Christ, great high priest,
living for ever to intercede for us,
pray for the Church and its leaders, your broken body in the world...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, King of righteousness,
enthroned at the right hand of the majesty on high,
pray for the world and its leaders, and make it subject to your gentle rule...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Son of Man,
drawing humanity into the life of God,
pray for your sisters and brothers in need, distress, or sorrow...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus, pioneer of our salvation,
bringing us to glory through your death and resurrection,
surround with your saints and angels
those who have died trusting your promises...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ, Lord over all things,
ascended far above the heavens and filling the universe,
pray for us who receive the gifts you give us for work in your service...

Silence is kept.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, graciously hear us.

Jesus Christ,
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
and in the bond of peace,
and bring the whole created order to worship at your feet;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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.

HYMN: BLESSED BE YOUR NAME

[Listen here](#)

DISMISSAL

God the Father,
who first loved us and made us accepted in the beloved Son,
bless you.

God the Son,
who loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood,
bless you.

God the Holy Spirit,
who sheds abroad the love of God in our hearts,
bless you.

The blessing of the one true God,
to whom be all love and all glory for time and for eternity,
come down upon you and remain with you always.

Amen.