



# *Morning Worship*

10 May 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.

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# 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

Christ is risen!  
**Christ is risen indeed!**

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: IMMORTAL, INVISIBLE, GOD ONLY WISE

[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.*

Risen Christ,  
your wounds declare your love for the world  
and the wonder of your risen life:  
give us compassion and courage  
to risk ourselves for those we serve,  
.to the glory of God the Father.  
**Amen.**

## HYMN: DO IT AGAIN

[Listen here.](#)

## THE WORD OF GOD

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

**1** <sup>5</sup> Then rose up the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and the Levites, everyone whose spirit God had stirred to go up to rebuild the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And all who were about them aided them with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, with beasts, and with costly wares, besides all that was freely offered. <sup>7</sup> Cyrus the king also brought out the vessels of the house of the Lord that Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and placed in the house of his gods. <sup>8</sup> Cyrus king of Persia brought these out in the charge of Mithredath the treasurer, who counted them out to Sheshbazzar the prince of Judah. <sup>9</sup> And this was the number of them: 30 basins of gold, 1,000 basins of silver, 29 censers, <sup>10</sup> 30 bowls of gold, 410 bowls of silver, and 1,000 other vessels; <sup>11</sup> all the vessels of gold and of silver were 5,400. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up, when the exiles were brought up from Babylonia to Jerusalem.

## THE SERMON

*By Revd Guy*

Today, we continue our journey through the book of Ezra. Last time, we discovered that the Jews had been in exile for nearly sixty years but a new beginning was just around the corner as King Cyrus of Persia, stirred up by God, proclaimed that the Jews could return once more to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. This reminded us of the sovereignty of God, how ultimately he is in control of the overall direction of this world, even if we cannot always see it and that he uses earthly leaders to accomplish this. But more than this, we saw how our situation today is like that of the Jews in Ezra's time - it is a time of opportunity. Our absence from our church buildings provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our practices, to rediscover and repair our relationship with God where it has become broken or distorted, to reaffirm our identity as God's people, and to return to the heart of worship.

The key word from last time was 'opportunity' but this week we discover that just because there is an opportunity does not mean that it will be easy to take advantage of it. The main reasons that opportunities pass us by are because of our feelings, our self-belief, and our resources.

## **OUR FEELINGS**

There are many instances across history where new opportunities or good ideas have struggled to come to fruition or to make an impact because of how they were received. Very few changes are received with universal acclaim. Just think about the NHS, today it is something that we would not be without. However, when it was first proposed in 1946 it was faced with such fierce opposition that it was not put into law until two years later - even doctors were opposed to it! We find a similar situation in Ezra. Although the opportunity to return to Jerusalem was a good thing, not all of the Jews were keen to go.

There are many reasons why people are against change and usually it is driven by our feelings. For the Jews there would have been four feelings that they might have experienced in preparation for this opportunity, this new beginning - fear, comfort, doubt, and ignorance. The journey back to Jerusalem would have been long and dangerous crossing hostile lands - I would not be surprised if some were afraid. Coupled with that is the comfort they have in Babylon. Yes, they are exiled and under someone else's rule, but compared to returning to a ruined city, devastated farmlands, and no real protection it would certainly be the more comfortable option to stay in exile. Often such comfort and fear can lead to doubts. When we are comfortable in a situation it is very easy to doubt that things would be better off somewhere else and when we are afraid, doubts over success against the odds can creep in - the Jews most likely would have felt similarly. Finally, some Jews would have been ignorant over exactly how great an opportunity returning from exile was! The Jews had been in exile for nearly sixty years meaning a large

number of them would have known nothing other than life in exile. This means that they would have been heavily or entirely influenced by Babylonian culture. These “Babylonian Jews” would have known little about the glory days of Jerusalem or seen any evidence of God’s provision for them. They were ignorant over the great opportunity the return from exile represented.

Ultimately, not all the Jews returned from exile, certainly not in the first instance.. Only those ‘whose spirit God has stirred’ (Ez. 1:5) returned from exile. It is the same for us when God presents us with new opportunities like we are facing presently. Some of us will be ‘stirred up’ by God and immediately see this new opportunity that being prevented from worshipping in our buildings presents and want to do things differently so we can grow in our relationship with God, be his witness to our communities in a new way, and meet him afresh once again. Others of us will be more resistant to such change, be it out of fear, comfort, doubt or ignorance or perhaps just wanting to keep things the same - why fix what isn’t broken?! But God is always calling us to grow in our faith (2 Pt. 3:18), just because you feel that nothing needs to change does not mean that God is not wanting to do something different with his Church.

Do not worry if you are not stirred up with the prospect of change, of new opportunities to do church differently, this does not mean that God is leaving you behind. God still loves you and wants to know you and you to know him. Not all of the exiled returned from Babylon right away, there were three waves of returning exiles - in fact, Ezra himself was not in the first wave of returning exiles! It can take time to see where God is calling each of us (and some see it more clearly than others) but he is always wanting us to grow in our knowledge and love for him. Continue to read God’s word, to pray, and to worship him for if we continue to be faithful and seek to know God then he will lead us to where he is calling us, even if we do not notice it! If you are excited about this time of change and the opportunities it presents then share that with people, use it to ‘encourage one another and build one

another up' (1 Thes. 5:11), bring your ideas to the ministry team or church wardens who would be happy to hear what God is revealing to you. When we share where God is calling us it can bring so much hope and in turn be used by God to 'stir up' something inside those who are yet to see God's vision for themselves.

## **OUR SELF-BELIEF**

If the first reason opportunities pass us by is because of our feelings about change then the second is our self-belief. All too often there is a good idea only for a lack of self-belief to prevent anything coming from it. We tell ourselves that we do not have enough people, or that we do not speak eloquently enough, or that we are too old to do what God is calling us to. But throughout God's relationship with this world he has not used those who we might perceive to be most able but instead uses unlikely people to work out his purposes. Think about it, Sarah thinks herself too old to have children but through her God creates the nation of Israel (Gen. 15:1-6; 21:1-70), Gideon's army is reduced by God from over 30,000 people to only 300 to successfully defeat the Midianites (Jgs 6-8), one of the greatest evangelists of all time, the apostle Paul, was an awful public speaker (2 Cor. 11:6), and in the person of Jesus Christ all of creation is redeemed from sin through his death and resurrection. God reveals his power in weakness!

In a similar manner, God chose only a remnant to return from exile at this time to reveal his power and sovereignty. This remnant of Israel would not have been able to much in their own strength. Numbering only around 50,000 people in the first wave (the size of an average town) it was hardly a workforce ready to rebuild a city the size and grandeur of Jerusalem - let alone defend it. In fact, ask anyone who has been in charge of getting a group of people from A-B and they will tell you that just making the journey home would have been impressive! The fact they managed this return successfully in such a weakened state showed the Jews, as well as the surrounding nations, that God was at work.



We should not be dismayed at the numbers, or the age, or the eloquence of speech of those we have to take advantage of the opportunity God has laid before us. When we act in faith God will take our weakness and achieve his purposes with it revealing his power and glory through it. Our self-belief should not stop us from taking full advantage of the opportunity that returning to our church buildings can be because God reveals his power in weakness.

## **OUR RESOURCES**

But in this revelation of God's power he still uses his people, it is not something that we can just sit back and relax thinking "God will sort it all out" - we still have a role to play. God reveals his power through us, not apart from us so we still have a role to play. In Ezra we read that the returning Jews were supported by 'all who were about them' (Ez. 1:6). So, even those we spoke about earlier who did not return from exile in the first wave for one reason or another still gave 'silver', 'gold', 'goods', 'beasts', and 'costly wares' to support those who were returning alongside 'all that was freely offered' which refers to gifts given for the temple. They did not just send them off with hopeful wishes and good thoughts but provided them with much needed resources for their journey and for the rebuilding of the devastated land they would return to.

We may not always catch the vision or see the direction that God is moving his people but we should always be supportive of those who are acting faithfully in doing God's work - particularly in financing it. Giving of our finances reveals not only where our priorities lie, but also where our faith lies. Are we holding on to our money because our faith is not that important to us? Are we not giving because we do not have faith that God's people will use the money for God's glory or do we not have faith that God will sustain us if we make ourselves poorer by giving to his Church? I understand that we are living in exceptional times and that for some of us our finances are more stretched than ever, but it is the same with our churches. If you regularly give via the collection

plate then perhaps you could consider setting up a standing order instead as it will provide us with a regular income to continue doing God's work in our benefice - just email Revd Guy, your church wardens, or your PCC treasurer for more details on how to do this. If you cannot do this then set up your own offering plate in your own home (it could be a Pringles tube, a biscuit tin - anything really!) and put your offering in every Sunday or whenever you worship God and then bring that offering with you when we can all meet again. As I said earlier, God can use what we might perceive as weakness for his glory so please give whatever you can in these financially difficult times. It is through the generosity of God's people that they are enabled to take advantage of the opportunities that God presents them and so it is through your generosity that the church is enabled to worship, and grow in the love and knowledge of God.

Our feelings, self-belief, and resources can often be obstacles to taking advantage of the opportunities that God presents us with that we discussed in our examination of Ezra 1:1-4: to rediscover our identity as God's people, to repair where our faith and practice has become distorted or unfaithful, and so to return to the heart of worship - God himself. But, God can turn weakness into strength, and although these are difficult obstacles to overcome and may be harder for some than others, all things are possible with God. So encourage one another with the vision God has given you, have faith that God will work in our weakness, and give generously so the church can go where God is leading it.

### **AN ASIDE: A LINK TO THE PAST**

I have one final thing to share from the passage that we read today. It is not linked with the thrust of the rest of the sermon but may go some way to allay the fears that some may have around all this talk of change. I am aware that throughout this series so far I have spoken a lot about opportunity and change but have not given any concrete idea as to what this may look like. That is in part because I do not know, and partly because, as a benefice,

COVID-19 to one side, we are already in a time of change as we are in vacancy and as a curate in training I do not think it my place to set such a vision. However, I do believe that God is going to use this time as a time to change and to grow his Church but I do not believe that this will mean that everything will change beyond recognition. In Ezra 1:7 we see that although the return from exile is a great opportunity for the Jews to rediscover their identity as God's people, repair their faith where it has been damaged in exile, and to return to the heart of worship in the temple, they are not making wholesale changes - they are not throwing the baby out with the bathwater as it were. The Jews bring back with them the sacred 'vessels of the house of the Lord' (Ez. 1:7), the vessels that they had used in the temple since the time of Solomon. So do not think of this opportunity as a time for change, but for a time of restoration, where we can refocus on what is important in our faith, our worship, our mission, and our evangelism. This will mean retaining a lot of what we have, but also replacing some things so we can best follow where God is leading us.

## **HYMN: THE HEART OF WORSHIP**

[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 between each prayer 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: NOW THANK WE ALL OUR GOD**

[Listen here.](#)

## DISMISSAL

*'Remember, I am with you  
to the end of the age,' says the Lord.*

*Matthew 28.20*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
and the love of God  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit  
be with us all, evermore. Amen.

With the risen life of Christ within us,  
we go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia!

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia!**