



Morning Worship

17 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.

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

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: BLESSED ASSURANCE

[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,
by the lakeside you renewed your call to your disciples:
help your Church to obey your command
and draw the nations to the fire of your love,
.to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

HYMN: THE HEART OF WORSHIP

[Listen here.](#)

THE WORD OF GOD

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

2 Now these were the people of the province who came up out of the captivity of those exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried captive to Babylonia. They returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town. ² They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

The number of the men of the people of Israel: ³ the sons of ...

³⁶ The priests: ...

⁴⁰ The Levites: ...

⁴³ The temple servants: ...

⁵⁵ The sons of Solomon's servants: ...

⁵⁸ All the temple servants and the sons of Solomon's servants were 392.

⁵⁹ The following were those who came up from Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer, though they could not prove their fathers' houses or their descent, whether they belonged to Israel: ⁶⁰ the sons of Delaiah, the sons of Tobiah, and the sons of Nekoda, 652. ⁶¹ Also, of the sons of the priests: the sons of Habaiah, the sons of Hakkoz, and the sons of Barzillai (who had taken a wife from the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called by their name). ⁶² These sought their registration among those enrolled in the genealogies, but they were not found there, and so they were excluded from the priesthood as unclean. ⁶³ The governor told them that they were not to partake of the most holy food, until there should be a priest to consult Urim and Thummim.

⁶⁴ The whole assembly together was 42,360, ⁶⁵ besides their male and female servants, of whom there were 7,337, and they had 200 male and female singers. ⁶⁶ Their horses were 736, their mules were 245, ⁶⁷ their camels were 435, and their donkeys were 6,720.

⁶⁸ Some of the heads of families, when they came to the house of the Lord that is in Jerusalem, made freewill offerings for the house of God, to erect it on its site. ⁶⁹ According to their ability they gave to the treasury of the work 61,000 darics of gold, 5,000 minas of silver, and 100 priests' garments.

⁷⁰ Now the priests, the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gatekeepers, and the temple servants lived in their towns, and all the rest of Israel in their towns.

THE SERMON

By Revd Guy

Over the past few weeks we have been looking at the book of Ezra. In the first chapter we saw that God had provided the Jews an opportunity, to return from exile in Babylon and repair their broken relationship with him. But, as we saw last time, it is not always easy to take advantage of opportunities when they are presented to us but we ultimately need to encourage one another to put our trust in God who can make all things possible. Today, as we continue our journey through the book of Ezra we have quite a dry text that at first glance is just a long list of names, places, and numbers detailing all those who were returning from their exile. It certainly reminds me of those genealogies we see all over the Old Testament only instead of 'so and so begat so and so', we have 'the sons of X and the sons of Y.' Hardly a text you might find on an inspirational poster or fridge magnet. Yet 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us that 'all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.' So it begs the question, what is this passage teaching us, how does it speak to us today?

Ezra 2 is revealing to us two things: who God is and what our identity is as God's people, two timeless truths that can inform who we are as a church today. This sermon series is called 'Returning to worship' and we can hardly do that if we do not

know who it is we are worshipping or how we are supposed to behave as God's people. By the end of this sermon I hope you will see that we have a God who cares, a God who is committed to us and that we, as God's people, are part of his plan and have a role to play in it.

GOD CARES

One thing that you cannot escape to notice in this passage is that there are a lots of names! From the sons of Parosh in verse three to the sons of Barzillai in verse sixty-one there are nearly one hundred references to 'the sons of' alongside a few references to places such as Bethel and Ai. Here we see someone who was at pains to ensure that every family who was returning from exile was recorded. This might just seem like it is just a piece of record-keeping, an administrative duty that needed to be done like ticking names off a register but there is a greater purpose than that.

Within the Bible there are numerous references to other texts that we know no further details about. Examples of this include a book detailing all the duties of the king (1 Sam. 10:25) or the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Israel (1 Kgs 14:19); there are even books of prophecy that are referenced but not included as part of the Old Testament (2 Chr. 9:29). Would it not have been better to keep this detailed list of families and people from particular places within a separate book of records, excluding it from the Old Testament, and then remove the first sixty-three verses of this chapter and leave in the grand total that we have mentioned in verse sixty-four?! It would certainly be easier to read! The fact that this has not happened shows us that it is important for these names and places to be mentioned and I believe it is because it reminds us that God cares for his people personally.

As I mentioned earlier, all scripture is God breathed and so God has left this detailed list of names and places in the Bible. He could have inspired the author to leave it out, or just group them all together as "the returning exiles" but instead every returning exile is described in relation to their local or family circles. The

return of his people from exile is a personal matter for God, each of these families had a personal part in the story of God's people, they were not just referred to as a conglomerate mass of people. Although God has an overarching plan for his people, (which have seen that clearly over the last couple of sessions), but this list of people moves beyond the general and into the specific, from the Jews as a nation to individual families.

This focus on the specific shows us that our God is not someone who only cares about the end result of his people being a blessed and holy nation returned from exile. It shows us that our God does not ignore the value of individuals for the sake of the bigger picture. Rather, it shows us that our God, for he is our God, is someone who cares about each and every family, each and every person, particularly those who are working towards that bigger picture and end result by living faithfully the life that God has called them to. You are never insignificant to God. You may feel like he is far away right now or that he is not listening to your prayers because you cannot worship or pray in the way you have become accustomed to, but this text reminds us that our God cares about us personally. So if you are struggling to feel God's love right now, to know his presence with you, take hope from the truth that he does care for you, not just as a part of the body of Christ but as an individual.

GOD IS COMMITTED

Not only is our God someone who wants a personal relationship with his people, he is a God that is unchanging in his commitment to us. Ever since God made a covenant with Abraham (and arguably even before that) he has been committed to his people and this does not change now the Jews are returning from exile. It is often very easy to think when we offend someone that that relationship is damaged and their feelings for us will have changed but this is not the case with God. Yes, he mourns when we turn away from him and follow our own selfish desires but he still remains committed to us. We saw the first

such example in our exploration of Ezra 1 when we saw that the timing of the Jews return from exile was in line with the prophecy of Jeremiah, God had not given up on his people and abandoned them to their fate but remained committed to them.

We see this commitment in our passage today when we read the first list of eleven names in Ezra 2:2. Numbers are often significant in the Bible and recur time and again such as the number forty - Jesus' forty days being tempted in the wilderness and Moses and Israel's forty years wandering the desert to give an example. But the number eleven does not seem to have any significance at all. This is where we need to do some research. Thankfully, this is not the only record of the Jews returning from Israel, we also have a list in Nehemiah 7. In Nehemiah 7:7 we come across the exact same list of names as we encounter in Ezra 2:2, only with one addition - Nahamani. What is likely to have occurred is that over time, during the process of copying and re-copying the text of Ezra, the name of Nahamani was accidentally omitted from the text. This leaves us with twelve names of the people who are leading the Jews out of exile and the number twelve has a lot more significance within the Bible. Immediately we think of the twelve tribes of Israel or the twelve disciples, groups of people that represented the embodiment of God's people. In referring to these twelve leaders in this way we see that these returning exiles are still God's people, they have not been cast aside - God's commitment to his people remains the same.

And so God's plan remains the same, he remains committed to his people as his representatives on earth and as the means for the whole world to be blessed by God through them. When we combine this fact about God with the opportunity that is presented to the Jews in Ezra 1 to return from exile we see that our committed God is concerned with his people's commitment to him. That is what the return from exile is all about, it is about returning to God. And so when we, here in the twenty-first century are presented with an opportunity to change the way that we go about our church life (that is, how we pray and

worship and live out our faith) because of a pandemic, God ultimately does not mind what form that takes so long as our hearts are committed to him, to being the people that he wants us to be. This may mean that our Sunday services take on a completely new form as an outworking of this inner commitment (particularly if our practice in church has been self-serving and self-centred rather than focused on God); God's commitment to us means that we can be brave and try new things without fear of failure. Equally we might let this opportunity pass us by out of fear, or doubt, or ignorance, as we discussed last time, and it may be detrimental to our faith, but God will remain committed to us as his people.

GOD'S PEOPLE

So far we have seen that God cares for his people, and he is committed to them. Well if that is the case, it is important for us to know who is part of this group of people. For the Jews returning from exile this was even more important. They were returning after nearly seventy years in exile, seventy years sharing land with other nations, seventy years for God's people to marry those of other nations and forget their identity as God's people. The fact that everyone who returned from exile is noted down and their ancestry traced shows that their connection to the history of God's people, either by family or location, is important - it was God's people who were returning from exile.

However, regardless of how important a connection to the history of God's people was, this passage reveals something deeper. It shows us that God has a place for anyone who is committed to being his follower. God has a place for all people who trust in him. In the description of those who return we have a huge variety of the types of people who return to Jerusalem: leaders (Ez. 2:1), lay Israelites (Ez. 2:2-35), priests (Ez. 2:36-39), Levites (Ez 2:40-42), temple servants (Ez. 2:43-54), descendants of Solomon's servants (Ez 2:55-58), as well as numerous people who could not confirm their ancestry (Ez. 2:59-63) and later on we see it also includes

‘every one who had joined them and separated himself from the uncleanness of the peoples of the land to worship the Lord, the God of Israel’ (Ez. 6:21), i.e. converts to Judaism. What connects them all is their commitment to God. And so what is important is not your job, your status, your ethnicity, your sex, or any other worldly descriptor, rather it is commitment and faithfulness to God that is most important to being part of God’s people.

With commitment to God as the main priority, all other things are secondary. What that means for us today is that when our church buildings re-open we need to ensure that there are no barriers for anyone seeking to come to know our God and to commit to him. With a recent study by Tearfund revealing that nearly one in four people have turned to faith during this crisis by watching or listening to a religious service during lock-down it would be a shame that when lock-down is lifted we are not ready to welcome such people into our church communities, (aware that for some, the very building itself may be the thing that creates a barrier!)

Being committed to God means being open to others, but by its definition commitment to God means that we need to be less attached and committed to other things in our lives, specifically anything that would lure us away from God. Such lures will attempt to make us forget our identity as God’s people and the life he calls us to - to be his holy (set apart) people. One of the great lures is in our finances, wanting to keep our wealth so we can be self-sufficient which takes away our trust in God’s provision for us. But as we see in Ezra 2:68-69 one of the first things that the exiles did upon their return to Jerusalem was to make ‘offerings for the house of God.’ How better to show commitment to God and his ways than to offer our wealth? To do this would show our trust in God and our commitment to him rather than ourselves, and for that wealth to go to the institution that is committed to guide you in your journey of faithfulness and commitment to God through preaching, teaching, and proper worship?

This time of lock-down, with work, social meetings, and most

hobbies put on hold, is a great opportunity to reflect and examine what things weaken your commitment to God. Is it that you need to drop one activity in your week to make time for him? Or perhaps you realise that it is not the busyness of your timetable that is stopping you, (because let's face it, most of us have significantly more free time right now!), rather it is your inclination. You may find it too much effort to read your Bible, or find some study notes, or to pray but in your heart you want to do more and be more committed in your faith. If that is you then please, please, tell someone, all these returning exiles did not do it on their own - they journeyed with others. Drop me a phone call or an email and I will do the best to help you in any way I can and I am sure the same would go for anyone else in our church communities too. Be brave and ask for help, because God cares for you, he is committed to you, and he loves that you want to be committed to him too.

HYMN: GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS

[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: JESUS SHALL REIGN!

[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!