

October 2020

A month of Sundays



Preston Ribble Circuit

Ministry Team

1st Sunday 4th October 2020

Call to worship

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit –
calls us to set our sights on the goal
of following and living in the way of Christ.
God calls to us follow now.

Opening Prayers

Lord God,
as we journey towards the goal you set before us,
we see glimpses of who you are,
often too deep and unimaginable
to grasp fully the depth of your being.
What we see and feel spurs us on
in our journey to discover more of you. **Amen.**

God of the journey of life,
the mystery of our very being,
we confess that the journey we take
gets disrupted and we get side tracked.
We go off on wild goose chases that lead us nowhere,
up blind alleys and into bad and barren places.
We find our way back to you in sorrow for our failings
and in penitence for our wanderings.
May we be enriched by your welcome,
relieved by your forgiveness
and comforted by your all-embracing love. **Amen.**

Lord God, we are all so different, each our own being;
and yet you love and care for us all, you nurture and protect us.
How can we not be thankful to you for all that the journey with you offers!
We thank you that you guide us, in unexpected ways, to find the right way in
life.
We thank you that when we wander, you draw us back to you,
give us new direction and encourage us to follow where you lead.
We thank you that you know our individual needs and quirks,
and yearn for us to be on the journey of life with you.
We thank you that the pains of life can be overshadowed
by the joy of walking with you. For all these blessings and more, we give you
thanks and praise. **Amen.**

Bible reading: Philippians 4b-14

Reflection *(Revd Karen Le Mouton)*

In my previous profession I used to interview people for a range of jobs. The process for interviewing people changed considerably over the years as we discovered people can complete application forms citing qualifications and 'say the right things' when being interviewed. But until they can answer, *'What areas do you feel you personally need to develop? Where do you see yourself in five years' time?* and see them doing the job, it's hard to know who they really are, and what they are made of! In what and in whom do you trust?

Paul, in his letter to the Philippians, gives his qualifications and experience, he could tick every box of Jewish credentials: ceremony, ancestry, learning, zeal and faithfulness to the law, citing all the marks of his Jewish identity. He had all the advantages of his birth, as well as being part of the ruling elite. Yet he says that it is worth nothing; he gave up everything, because knowing Jesus Christ is worth far more; it is in Christ he puts his trust and confidence. With all the tensions and internal challenges, the Philippian Church was facing, Paul urges them not to put their trust in anything apart from Jesus. He wants them to stand firm against those who want Gentile believers in Christ first to become Jews, rather than to understand it is faith in Christ that matters first and foremost.

Paul's confidence is in Jesus and in knowing him; this he places above everything else. It is his relationship with his Lord that is uppermost. In knowing Jesus, he knows his identity, who he is: he is right with God as he is united with Christ through his faith in Jesus. Paul knows God has exalted Jesus to the highest place, where his name is above every other, and at his name all should bow their knee. Paul also knows that ultimately in knowing Jesus, he too will know the resurrection power in this life and in the age to come.

Yet, if we asked Paul what he needed to develop and what his goal was, he would be all too quick to list his weaknesses; he knows too, that he has not got where he wants to be. Paul knows he is a work in progress, but no matter what the obstacles, he will press on and persevere until he reaches his goal: to win the prize for which God has called him heavenwards in Christ Jesus. Paul's heart and mind are set on the future, and it is that future he is certain about and striving towards, yet he knows he cannot do it on his own, only with and through Christ Jesus.

Where do you find your own identity? In your heritage, in your work, in your family, in your professional status? Or do you know yourself as a child of God, joint heir with Christ, a person welcomed by the King of kings and Lord of lords? God knows we are not perfect, in need constant forgiveness and grace; yet has provided

the means to be in a right relationship with God, through Christ Jesus whom we follow as disciples.

For Christians, the significant aspects of discipleship are: it centres on the person of Jesus Christ and our ongoing transforming relationship with him; it's about putting our deepest confidence in Christ alone; it's about being conformed to Christ's death in this life – to sacrifice ourselves to others in the name of Christ; finally, to remain committed to Christ in the midst of a suffering world.

If you were to be interviewed how would you respond to the following questions:

In what or whom do you put your trust?

Are there areas of your life that need developing?

Where do you see yourself in the future?

Can people see this from the way you live your life?

Remember as you answer, we are all works in progress!

Prayers

God of one and God of all, we pray for:
those who don't know who they are,
who can't understand themselves or their place in society –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who don't 'fit in',
who are or seem to be different –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who don't know where they come from,
their heritage or home, their family or bloodline –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who feel lost and isolated, confused and afraid,
rudderless or homeless, strangers in a strange land –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who wish they were someone else,
or somewhere else, in some other time and place –

God of all, we pray for them.

In your great mercy, Lord,
hear our prayers and grant surer journeys for them all.

Amen.

Hymn STF 472 May the Sending One

Blessing

Bless us, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
as we trust you to guide us, to give us the
strength, the courage and the persistence

May the Sending One sing in you,
may the Seeking One walk with you,
may the Greeting One stand by you,
in your gladness and in your
grieving.

May the Gifted One relieve you,
may the Given One retrieve you,
may the Giving one receive you,
in your falling and restoring.

May the Binding One unite you,
May the One Beloved invite you,

we need to follow where you lead even if the path is tough. Be our guide, we pray. **Amen**

2nd Sunday 11th October 2020

Call to worship

We sit and read this, not alone but joined with others who are reading too. We are in our home but yet there is togetherness in this moment. God is present. His love is deeper, wider, higher and stronger than we can ever imagine and it is this God we worship today.

Opening Prayer

We still our hearts and minds. We acknowledge the sounds around us – the ticking clock, the dog barking, the cars going past – these are the sounds we live with and hear daily. Today, in this moment we open ourselves up to the possibilities of God. Listen for the other sounds, the less distinct ones – a passing bird, the oven whirring, water running. These are harder to hear and we must still our bodies and strain our ears to listen. With that kind of stillness and intensity we come to God. We are eager to hear his voice and straining to feel his love.

Lord we are ready, we are still, and we want to experience you. We are grateful for a night's sleep in a warm bed, food in our fridge and the safety of our home. We are grateful for the friends we have and the visitors that bring sunshine into our lives.

We are aware of the thoughts inside of us which cause us unease or regret. We acknowledge the words we may have spoken which haven't been shared with love. We may feel unsettled by our past. Lord we know that your forgiveness is free and unconditional and in this moment of quietness we confess to you the things which rob us of our peace.

A prayer of adoration

The majesty of God
Cannot be measured
By human instruments,
Cannot be constrained
Within human boundaries,
Cannot be contained

Within human vessels,
Cannot be explained
By human thought,
Cannot be dismissed
By argument or reason.
The majesty of God
is beyond human comprehension.
Yet can be known,
And touched,
Understood ,
And received,
In this simple act
Of worship.

Bible reading

Philippians 4v1-9

Reflection by Denise Johnson

Tucked away in this reading from the book of Philippians are these words- Let your gentleness be evident to all. My Dad was linked to working with shire horses much of his life. He ploughed with them, showed them at County shows and even drove his daughter to her wedding with a pair pulling a wagon. I was always wary of the horses, they were huge, weighing in at a ton each and standing so tall. My Dad always referred to them as gentle giants, he could do anything with them and it was clear to see that they loved him. These gentle giants would root in his pockets for Polo mints and lean on his shoulder as he talked to them.

Gentleness is a great quality. We all want to be treated gently, held carefully and spoken to with tenderness. Paul, the writer of these words in Philippians often has a “bull in a china shop” approach in his letters but this section of Philippians is gentle and softer. He speaks of not being anxious, dwelling on lovely things and experiencing the peace which passes understanding.

These are the things that we crave. Maybe this is why this passage is often read and why it resonates with us.

How do we show that gentleness?

How do we imprint that gentle approach in to our lifestyle?

As autumn consumes us and we cut off the deadwood in the garden what can we remove from our lives that stunts our growth and development. Let's put all that regret and tension behind us and nurture within us that spirit of gentleness, the goodness. The seasons take us forward not back, go into the coming days and let your gentleness be evident to all.



Prayers

Lord we reach out to you in prayer. We pray for our world, for those who live in places of unrest. For those who live without peace. These are the stories which reach the news headlines and in the coming days we continue to pray for those we read about.

God of mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for peacemakers, volunteers and courageous levelers who risk all for the sake of those around them, who give their all to help and support the vulnerable and those who are damaged by war and disease.

God of mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who are not treated gently, for those who are bullied at work or school, for those who suffer at the hands of an abusive partner or relative. We pray for the hidden people who live behind closed doors in loneliness and isolation.

God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord God create within us a gentle heart, a heart which is loving and full of hope. May our gentleness be evident to all we meet in the coming days.

God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Amen

Blessing

As the earth turns and the seasons change the love of God remains constant and true. May we know this love deep within our hearts as our journey continues.

Amen

3rd Sunday 18th October 2020

Call to worship

Holy Spirit, hear us, help us while we sing.
Breathe into the music of the praise we bring.
Holy Spirit, help us, when we kneel to pray
Nearer come and teach us what we ought to say.
Amen.

Opening Prayer

We praise you, Lord, for witnesses through the ages who have told your story and made you real to the next generation. We thank you for people whose names are well known and prominent, and we thank you for those whose names are long lost in the passing of the years – but who are known to you.

We praise you for all whose good Christian lives have impacted on who we are, and what we are, and where we are. We praise you that in every generation there are witnesses who stand out, who stand up to be counted, who make a difference to the Christian path.

We praise you, Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, that we have been brought by word, by deed, by action to follow you.

We confess before you, O God, that we are not always a good example of what it is to be a Christian. We do not feel worthy that others should follow us.

And yet, Lord, you encourage us to share your love and reveal your truth and lead others to you. We confess that we fail, and we are sorry. Forgive us, Lord, and guide us in the ways of truth and justice.

Help us always, in every way, to be a good example, a shining example, of what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Jesus. Amen.

Bible reading

1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10

Reflection (by Rev Janet)

It was a complete revelation to me the day my elder son, who was training as a local preacher, said “Did you know that St Paul never read the gospels?” It had never really occurred to me. But yes, the gospels were written down years after Paul wrote his letters to the churches. Paul never read them. He was not one of Jesus’ disciples – his only meeting with Jesus was on the road to Damascus. And what an encounter that was, leaving him blind and traumatised!

So how did Paul come to know Jesus? How did Paul form his ideas on what Jesus was like, how Jesus thought and lived and loved? What inspired Paul to devote his life, and to die, for this man who he had never even met? Paul had to rely on what other people told him and he relied on what he saw in the lives of those people – pretty much in the same way that WE have come to know Jesus.

The best way to learn anything is to watch an experienced person and copy what they do. You may remember watching your grandmother knitting, your mother making an apple pie, your uncle driving a car, or a teacher drawing a map. You watched, you learned, you had a go yourself. You learned through imitation. And Paul says that is how we learn to be disciples of Jesus. By imitating those who are more experienced in the faith.

Christianity is caught, not taught. It is the example of faithful followers of Jesus that inspires us and makes us want to know for ourselves just what this Jesus person is all about.

Today we give thanks for those early Christians who knew Jesus and who inspired others to get to know him too. Like those people at Thessalonica. Paul thanks them for their work, their labours and their endurance – the fruit of their faith, hope and love. He encourages them by telling them that they are shining examples, models to all believers everywhere. They have learned by imitating Paul, Silas and Timothy, who have imitated other Christians, who imitate Christ himself, and so began what we call “The Bright Succession” – generation after generation of men, women and children learning from those who have gone before and passing on what they have learned to those who come after. We remember with joy and gratitude our own personal saints who have been Christ for us.

In that there is a great joy, and much to be thankful for. But there is also a great responsibility when we realise that there are people imitating US,

because we are the picture of Jesus that is presented to them. Our prayer must be that our picture of Jesus is true, and good, and attractive.

Imagine that Paul is writing his letter to our church today. What would he say? Would he praise us for the depth of our faith, for our joy and hope and love? Would he say that we are a great model for others to follow? I will leave you to think about that in the coming days. And remind you of the words of an old chorus:

To be like Jesus, this hope possesses me
In every thought and deed, this is my aim, my creed.
To be like Jesus, this hope possesses me
His Spirit helping me, like Him I'll be.

Prayers

Think of who first told you stories of Jesus; who first influenced you to make you want to be a Christian, and to want to find out more about the Jesus story. Let these names and faces be part of your praying.

Lord God, who will name me as their influence in days or years to come?

Loving, living God, be close to me now.
Show me your ways.
Guide my steps.
Live in me,
That I may be a person of faith, hope and love.
Help me to hear your words, challenging me to give you
all the things that are mine.
Help me remember that all I am and all I have
are gifts from you,
gifts to be shared in service and love.

Lord we ask that You bless and guide Your church,
helping us to reach out to others,
sharing with them the good news of Christ
and standing with those who are most in need of our help,
love and support.

Guide us in our relationships with others,
within our families, with friends, neighbours
and those who we struggle to love or try to avoid.

Fill our homes and communities with the warmth of Your love,

may we learn to love and accept all.

Pour out Your Spirit into the world,
bless those struggling with poverty and homelessness, evil and war.
Help us to reach out to those who are in need.

Bless those who are ill at home or in hospital,
those who are feeling anxious or low,
May they know Your love and sense Your presence with them
And may we as a church reach out to them in their time of need.
Bless the leaders of nations and people.
Guide them in the decisions that they make,
ensuring they work hard and fight for the people they represent.
Lord, may we always sense Your presence in our lives
and in the lives of others.
Transform us to be the people that You would have us be.

Holy One among us,
help us be a holy people
who receive your word with joy
and live your message with love. Amen

Blessing

Into a world of confusion and disbelief,
into a world of welcome and rejection,
we take the grace of God that has been among us,
and the peace of God that has been on our hearts.
Amen.

4th Sunday 25th October 2020

Call to worship

Come love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind.

Opening Prayer

We give thanks, Lord God, for the gentle caring people in the world whose love of you radiates from their lives. For their gentleness of voice and touch, for their gentle smile, their listening ear, their quiet reassurance and understanding, their patience and perseverance with us. We thank you Lord God, that you have touched the lives of these people and have enabled them to touch our lives and bring us to our faith and enrich our knowledge of you. Amen.

Holy Spirit of God, may our confessions and grief for what we have done wrong, or what we have left undone, be taken from us. May our burdens be lifted and inner souls released to share afresh the love we have known in you. Holy Spirit of God, forgive us and assure us that our sins are forgiven, that our lives are renewed, that we are loved, cherished and cared for. Amen.

Bible reading

Matthew 22 v 34-46

Reflection (Rev Barbara Pettitt)

A wife asks her husband 'how would you describe me?'

He replies: 'ABCDEFGHGIJK.'

The confused wife asks: 'what does that mean?'

Her husband replies: 'Adorable, beautiful, cute, delightful, elegant, fashionable, gorgeous and hot.'

The wife says: 'Aw thank you. But what about IJK?'

‘I’m just kidding.’

Love, it makes the world go around, it can’t be bought and yet we fall into it, or so we are told. The kind of love most of us talk about is romantic love, eros.

When Jesus talks about love he is talking about agape, selfless love. That’s the kind of love being used here. A love that puts the object of ones love first. A love that wants the best for the one you love.

Jesus says we must first love God. And we must love God with all of us, heart, mind and soul. It’s an all-in thing. We can’t love God partially or half-heartedly but totally, fully with all of us. That’ OK isn’t it we expect to love God like that with all of us, after all he has done for us in Jesus. It’s not too big an ask is it? Are natural response might be to love God like that.

But then Jesus says love your neighbour as yourself. With that same kind of love with which you love God?

Now that’s a tall order. Loving others in the same way I love God. And loving myself in that way too.

I find that lots of people don’t love themselves. I think it might be a British thing in many ways. Many of us grew up in an era of no praise and when to think positively about yourself was to be accused of being big headed. But the truth is unless we love ourselves in an honest way, we cannot hope to love others and God.

What does that mean. Well when we love ourselves we are not saying we are perfect, we are not overlooking the less nice parts of ourselves. We are simply recognising that we are human, flawed and yet still worth loving. Having a confidence in yourself and in the God who created us.

When I first became a Christian I was taught that JOY is found in Jesus first, others second and yourself last. I think it possibly a good acronym. However in practice it can leave people feeling as though they are not worth loving, not worth taking care of and trying to take on too much. I think the acronym stands for some of the time, but sometimes we have to put ourselves first, because we all need times of renewal and recreation, rest and relaxation. We need a proper balance in loving ourselves and loving others.

When we love God wholly, heart, mind and soul maybe that helps us to love our neighbour and ourselves?

Love the Lord your God with all of you. Love your neighbour in the same way. And don’t forget to love yourself.

Prayers

Lord God, we pray for those who have brought us to faith, who have shown us your love, who have tended to our needs, physical, emotional and spiritual.

We pray for those who have put themselves in harm's way for us and others. We pray for those whose lives have been made harder because they have sought to serve you and help their fellow human beings.

We pray for those whose selfless acts have caused them distress. We pray for those who have at any cost shared the gospel of Christ.

We pray for those imprisoned and tortured for their faith and witness.

May they be blessed in abundance with your love and care.

Amen.

Hymn: A new commandment I give unto you

That you love one another as I have loved you,

That you love one another as I have loved you.

By this shall all men know that you are my disciples

If you have love one for another.

By this shall all men know that you are my disciples

If you have love one for another.

Blessing

God of all times may I live my life so that others know that I care for them, am there for them, am loving them in your name. Amen.