

*Sunday, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2020*

led by Tom Parkinson and Stuart Green

### Call to Worship

Firstly, I want you to look around where you are, you may be together, you may be alone, but you are not, for whether together or alone, another is with you. I read now some words from Matthew Ch 18. v 19 & 20.

"Again, I tell you, if two of you on Earth agree about anything you ask for, It will be done for you by my Father in Heaven.

For where two or three come together in my name, there I am, with them".

For where two or three come together in my name, there I am, with them".

"There I am". He says, one with the another! Jesus, with us, and whether we gather in our home, in our garden, or any other place, Jesus is, as promised, with us, and not only Him, but as Paul says in Hebrews

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith."

### Stuart's Text

A couple of years ago, I went on a course at Ashbourne Bakehouse to learn how to make sourdough bread.

Over the last few months, those skills have been really useful and I have been making a lot of bread.

You might not know, but sourdough bread doesn't have any yeast in it – just flour and water and a pinch of salt. If you mix flour and water together, eventually it starts to ferment and bubble, and this "starter" is what makes the dough rise. You need to regularly add more water and flour to the starter to "feed" it.

One of the things we're thinking about in today's service is how we can God is with us and his love is always surrounding us.

Paul wrote, in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verses 38-39:

"I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord!"



In the bread I'm making, once the flour and the water are mixed together, they can't be separated.

And it's a bit like that with God's love – Paul was convinced that nothing could

separate us from God's love. The love that was shown to us in Jesus.

Paul went through many difficult times in his life. He was shipwrecked, put in prison and beaten up, and faced all sorts of hardships, but was absolutely certain that nothing can separate us from God's love for us.

### Prayer

Let us pray...

Thank you God that you love us

Thank you for sending Jesus, and how that helps us to see you love for us

Thank you that nothing can get between us and your love for us

Even when we do wrong things, you forgive us and we stay in your love.

So Lord God, bless us as we worship you together today, and help us to understand more of your love for us.

### The Lord's Prayer

*Our Father .....*



Hymn: In Christ Alone StheF351

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3ch6eXkQWU8>

IN CHRIST ALONE my hope is found,  
He is my light, my strength, my song;  
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.  
What heights of love, what depths of peace,  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!  
My Comforter, my All in All,  
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,  
Fullness of God in helpless babe!  
This gift of love and righteousness,  
Scorned by the ones He came to save:  
Till on that cross as Jesus died,  
The wrath of God was satisfied -  
For every sin on Him was laid;  
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain;  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave He rose again!  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,  
For I am His and He is mine -  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,  
This is the power of Christ in me;  
From life's first cry to final breath,  
Jesus commands my destiny.  
No power of hell, no scheme of man,  
Can ever pluck me from His hand;  
Till He returns or calls me home,  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Stuart Townend & Keith Getty  
2001 Thankyou Music

**Today's Readings:**

**2 Kings 5 Naaman Healed of Leprosy**

<sup>1</sup> Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

<sup>2</sup> Now bands of raiders from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. <sup>3</sup> She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

<sup>4</sup> Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. <sup>5</sup> "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents<sup>[b]</sup> of silver, six thousand shekels<sup>[c]</sup> of gold and ten sets of clothing. <sup>6</sup> The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

<sup>7</sup> As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

<sup>8</sup> When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." <sup>9</sup> So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. <sup>10</sup> Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

<sup>11</sup> But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. <sup>12</sup> Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

<sup>13</sup> Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" <sup>14</sup> So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and

his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

## Romans 8

<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,<sup>[k]</sup> neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, <sup>39</sup> neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

## Sermon

Some words of scripture, probably familiar to us, and words that were, I believe, part of a pop song some time ago, but words that are relevant to today, as, I hope you will see.

## Psalm 137

- <sup>1</sup> By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept  
when we remembered Zion.  
<sup>2</sup> There on the poplars  
we hung our harps,  
<sup>3</sup> for there our captors asked us for songs,  
our tormentors demanded songs of joy;  
they said, "Sing us one of the songs of  
Zion!"  
<sup>4</sup> How can we sing the songs of the LORD  
while in a foreign land?  
<sup>5</sup> If I forget you, Jerusalem,  
may my right hand forget its skill.  
<sup>6</sup> May my tongue cling to the roof of my  
mouth  
if I do not remember you,  
if I do not consider Jerusalem  
my highest joy.

After reading those words I was reminded of listening to a media interview recently, where I was concerned about a comment that someone made, I cannot remember the actual quote, but it roughly said that they were looking forward to the churches opening so that they could be near God! What I was surprised also, was, that some of these thoughts came from as well as the general public, but also, were implied from some members of the clergy too!

Ann and I, when talking about it, found it rather an odd belief, in that here in the 21st Century, some people have a belief which is

almost parallel of many people in the scriptures of the Old Testament, who, when been taken as slaves, or in exile in Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon left God behind at the border of Israel.

The Psalmist wrote of the anguish of these people in our Old Testament lesson, Psalm 137.



***"By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion".***

It reads that their captors asked them to sing, probably noticing that the exiles had hung their harps on the Poplars.

***"Our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" To which they replied, "How can we sing the songs of the Lord, while in a foreign land!?"***

Those of this group seemed to give up once they had crossed whatever border they saw at the time. It seemed to end there, they, to use a modern phrase which is very apt in these days, had, "Shut up shop"!

They prayed that they would never forget, in their minds, but their hands and tongues were, so it seems frozen, at this border of Babylon.

It was not only restricted to those of Israel, think for a moment on the story of Naaman the Syrian, in 2. Kings Ch. 5. Here this little slave girl, who we might note, did not give up her faith in her God and his people.

***"If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria, he would cure him of his leprosy!"***

I am always saddened by this story in that the little girl has no name, yet her faith was not "cut off " by a frontier! She not only had faith that God was with her, but knew, of the happenings of her land.

Yet, when Naaman went to Israel, and was ordered to wash in Jordan seven times he was outraged.

***"Are not Abana and Pharpar the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?"***

Naaman too, it seemed thought his gods, Rimmon, who he mentioned later, were restricted to the frontier of Syria and not in Israel.

So, I hope you can see, how my mind was working when I heard of the comments in all forms of the media, on the television, the radio, and the few newspaper comments that I read that we have, today still, some of those of Psalm 137. and, possibly, a few Naaman's around as well.

Yet, on the other hand, when talking to people that are on my Pastoral list, and friends from Kniveton, plus others of whom I am in contact with over the phone, as I cannot visit them due to the restrictions. Some are concerned after being isolated they are afraid of becoming "locked in" their ways after being in the "Lock Down" so long that they think they are in danger of becoming recluses, and wonder if they can ever get back to what we will call "normal"!

Others that I have spoken to, **do** want to get "back to normal" for they long for the social aspect that church did bring to their lives, whether it is social, mental, or of spiritual benefit Not only the church but others I have spoken to long for the social benefits of a choir, or a dance group, or even a visit to something long denied, for example , the hairdresser.

Thinking of the hairdresser, resurrected an event many years ago, when getting ready for church in my hometown of Stockport, my mother was going through the ritual of getting my sisters ready for Sunday School.

My youngest sister, Jayne, was having her hair done and put into pigtails, when she piped up. "I don't know why you bother Mum, all this fuss, He's never there!"  
"Who's never there?" my mother asked.

"Jesus, of course, He has never turned up yet"

I remembered the old stage and screen actors adage, "Never work with Children or animals,  
Well, I found out, that day, It applies to Sunday School too.

So, I thought we have a broad spectrum of people, my sister included, and the thoughts of local and national people during these challenging times.

While pondering on these thoughts Ann found an old hymn, it is not, unfortunately in "Singing the Faith", but it is in "Hymns an Psalms", number 549. The first two verses say.....

*"Jesus, where'er thy people meet" It continues,  
There they behold thy mercy seat,  
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,  
And every place is hallowed ground."*

*"For thou, within no walls confined,  
Inhabitest the humble mind,  
Such ever bring thee here they come,  
And, going take thee to their home!"*

Whoever you are, wherever you are, whatever your faith, or lack of it, I believe, that God is with us in the "whatever" the "wherever" and, most importantly, in the "whoever you are" at this time. Whether you feel closer to God in church or closer to God anywhere!

I believe, we believe, that God is with us

wherever we are, with us as the air we breathe is in us and around us.

And if I might illustrate this another way.



Tom's "home" church St John's in Stockport

When I look at this, I do see this lovely building, of red brick, that was such an influence in my life.

I have not been back there for ages, but, I not only see the red brick church, I feel, still, the presence of those, who are now, as it says in Hebrews, part of "That great cloud of witnesses,"!

I still feel the presence of Joan, who taught me the gospel, and to be a preacher, along with others, David, Barbara, Maurice, Dilys, Barrie, Sandra, Geoff and Joan Kershaw.

The Taylors's, the Goodison's, the Cooke's, I still feel their presence.

I still feel the presence of those of those days of the Brethren Church of Crescent Road, I attended, the elders there, such as, Arnold Pickering, and Professor F.F. Bruce.

Because of that "Great Cloud of witnesses", I still feel the presence of our own greats, of this Circuit, Rev Eli Meese, Rev John Perkins, and Rev Trevor Staniforth, to name but a few. Gone from us physically, but, in faith, I still feel their presence.

Yes, I feel their presence, all of them, not, I might add in the presence of a spiritual séance, but in the presence unique to us, via the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is not restricted to myself alone, for I know many of you "feel" the presence of those lost loved ones, a brother, a sister, a husband, a wife, or friend, yes, we all "feel".

To one dear friend when she was feeling the loss of a husband very badly, I said "We would not be much of a civilisation if we did not "feel" that way"!

Yes, we all "feel", all of us.

So, my friends, via the Holy Spirit, if we feel their presence, How much more do we feel the presence of God!

I feel God, yes, at Ashbourne, at Kniveton, at Tissington, in every church and chapel I am privileged to worship, and / or preach, and I also feel God when walking the farm, seeing the wonder of nature, or, when looking out at the night sky and see the moon , the planets and the stars.

I make no apology to repeat this, I believe, we believe, that God is with us wherever we

are, with us, as the air we breathe is in us and around us. With us as the warmth of the sun touches us, with us in ways we cannot sometimes grasp. With us not only as God, but the one in three, three in one, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. to be with us alone in the "Lock Down" to be with us surely as a family in the "Lock Down", a family of blood, of kith and kin, and as family of faith too.

While writing this another illustration came to mind of the founder of the people called Methodists. On 2 March 1791, at the age of 87. John Wesley lay dying, his friends gathered around him, Wesley grasped their hands and said repeatedly, "Farewell, farewell." At the end, he said, "The best of all is, God is with us", lifted his arms and raised his feeble voice again, repeating the words, "The best of all is, God is with us, as he passed away!

I hope in the days come, I hope and pray whatever you feel, whatever your fears, whatever your anxiety, whatever you faith, whatever your belief. please take that to heart that as John Wesley said, "The best of all is that God is with us"!

With us in our homes, with us on our walks, our exercises, with us wherever we are, with us as kith and kin of family, of faith, and of blood, and God will also welcome us back to church when the doors open to us again.

"No power of hell, no scheme of Man,  
can ever pluck me from his hand.  
Till He returns, or calls me home,  
Here, in the power of Christ I'll Stand.

"Here in the power of Christ, we will stand"

The best of all God is still with us. AMEN!



## Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray for those that we love and care for.

Let us pray for those that need our prayers.

Let us pray for those of our people, for those of our land, for those of our nation, for those of our world.

Heavenly Father, we bring our people to you, in this transitional time between lockdown and getting out

We pray, Lord, that you'll help us to overcome our fears.

Heavenly Father, help us to go out into the world with our hand in ours to do your work and to meet again in your name.

We pray for our nation, again in this time of transition. For those that want to get out ahead of schedule. We pray for common sense. We pray for sensibilities, that we may all come out of this together.

We pray for those that we've recently heard about:

we pray for the family of the boy who was thrown off the Tate building and help his family now to rebuild their lives.

We pray for others that have lost loved ones. We pray for the mother whose children were murdered and then found out that the police were taking selfies. Thank you for her witness as archdeacon. We pray you'll be with her at this time of trauma for her and her family.

We pray for our world. While Covid-19 dominates in the United States, in South America, in Yemen and in other places, tragic as it is, we think of those that may be forgotten at this time. Those that still suffer war, those that still suffer famine, those that still suffer pain, those that still suffer grief.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.  
Amen.

**Hymn: Jesus, where'er thy people meet (H&P 549).**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8f6g2dcZqA>

Jesus, where'er thy people meet,  
There they behold thy mercy-seat;  
Where'er they seek thee, thou art found,  
And every place is hallowed ground.

For thou, within no wall confined,  
Inhabitest the humble mind;  
Such ever bring thee where they come,  
And going, take thee to their home.

Dear Shepherd, of thy chosen few,  
Thy former mercies here renew;  
Here to our waiting hearts proclaim  
The sweetness of thy saving name.

Here may we prove the power of prayer,  
To strengthen faith and sweeten care,  
To teach our faint desires to rise,  
And bring all heaven before our eyes.

Lord, we are few, but thou art near;  
Nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear;  
O rend the heavens, come quickly down,  
And make a thousand hearts thine own!

William Cooper. (1731-1800)  
(May also be sung to No 22(i) "Warrington".



## Blessing

The grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ,  
the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all now and always,  
in Jesus' name we ask, Amen

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