

Sunday 17th May 2020

Welcome & Announcements

Call to worship 1 Peter 3:18

Praise group- 'Our God '

Prayer

New Testament Reading Acts 17; 22-31

Video – 'Fragile'

Gospel reading- John 14;15-21
(Hilary Spencer)

Sermon

Prayers

Hymn HP536 O for a heart to praise my God

Blessing

Welcome & Announcements

Good morning everyone and welcome again to our Regent St Methodist service of worship for this 6th Sunday in Easter. This morning as we praise God and pray we will be thinking more about our need for that deep relationship with God through Christ.

But before we begin I need to mention a few announcements.

Firstly can I pass on a word of thanks from Duncan & Anne Alderdice, to all of you who have sent cards or got in touch to wish Duncan happy birthday. Some of the cards have been slow in arriving but they want to assure everyone that your kindness is really appreciated.

Secondly can I remind you all that Sunday the 31st May is our Ark service and I am looking forward to the involvement of our children and young people in the service.

And as I mention our young people, can I say a special word of congratulations to Emily Deering and Rachel Jest who excelled this year in GB and achieved the Queen's

award. Emily & Rachel were due to receive their awards Friday past at a special gathering in the guild hall in Londonderry but sadly like other events that has had to be cancelled.

And can I also let you know of another cancellation. Sadly after much deliberation the County Down Traction Engine Club has had to cancel the annual vintage rally in Greyabbey. I know that many of you have supported this event in the past & that we were due to operate the cash huts this year. So let's all stay safe and pray that this event along with others is able to return next year.

Call to worship So now we still ourselves as we prepare for worship & we hear a call to worship from the letter of first Peter.

'Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit... 1Pet3:18 ,

So now let us worship God together as we sing our opening song of praise led by the praise group 'Our God '.

Song- Water You turned into wine,
Opened the eyes of the blind ,
there's no one like you, None like you.
Into the darkness You shine
Out of the ashes we rise,
There's No one like you, None like you

Chorus
Our God is greater, our God is stronger
God You are higher than any other
Our God is Healer, awesome in power
Our God, Our God

Into the darkness you shining,
Out of the ashes we Rise..
No one like you, None like you

Chorus-

& if Our God is for us, then who could ever stop us...& if our God is with us, then what can stand against? & if Our God is for us, then who could ever stop us.. & if our God is with us, then what can stand against?

Then what can stand against?

Chorus

Prayer - There's no one like you, none like you. Lord God this day as we come to worship You we simply say that You alone are Almighty.... the God who holds all things in your hands... That You alone are all good...opening the eyes of the blind and bringing salvation & mercy to us who don't deserve it... We proclaim that there is none like you....none like you.

So it is to You that we turn at this time of continuing crisis & trouble... to You, our God, who is healer, awesome in power Our God Our God... We come bringing You our worship now, for You alone are worthy of all glory honour and praise.

Yet as we turn to You in worship so we still ourselves once more in Your awesome presence & knowing our constant need of fresh grace ...we confess our sins asking for a touch of mercy again this day.

And so we hear our verse from First Peter again that 'Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God'

Lord Jesus we thank you that You bring us safely home ... in & through You are sins are forgiven.

So we are now going to hear our N Testament Reading then a short video followed by our Gospel reading.

Acts 17:22-31 Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus & said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city & looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world & everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven & earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life & breath and all things.

From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, & he allotted the times of their existence & the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God & perhaps grope for him & find him-though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art & imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, & of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Video- Fragile

Gospel Reading- John 14:15-21

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the

Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them & reveal myself to them."

Sermon

Have you ever watched a small child try to get a star shaped toy block into a round hole? I remember doing just that & being amazed by how quickly the child learnt that it just wouldn't fit....We know that children learn quickly....but what about us adults...?

The Church Father, Augustine, famously wrote, "*Thou hast made us for thyself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee.*". Others building on that idea began to speak of a '*God shaped hole*' in the human heart, a space that could only be filled by a real relationship with the One who made us & gave us life.

Yes that hole can't be filled by anything else, & yet, sadly, it seems that so many people down through the years have tried to fill that hole with other things.... Perhaps with sport & their favourite team or activity.... or with that perfect romantic relationship, the one portrayed in those popular films..... or with peoples' respect or popularity....

or indeed with that old favourite money & all the pleasures & security that it supposedly can buy.

Idols are anything that seeks to take God's place in our hearts. They can come in all shapes & sizes, some are very obvious, others are much more subtle, some are, if used properly, good...while others are not. But none of them, whether good or bad, can ultimately fill that 'hole' in the human heart.

This morning's New Testament reading leads us to the city of Athens, as we see Paul preaching to the citizens in the Areopagus, that was city's court for religious & moral matters. Paul, while in Athens, had been greatly disturbed by the number of idols he had seen throughout the city & in particular he was struck by an idol to an '*unknown god*' vs 23. So Paul tells the Athenians that '*what you worshipped as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you*'

Paul then goes on to clearly tell them that the true God does not live in temples built by hands' vs 24, rather He gives everyone 'life & breath & everything else' vs 25. So they shouldn't 'think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone...'vs 29.

As I read this sermon, I couldn't help but wonder what example Paul might use today if he was addressing our society? Of course we don't see many stone idols around Newtownards or anywhere else in Northern Ireland. Yet as I've said there are plenty of other 'things' that people set their hearts on, plenty of other 'blocks' that people seek to use to fill that deep longing in their lives. Perhaps as football stadiums,

shopping centres, cinemas & pubs/clubs, still for the most part remain silent. I wonder if some in our society aren't waking up to the fact that these things ultimately aren't as important as they thought...that while football or a trip to the cinema or shops can be good fun.. that these things were never made to fill our lives..

So have some of us been trying to fit round pegs into a God shaped hole? And if we have then what do we do now when we realise that nothing else but God will do....?

In our gospel reading from John 14, Jesus promises that those who love Him will be given another advocate, comforter or helper. In fact the Greek word used here has all these meanings & literally is the 'one who comes alongside to help'. This 'helper' is as Jesus explains, the Spirit of God & Jesus tells us that He will come and abide in & with those who truly love Him. Yes amid all the false 'blocks' that we might pick up, Jesus here directs us to the only One who can fill that hole... The only One who can satisfy our souls, the One who gives life and rest....

I remember once, years ago, going for a long hike in the Mourne's but foolishly I was wearing a pair of boots that were a little too large for me. I told myself that my thick socks would make it ok but the truth is that the more I walked the more they rubbed & the bigger the blisters got! Until I just had to sit down & take those boots off. As we continue through this difficult time I am left wondering if this might not be a moment when some people need to sit down & take off those boots that aren't a good fit. Is it a time for some, to stop

trying to fit the wrong shaped brick into a hole that will never accept it?

No, if we realise that we have been seeking after the wrong goal, if we understand that we have been limping along relying on something that was never going to support our hearts properly.... Then now is a good time to sit down & look for a change...For as Paul told the Athenians '*while God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, & of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.*' vs 31-32

There is none like our God...He alone can satisfy our souls, everything else will ultimately let us down. As we continue through these testing times, let us not be afraid to ask God to purify our hearts, our churches & our nation. Let's also pray for courage to speak words of hope & love, but also words of truth and challenge if necessary. As Paul was 'greatly distressed' vs 16 by the idolatry in Athens let us not be content to accept consumerism or secularism or anything else as our new gods..

Rather let's bravely point to the one, the only one who will satisfy our souls and give us rest... Let's pray.

Prayers

Lord God we thank you that You created us in your own image & You made us to be in relationship with Yourself. We are humbled by that amazing truth & we ask that You would forgive us when we try to fill that hole in our hearts with anyone or anything

else. So Lord God draw us deeper into You , help us know & love You more... Help us find our rest in You...

So now we pray for our world--- And let us use the words ...***In Your mercy Lord*** as a response.

Heavenly father we bring to You our world in crisis & deep need at this moment.

For the leaders of the nations- may they know Your guidance & may they have courage & compassion as they make all decisions. ***In Your mercy Lord***

We pray also for the most vulnerable in our world. For those with little or no access to medical care, those in slums or sleeping rough & those with underlying health conditions.

In Your mercy Lord

We pray also for the Church. Lord God at this distressing time help each and every Christian to be a beacon of light & hope pointing to Jesus. Help us continue to work together, building new & enduring friendships & partnerships between Churches and believers, for the sake of the gospel.

In Your mercy Lord

Finally let us bring to God those who have requested prayer.

We pray for baby Rosie, very ill in intensive care & for Hannah, for Christine, for Cyril, for Ellen Stewart & Nicole's mum. And we keep praying for 2 young boys with cancer- Timothy Harte & Daniel Kidson. Lord we ask for complete healing & lasting wholeness for these people.

In Your mercy Lord

Now we remember many connected to our Church who have lost loved ones in

the past days. For the families of Betty Millar, Greta Cooper & Stephen Tew, who all died in the past week. For Anne, Ian, Marie, Gary, Ann, Rikki, Claire, Samantha & Morris, Hilda, Marta & David. God of comfort may they know Your loving care in the days ahead.

In Your mercy Lord

We finish with the Lord's Prayer.

Closing Hymn

O for a heart to praise my God,
a heart from sin set free;
a heart that's sprinkled with the blood
so freely shed for me:

A heart resigned, submissive, meek,
my great Redeemer's throne;
where only Christ is heard to speak,
where Jesus reigns alone:

A humble, lowly, contrite heart,
believing, true, and clean,
which neither life nor death can part
from him that dwells within:

A heart in every thought renewed,
and full of love divine;
perfect and right and pure and good —
a copy, Lord, of thine.

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart,
come quickly from above;
write thy new name upon my heart,
thy new best name of Love.

Closing blessing

May the Father's hand
keep you from stumbling,
the footprints of Jesus
give you confidence to follow,
and the fire of the Spirit
keep you warm and safe
in your walk with God this day.

We share the grace together.