

## **Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

### **Welcome & Announcements**

**Call to worship** (based on Psalm 25)

**Praise Group** - *Peace like a river*

### **Prayer**

**Old Testament Video** - 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.

### **Children's thought**

**Hymn** Great is Thy faithfulness (22/9/19)

**New Testament Reading** Acts 2:42-47

### **Sermon**

**Prayers for Others**- including prayers for the persecuted Church- (Connor Cunningham)

**Hymn** Mp473 My hope is built on nothing less (31/3/19)

### **Blessing**

**Welcome & Announcements** (Caroleen)

Firstly just reassure you that as the restrictions on Churches are gradually being released that we are constantly listening to

the guidelines given from our Executive & our central Church leadership.

We are also as leaders here in Regent Street continuing to discuss the way forward over the summer & into the autumn & in that regard we are planning another meeting of the Church council this coming Thursday at 7.30pm on Zoom.

After that meeting we will announce our own personal road map as to when we as a Church will begin to open our doors in different ways. Let's also remember that next Sunday being the first Sunday in July we will celebrate Communion together on our Facebook page at 12 noon. This will be a short live service & it won't remain up online.

One other announcement - this Tuesday at 7.30pm the Church's Faith & Order committee have organised a Zoom bible study on Sexuality, especially looking at Romans Chapter 1. Anyone interested can find further details on the Church website & you do have to register before noon on Tuesday if you wish to attend.

So lets us still our hearts & prepare to worship God.

### **Call to worship**

We lift up our souls to you, Holy God.

*We trust the Lord with our past, present, and future.*

Teach us, Lord, that we may know your ways.

*Guide our every move, Holy One, that we may walk in your paths of love and mercy.*

Let us worship the One who leads us in what is right.

*Together, let us worship God!*

And so we raise our voices in worship now as led by the Praise Group we sing, *Peace like a River*. Following that we will have our reading from the Old Testament which is a video called *Everlasting* & then we will have our children's talk.

### **Praise Song - Peace like a River**

I've got peace like a river X2

I've got peace like a river in my soul

I've got peace like a river X2

I've got peace like a river in my soul

I've got love like an ocean X2

I've got love like an ocean in my soul

I've got love like an ocean X2

I've got love like an ocean in my soul

I've got joy like a fountain X2

I've got joy like a fountain in my soul

I've got joy like a fountain X2

I've got joy like a fountain in my soul

I've got peace, love and joy like a river X2

I've got peace, love and joy like a river in my soul

I've got peace, love and joy like a river X2

I've got peace, love and joy like a river in my soul

**Prayer** Father of everlasting peace, God of abounding love, Lord of wonderful joy... We praise & worship You this day for opening up the way into your presence & your family, through Jesus Your only Son. Generous God...You touch our lives with so much goodness & grace.... You drench us with Your kindness.

Faithful God, forgive us that we can take your goodness, your grace for granted & we confess that at times we grumble and complain. Touch us once more with your mercy and help us to live in thankfulness, sharing your generosity with others. In Jesus name amen.

**Old Testament video** 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.

### **Children's Talk** (Aileen Milligan)

Hello everyone, now tell me the truth...are some of you still in your pyjamas? I know it's amazing isn't it but during this very strange time with services being online I think quite a few people have probably watched it in their pyjamas at some time! But thankfully as you see I am not in my pj's but I am running a bit late so if you don't mind I will have my breakfast now... a bowl of cornflakes.. just pour them into this bowl & get the milk.... Ohhh wait this milk doesn't smell good... Ukkk its gone sour! I wonder what the problem is... Oh here it is the date on the milk is the 24<sup>th</sup> June... Ah well I will have a bit of toast instead... here's a slice of bread... Oh no...its rock hard ...it's completely stale. I guess I better do some shopping! But you know most things go off after a while don't they... milk, bread other foods... and clothes go out of fashion... and technology changes and goes out of date... Yes everything changes doesn't it ...even us! And we have been in a real time of change.... shopping has changed... Church has changed... & when you go back to school it will be different too! Yes everything changes... WELL nearly

everything.. because I came across this verse in the bible which reminds us that Jesus doesn't change... ' *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* ' Hebrews 13:8 Yes isn't it good to know that in this ever changing world that our God, our Saviour doesn't change.... His love remains the same, His promises remain firm & He is faithful, never letting us down. Let's pray. Lord God help us to remember that You don't change even if everything else does, help us to love, trust & follow You in the days ahead. Amen And so we continue in worship as we sing *Great is Thy faithfulness.*

### Hymn Great is Thy Faithfulness

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not;  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be.

[Chorus] Great is Thy faithfulness!

Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see.

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided;

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,

Sun, moon and stars in their courses above

Join with all nature in manifold witness

To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

[Chorus]

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth

Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;

Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,

Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

[Chorus]

**New Testament Reading ACTS 2: 40- 47** <sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; & he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, & about 3000 were added to their number that day. <sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching & to fellowship, to the breaking of bread & to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders & signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together & had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property & possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes & ate together with glad & sincere hearts <sup>47</sup> praising God & enjoying the favour of all the people. & the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

**SERMON** It was one of those mornings, my computer had completely frozen for the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> time & I had decided that it was time to take drastic action, it was time to hit the reset button.

Yes hidden away somewhere in the settings of most of our gadgets & technology there is usually some sort way of restoring your phone, tablet or computer to its original factory default settings. If your device is behaving badly or simply not working at all, this factory reset will often resolve the issue... But it sorts it at a price because when you hit that button as well as removing the problem you will also remove all those programs, files & photos that you have stored on the device. And even if you have made copies you know that you will have task of going through them all & putting them back on after the reset....

Yes resets can be totally necessary but they come at a cost....

During these past months I have listened to a few Christian leaders compare our present situation in Churches with that of a computer being reset.... They argue that God has led us to the place where, for the first time in history, all our Churches have had to shut their doors. Of course it's been a strange & difficult time but now as we look forward towards reopening... we are in that place of having to sort through our programs & files & ask what do we really need & want to put back on our system...

Of course the temptation is just to take the whole box & begin one by one to put everything back in place, the way it was before. However, while that could be right, we shouldn't skip an important step. The step of taking time to prayerfully consider what God is saying to us & what might need to change... I believe that this is where every Church is at the moment, in that place of sorting through their box of programs, traditions & the way

they do services. So that they keep what's deeply valuable, but also perhaps refresh the way they do certain things & consider what new ways we things we have learnt during this crisis

This is the type of conversations that are occurring throughout our Churches & these are the questions that we all should be considering in the days ahead. What is indispensable in our Church life? How might we make improvements? How can we share the love & good news of the gospel with others?

As I have been thinking about these questions, so I have been drawn back towards the book of Acts & the life of the early Church. Now of course the book of Acts comes from a different time & a different culture & we can't just get in a time machine & move ourselves back there. There isn't a big enough reset button for that! However looking at the characteristics of the early Christian community can help us to consider what was central to their faith & life & this might help us remember what must be central to us too. So over the next few weeks I hope to examine some different passages from the book of Acts to help us reflect on what is really important to us as we follow Jesus.

Our passages from Acts won't tell us how we do certain things but they will help us to think & pray about our foundations as we look ahead in a time of great change...

Our first passage comes just after Peter's sermon at Pentecost and its Luke's way of giving us an overview of the early Christian community. In this passage Luke pulls together, into a few short

verses, a description of the early Christians which stirs & excites our hearts but also leaves us deeply challenged.

*<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; & he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." <sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptized, & about 3000 were added to their number that day <sup>42</sup> They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching & to fellowship, to the breaking of bread & to prayer. <sup>43</sup> Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders & signs performed by the apostles. <sup>44</sup> All the believers were together & had everything in common. <sup>45</sup> They sold property & possessions to give to anyone who had need. <sup>46</sup> Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes & ate together with glad & sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God & enjoying the favour of all the people. & the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*

So over the next weeks we will look at what the early Christians were devoted too... **the Apostles teaching**... to fellowship.... to the breaking of bread & to prayer....to generous sharing of their lives & resources... & to praise & worship.... Through the month of July we will look more closely at these 5 things, examining 5 different passages from Acts.

But for this morning let's just quickly remember how it all started as we hear vs 41 again... *Those who accepted his message were baptized & about 3000 were added to their number that day.*

Dr. Charles Garfield tells the story of how he once had a chance encounter with a toll booth operator outside San Francisco.

Garfield talks of how used that toll road regularly but one day he was amazed to hear music playing loudly from 1 of the 17 booths. As he pulled up next to the booth, he noticed the young man inside was dancing. So Garfield asked *what are you doing?* The young man replied *'I'm having a party!* Garfield wanted to chat further but there were others behind him & so he had to drive on. However Garfield happened to be driving that way again a few days later & approaching the toll booths he listened for the one with music. Sure enough there was the kid still dancing, this time the road was almost deserted so Garfield had the opportunity to chat to the young man more, asking him *what was going on & what about the rest of the booth operators , where they not invited to the party?*

The kid asked Garfield to look around at the other 16 toll booths & tell him what he saw. Garfield just shrugged & said *toll booths.* *Wrong* said the young man *these are vertical coffins...every day at 8:30 in the morning, live people get in. Then they die for 8 hours & at 4:30, like Lazarus from the dead, they re-emerge & go home. Garfield was amazed at this & he had to ask... Well then why are you so different?* The kid looked at him smiled & answered, *'I am going to be a dancer someday & my bosses in there are paying for my training, they just don't know it!'*

The kid knew who he was...who he was becoming & it made all the difference to how he lived each day...

As over the next weeks we come to consider what the early Christians did...we must not forget that what they did flowed out from who they were...

They had *accepted the message* & in *baptism* they had surrendered their lives to the Saviour. They were at heart followers of Jesus.... As God has given us this opportunity to take stock & think about the things we do... we must remember the most important thing is our own relationship with Jesus...

Is our relationship alive & vibrant or has it grown stale...? Are we serving out of love or just out of duty...? Do we encounter the love & grace of Jesus each day...? Those are questions for all of us, for every Christian & indeed for every single human being... So as we consider the things we do over the next weeks, let us not forget that, as the Westminster shorter catechism says ... *Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.* Or perhaps as a kid in a toll booth might have said.. *We were made for dancing..!* Let's take a moment in quiet before coming to pray.

**Prayers for Others** - So Lord as we come to prayer we praise You for Your constant grace & faithfulness. Lord help each of us to glorify You & bring You glory.

And so we continue in prayer as we remember others & we begin with a monthly slot led by **Connor Cunningham** as we think and pray for our persecuted Christian brothers and sisters in different countries in the world.

**Connor- IRAN** (No 9 World Watch list 2020)

Iran is currently listed at number 9 on the Open Doors World Watch list. We originally looked at Iran about two years ago, but

it is worth revisiting this country and reminding ourselves what it is like for Christians who live there.

Christianity has a long history and deep roots in Iran. Its presence on Iranian soil dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., and possibly even earlier. The many old church buildings still in use, (albeit not as places of worship) are concrete examples of Christian presence on Iranian soil. The only non-Muslim churches which are tolerated by the Iranian authorities are those with congregations with Assyrian or Armenian ethnic backgrounds, but these churches are small in number.

Apostasy or converting from Islam to Christianity is a crime in Iran & is punishable with terms of imprisonment, often in appalling conditions and or expulsion. The vast majority of Christians in Iran today are Muslim background believers, the majority of whom have come to faith since 2006. They are approximately 800,000 in number with approximately 50% living in the capital Tehran. It is reported that Christianity is the fastest growing non-Muslim religion in Iran with an estimated annual growth rate of approximately 5.2%.

These Christians are strictly prohibited from public worship or sharing their faith with their muslim countrymen. They must therefore, exercise their faith in fellowship with others in the privacy of their own homes....."House Churches" just in exactly the same way that the fledgling Christian Church started.

Several sources have indicated that the Christian underground church has been steadily spreading and continues to spread inside Iran despite stringent government restrictions and close surveillance by the authorities and the ever-present threat of prison sentences. It is reported that frustration with a repressive and religiously rooted regime, coupled with a critical and negative view of Islam are some of the reasons why Iranians are choosing to convert to Christianity.

At the same time, the "House Church" movement is growing as a result of a targeted missionary activity by Christian organisations abroad. This missionary work is carried on via Christian satellite networks such as Sat 7, & by the internet & social media as well as by the smuggling into Iran & circulating Bibles in Persian. As we have seen, this is all continuing despite the government's repressive measures against the underground church. Many house church leaders are still being arrested & imprisoned in a vain attempt to stem the spread of the Christian church in Iran. But as soon as the authorities arrest a house church leader & break up that church, it will soon emerge somewhere else & so it goes on.

Let me tell you about one of those house church leaders. His name is Mojtaba. He is the leader of a house church in Tehran. After being under surveillance by the authorities, Mojtaba was eventually arrested & taken to court. He was charged with offences contrary to "National Security" He was duly convicted & received a 3-year prison sentence. But even in prison God gave

Mojtaba a purpose. He says "I saw the huge gates of the prison & the big locks on the doors. No-one can enter or leave. But an inner voice said to me "Look I took you through those doors to talk to people about Jesus".

God blessed Mojtaba and so, like the early apostles, he started to tell his fellow inmates about Jesus and the Gospel. Almost unbelievably, as things progressed, an Imam started to smuggle sections of the Bible into the prison for them to study.

Mojtaba reflects on the need to pray for our Church family in Iran & in particular for those brothers & sisters in Christ who are in prison. He says, "Yes it is good to pray that God will release them but we should also pray that God will use them in this unique & valuable opportunity in sharing the gospel with others".

**Let us pray:** Heavenly Father, we remember our Brothers and Sisters in Christ in Iran at this time. We thank you Lord that despite many hardships and dangers, your church is growing inside this country and that many are coming to know about Jesus and the message of the Gospel. We especially remember those Christians who have been imprisoned for their faith and we would ask that they might come to know your strength and your grace as they endure the privations of their incarceration and may they experience the power and protection of the Holy Spirit as they share the gospel with their fellow prisoners. We ask that you will hold them in the palm of your mighty hand until

they can once more share in the love and fellowship of their brothers and sisters in Christ. In Jesus name. Amen.

And now we continue in prayer as we pray for those who have requested our prayers. We continue to pray for Timothy Harte & Daniel Kidson, that God in His mercy would bring complete healing to these young boys.

We pray for Nan Irwin who is in hospital awaiting an operation. We pray for God's healing.

We pray also for Elsbeth White in the hospice, we ask that God might ease her pain & bring peace to her & her daughter Marion.

We remember also Margaret, Lou & Marta Kennedy as they recover. And we pray also for Colette as she continues to recuperate & we ask for healing for them all.

We pray for Helena as she awaits her operation next week, we pray that she remains healthy & that the operation goes ahead without complications.

We remember Mark Armstrong who is serious ill & his wife Roberta. And we pray for Jerry McHaffie remembering him as he awaits hospital test. And we continue to remember those who have lost loved ones during these difficult times.... We sum up all our prayers by saying the Lord's Prayer together.

And so let's sing our praises to God again using the Hymn

**HYMN** - *My hope is built on nothing less*

My hope is built on nothing less  
than Jesus' blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,  
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain: *On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;  
all other ground is sinking sand,  
all other ground is sinking sand.*

2 When weary in this earthly race,  
I rest on his unchanging grace;  
in ev'ry wild and stormy gale,  
my anchor holds and will not fail. [Refrain]

3 His vow, his covenant, and blood  
are my defence against the flood;  
when earthly hopes are swept away,  
He will uphold me on that day. [Refrain]

4 When the last trumpet's voice shall sound,  
O may I then in Him be found,  
clothed in His righteousness alone,  
faultless to stand before the throne. [Refrain]

**Blessing** - Lord God help us stand on Christ the solid ground & may we know Your blessing each & every day... we finish by sharing the words of the grace together... The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God & the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all forevermore. amen



