

SUNDAY 2nd August

Welcome & Announcements (Caroleen)

Call to worship Lamentations 3:22-23

Praise

Opening Prayer & Psalm 137 (Colin)

Video 'A four-fold blessing'

Old Testament reading- Isa 58:6-10 (Howard Ming)

Hymn I the Lord of sea & sky (Sun 13/10/19)

New Testament Reading- Acts 8:1b-4 (Howard Ming)

Sermon (Daphne Twinem)

Prayers (Laura)

Hymn Onward Christian soldiers (Sun 2/6/19)

Blessing (Colin)

Welcome & Announcements

Call to worship The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; *his mercies never come to an end*; they are new every morning; *great is your faithfulness.* - Lamentations 3:22-23

Praise Song

Opening prayer & Psalm

Lord we come to worship You this morning, You who are faithful, You who are steadfast... We come knowing that You are altogether Holy & righteous but also that Your mercies never come to an end...they are new every morning...We come knowing that You are the eternal & ever present God... that there is no where we can travel to where You are not... We come worshipping You this morning for You alone are God.

And we come as we are... with no pretence, no masks... some of us come lightly in joy.... while others of us may be coming with heaviness in our hearts... still we come... asking again for the touch of Your presence, asking for Your forgiveness, asking for Your healing... We make our own confessions to God in the quiet.

May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image, to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Psalm 137:1-6

¹ By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept, when we remembered Zion. ² There on the poplars we hung our harps, ³ for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" ⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. ⁶ 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.

We are now going to watch a video entitled 'A 4 fold blessing'

Old testament Reading Isa 58:6-10 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? ⁸ Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you will call, and the LORD will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I. "If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰ and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.

Hymn *I the Lord of sea & sky*

I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them? Whom shall I send?
Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.

I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart

I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them, They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them, Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.

I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them, My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide, Till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give My life to them, Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart

New Testament Reading Acts 8:1-4 On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. ² Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for

him.³ But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Sermon After Covid-19 – What ?

This time last year, I'd never even heard of zoom, or live streaming! Not that I'm a whole lot wiser about them even now - but I have heard of them, and can even use them if someone tells me exactly what to do!

Also of course, this time last year none of us had heard of covid-19! Now it's on everyone's lips, every news broadcast, and affects all our lives in so many different ways. Even 6 months ago, we couldn't have guessed at the lives it would take, and the way it would turn everything upside down. Surely - apart from wars - nothing like this has ever happened before?

But of course it's not completely new. There have been epidemics and pandemics before - only with less medical skill and knowledge to fight them with. And people's lives have been turned upside down by all sorts of things -, tsunamis, plagues, wars, persecution, industrial revolutions

We've all been affected in different ways by this pandemic, depending on our family or employment situation, our health situation generally

But we've all been affected! I want to look this morning at some things I think God is saying to us through all this.

What is God saying at this time?

1. It's ok to be sad (Matt 23:37. 21:12, 23)

While as I've said, it's not completely new, it is hard! It was hard listening to the news over so many weeks when all we seemed to hear was how many had tested +ve for covid-19, or how many had died. And then more recently the businesses that were closing down, and the jobs that were being lost.... Sometimes as Christians we can feel guilty for feeling sad! Should we not be able to rejoice in all situations?

I think though how the Jews wept when they were taken away from their homes and all that was familiar, to a strange land, far away Babylon. Their lives had been turned upside down, and they brought their sadness and bewilderment to God, and wept and mourned before Him.

Also, when Jesus stood outside Lazarus' tomb, He didn't say, "Stop crying. After all, all things work tog for good for those who love God". Neither did He put on a brave face - rather He wept! Lazarus' death did eventually work out for good, but that didn't prevent Jesus weeping with the grieving sisters.

Later He looked over the city of Jerusalem, and realised that because the people were turning their backs on Him and His message, there would inevitably be revolution and suffering on an unimaginable scale ... and His heart was broken, and He wept.....

So it's only right and proper that we grieved as we listened to the news each day, and heard how many had been tested +ve for covid 19, or died from it - here in N.I. or the UK, or in India or Brazil. At times the account of deaths and the amount of suffering of all kinds, was nearly overwhelming, and we felt as if our hearts were breaking.

We grieved at the closing of church buildings. We've been glad to be able to worship online - but we miss the fellowship and support that formerly we took for granted. One of the things I am missing the most is singing hymns! We took it so much for granted didn't we? Simply being able to praise God with our voices, in the company of fellow believers.

We've grieved as we've seen our young people losing their hopes and dreams for the future ... as we saw adults losing their livelihoods children getting behind in their education.

Surely God's heart is breaking too, as He sees the suffering and pain and heartbreak of so many. And surely the response from His people to such human suffering and need, must be grief, and sadness, and breaking hearts. So yes, it's ok to be sad, and to grieve for all that has been lost.

2. It's ok to be angry.

In the Temple, as Jesus saw folk cheating those who were buying animals for sacrifice - He didn't say, "Tut, tut" and wag his finger at them - no, he was furious! He grabbed some ropes

and made them into a whip, and chased the dishonest traders out of the temple courtyard.

The whole book of Amos shows God's anger at those who get rich through injustice, and God's care for those who are exploited. Isaiah spoke vehemently about sharing our food with the hungry, and setting the oppressed free.

Anger at the right things is right! And many things about covid-19 make me angry. We're realising how much more the weakest and most vulnerable are being affected. The children in the UK who didn't have a computer at home, or parents to help them with school work. The children in the UK who depended on school meals for a healthy diet. One Government research says that 200 thousand additional children have been pushed into poverty by coronavirus.

Haven't we all felt both sadness and anger, as we heard how violence against children has increased under lockdown, in every country that keeps records, including the UK. Many families in this country struggled financially during lockdown, and in the recession since it ended - but what about families in poor countries, who have no dole or furlough system - or savings of any kind! Many find themselves with impossible choices to make: do they watch all their children die of hunger? Or do they sell the girls into prostitution or forced marriages, so that some children might survive? An impossible choice - except it's happening.

Most Governments care most about those that will vote for them, or give cash to their party funds. The Bible tells us however, over and over again, that unlike earthly rulers, God cares for the weak and vulnerable, those like the sparrow that no one notices. The whole book of Amos is condemnation of those who get rich through injustice, and God's care for those who are exploited. Or think verses like Deut 10: 17 - *The Lord your God shows no partiality ...he defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow* (the vulnerable and marginalised in that society).

Through the support of people like us, the number of destitute people in the world had begun to fall - until climate change brought increasing drought, and worsening storms, along with things like locust swarms - yet the climate change is largely due to the richest nations like ourselves, not the poorest ones! And now in a post-covid world, inequality is exploding.

The Covid crisis means that the world's poorest people face yet one more disaster against which they have little protection. Countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo for instance. I try to imagine a country where all law and order has broken down, where more than 2 thousand died in the recent ebola outbreak, and 6 thousand in an outbreak of measles, the worst in the world! How do they even begin to fight the covid epidemic?

Some of the UK's leading aid charities have launched an appeal for help, reminding us that this is truly a global problem. The

difference though is that the rich like ourselves are afraid of covid-19, the poor are afraid of hunger.

The Bible tells us God is angry when He sees His children being exploited, especially the marginalised and vulnerable.

Surely the only right response from His people to such human suffering and need, is anger also.

---So yes, it's ok to be sad, and grieve for all that we've lost, and all that our world has lost through this pandemic.

It's ok to be angry, over many lives cut short, so much wasted talent, so much injustice and inequality of all kinds.

But the big Q is what we do with our anger and sadness!

3. Facing the future

Grieving is necessary - to enable us to move on.

Moving on is hard. I only bought a smart phone because my nephew wanted to send me pictures of the children! He had to help me buy it, and set it up - but it's wonderful! I only joined zoom because the church wanted us to talk to each other during lockdown! And yes, I needed a lot of help to set it up, but I got there - and it's wonderful!

A few weeks ago, Colin reminded us of how the early Christians were persecuted for their faith - which led to them having to leave their homes and all that was familiar - and also to

thousands more people hearing the good news of God's love, and becoming Christians!

John Wesley was a respectable Anglican minister, who hated the thought of preaching in the open air. But when he realised God was blessing his friend George Whitfield's open-air services - he knew he had to follow God's leading, out of his comfort zone into something completely new! That led to thousands and thousands more people hearing the good news of God's love, and becoming Christians!

Every pandemic has led to changes that would have been unimaginable before. We're beginning to see some of those changes already. Most of them we can do little about - but we have a choice as to how we respond to the changes - to look back with sad nostalgia to the good old days pre-covid; OR look forward with God's help to new beginnings, new opportunities to spread the good news, new avenues of service.

Yes of course we're all longing for the day when our church buildings are open once more, and we can meet face to face, and worship God together as His people.

But at the same time we hear with joy and wonder, how through lockdown more people than ever before downloaded Pete Grieg's course on Prayer; and more than 3 million new people have turned to prayer! Similarly, more people have joined in services online than ever went to church before all this. The Dean of Canterbury Cathedral said recently, "Of course we long to go

back into the cathedral, but the church will never be the same again, because we're getting emails from all around the world about how people are sharing in worship with us."

It's obvious that many are asking questions at this time, but perhaps don't want to venture into our buildings - where they don't know anyone where they're afraid of being judged for their clothes or hair style or lifestyle

I pray that we will all come out of this crisis, asking God's Spirit to nudge us into new paths, new ways of doing things, new ways of reaching our neighbour with God's love.

I for one feel scared at all the changes, the greater use of technology such as facebook and zoom for instance, that my generation really struggle with! Then I thought of one of the ads on our TVs at the moment. I'm sure you've seen it. It says, "*Be a hero - stop covid*" - how???? How can someone as ordinary and unskilled as I am, stop the spread of covid? Do you remember the answer? It was very simple - sneeze with your elbow!!!! Yes, anyone can be a hero, by just doing their bit.

So I realise I can't save all the starving people in the DRC - but I can help one, and be a hero for that one I can't fight climate change on my own - but I can make small changes in my shopping and my lifestyle, and be a hero in those very small ways I can't reach the whole world with the Gospel, but if I can make it easier for even one person to hear the good news, by accepting changes in the way I meet with God's people, the way I do church

- then I know God will be cheering me on, and calling me a hero for the sake of the Gospel!

And yes, I remember God's promise that all things, even covid, will work together for good for those who love Him. And I face the unknown future with greater faith, and greater hope, in our faithful God who transforms all our pain into glory.

For the first Christians, persecution was unexpected and unwelcome. For John Wesley, preaching in the open air was way out of his comfort zone. Their lives were all turned upside down - but the message of God's love spread, and the Church grew.

May our response to change be, "Yes Lord, help me to be willing to leave my comfort zone behind; help me to be a hero for you and your kingdom, in whatever ways I can." Amen

Prayers For Others

Hymn Onward Christian soldiers

Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to war,
With the cross of Jesus, Going on before!
Christ the royal master, Leads against the foe;
Forward into battle, See! his banners go!

*Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to war
With the cross of Jesus, Going on before.*

At the sign of triumph, Satan's host doth flee;
on then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver, at the shout of praise;
Brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.

*Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to war
With the cross of Jesus, Going on before.*

Crown and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
but the Church of Jesus, constant will remain;
gates of hell can never, 'gainst that Church prevail;
we have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.

*Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to war
With the cross of Jesus, Going on before.*

Onward, then, ye people, join our happy throng;
blend with ours your voices, in the triumph song:
glory, laud, and honour, unto Christ the King;
this through countless ages, men and angels sing.

*Onward Christian soldiers, Marching as to war
With the cross of Jesus, Going on before.*

Closing blessing

May God the Father, prepare your journey,
Jesus the Son, guide your footsteps,
The Spirit of Life, strengthen your body,
The Three in One, watch over you,
on every road that you may follow. Amen