

Worship @ Home

Sunday 27th September 2020

DON'T WORRY....?
A COVID Harvest Festival



Worship Leader: Revd Val Reid

Reader: Mandy Pye

Music: Tom Nichol, Paul Arnold and Catriona Bevan

Technician: Tony Edmonds

Call to worship

We come to celebrate

We come to give thanks

We come to lament

We come to remember

We come to be present.

Be present to us, Lord of a bitter harvest.

Amen.

Welcome

Opening hymn (StF 24)

Come, now is the time to worship

Come, now is the time to give your heart

Come, just as you are to worship

Come, just as you are before your God,

Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God

One day every knee will bow

Still the greatest treasure remains for those

Who gladly choose you now

Come, now is the time to worship...

Brian Doerksen

Let us pray...

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

This is the opening line of today's harvest reading, which we will listen to shortly.

But for our opening prayers today, I invite you to take this familiar sentence, and to be present to what it means for you now.

Today.

Sunday 27th September.

Harvest festival.

So I invite you to make yourself comfortable.

You may be on the sofa.

In bed.

At the kitchen table.

You may be with your family or friends.

You may be alone.

Breathe in.

Breathe out.

You are here.

Do not worry about your life...

What is going on in your life today?

Are you glad to be alive?

Are you anxious about your health?

About a loved one?

About the new lockdown?

Do you feel God to be present?

Or does God feel far away?

Listen to your heart.

Be honest with the God who listens.

Silence...

do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink...

What have you eaten so far today?

What have you drunk?

Where did you buy it?

Who was involved in putting the tea in your mug, or the cereal in your bowl?

Which key workers took risks to ensure that you have enough?

Give thanks for the food on your table.

Give thanks for the people here and across the world who made the supply chain possible.

Celebrate the Lord of the harvest, who created this bountiful world.

Silence...

do not worry about your body, what you will wear...

What are you wearing this morning?
Comfortable lockdown loungewear?
Are you still in your pyjamas?
Or have you dressed up for church?
Where did you buy these clothes?
How long have you had them?
Are they a long-term investment?
Or a throw-away bargain?

Perhaps this is the moment to say sorry.

For the people who are not paid a decent wage to sew in garment factories in Bangladesh or Leicester.
For our reluctance to pay a fair price so that others are employed safely.
For the systemic global exploitation in which we are complicit.

Silence...

Holy God, you told us not to worry.
But you did not tell us not to think.
Not to be alert to the realities of our world.
So we give thanks.
We repent.
We claim your forgiveness.
We promise to do better.
To notice.
To wonder.
To celebrate.
To shop wisely.
To recognise you in our daily choices.
Amen.

Matthew 6: 25-33

‘Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?

And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?

And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these.

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith?

Therefore do not worry, saying, “What will we eat?” or “What will we drink?” or “What will we wear?” For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.

But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Reflection

Don't worry!

It'll be fine!

I'm sure everything will be OK!

If you're anything like me, when people say that to me, I want to punch them!

That's a terrible admission for a minister to make.

But I'm being honest here.

Don't worry – it'll be fine...

Maybe it won't, I want to say.

Maybe things won't be OK.

Over the last six months we've learned that actually, things often aren't OK.

We've been struck by a virus.

A global pandemic.

Lockdown has gone on far longer than we could possibly have imagined, back in March, when we were in our heroic phase.

Nearly 50,000 people in the UK have died because of COVID.

BME people have been disproportionately affected.

People in care homes haven't seen family or friends for months.

Some have died alone.

Mental health issues have risen exponentially because of isolation.

Domestic violence has flourished behind closed doors.

When our prime minister said it would all be over by Christmas, how many of us breathed a sigh of relief?

And how many thought – in your dreams?

Don't worry!

We are living in a world of anxiety.

Don't be so simplistic!

And yet...

And yet...

Jesus definitely said, *'do not worry about your life'*.

*Don't worry about what you will eat, or what you will wear.
Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*

Did he mean that we shouldn't stockpile loo paper or pasta this time round?
Did he mean it's OK to wear trackie bottoms on a zoom call?

Or did he mean something more profound than that?

I don't think Jesus was saying 'there's nothing to worry about'.
Clearly that wasn't the case in his time, in an occupied country, with profound inequality, no welfare safety net, no NHS, no furlough scheme.
Last week's parable of the workers in the vineyard reminded us just how precarious employment and income were two thousand years ago.

And we know it's not true today.
This year has taught us that.

Look at the birds of the air, he says.

Birds may be Jesus' role model for not worrying, but he is not misty-eyed about their lives.
It's only a few chapters later that birds crop up again as a sermon illustration.
Not a sparrow falls to the ground, but God sees it.
It's not that birds lead charmed lives.
It's that when one falls to the ground, God notices.
It matters.
You matter - I matter.
Our lives have significance.

That doesn't mean life will be easy.
Or happy.
Or anxiety-free.
But it does mean that deep down, we know that we have a purpose in the scheme of things.
We are known.
We are loved.

Talking of birds as a sermon illustration, here's something I learned from some hens.
When I was candidating for the ministry, I did a placement with the Reverend Micky Youngson.
When I first met her she took me into her garden in Wembley to meet her chickens.
Emmeline.
Sylvia.
Kathleen.
Etty.
They were named after women who had inspired her on her journey of life and faith.

Well I recognised the suffragette.

The poet.

The first female president of Conference.

But who was Etty?

I am embarrassed to admit that I had never heard of Etty Hillesum.

She was born at the start of the First World War, in Amsterdam.

She was Jewish.

As fascism became more and more prevalent across Europe, she knew she was in for a rough ride.

In 1941 she started keeping a diary.

Like any young woman in her 20s, she wrote about clothes, about makeup, about dates, about love.

About her complicated relationship with food.

But she also wrote about God.

About life.

About spirituality.

About how to cope as she felt the darkness closing in.

She wrote a memo to herself:

Do whatever your hand finds to do, and don't take thought for the morrow.

Make your bed and carry your dirty cups to the kitchen and face the rest as it comes.

Get Tidé some sunflowers today.

Teach that teenage girl some Russian pronunciation.

Do whatever your hand and spirit find to do.

Live every hour to the full, and stop fussing about with your thoughts and fears.

I shall have to take your education in hand once again, my girl!

She spent part of 1942 and 1943 as a volunteer in Westerbork transit camp.

During this time she wrote letters to friends and family.

She was painfully honest about the mud, the lice, the overcrowding, the sickness, the despair.

But she also noticed the gorgeous yellow of the lupin fields.

The taste of red cabbage stew.

The humanity of the prisoners crowded together there.

And above all the presence of God.

There is a really deep well inside me.

And in it dwells God.

Sometimes I am there, too ...

And that is all we can manage these days and also all that really matters:

that we safeguard that little piece of You, God, in ourselves.

I love it that she writes 'You, God...'

God as a real, living presence, she can talk to.

I love it that she is honest that she can only manage to feel God's presence sometimes.
She is so very human.

She wasn't a volunteer for long.
Soon she was an inmate.

As she left the camp on a train for Auschwitz, where she died, she threw a last postcard out of the window.
It was found by a local farmer and posted back to Amsterdam.
She wrote: 'We left the camp singing'.

I think what Etty Hillesum discovered was a kind of mindfulness.
The sacrament of the present moment.
Not pretending everything would be OK..
Not denying the horror all around.
But being present to everything.
Good and bad.
Inspiring and horrible.
And – as far as she was able – being present to God.

We can't sing together as a congregation.
But I wonder whether, like Etty Hillesum, we can leave the camp singing.
The hymn the music group are about to sing for us asks:

Give us the courage to enter the song!

I think that's a different kind of 'Don't worry – trust Jesus'.
A recognition that life can be rough.
And people are not always kind.
And politics can be very, very damaging.
But we are each living our own story.
We are each singing our own song.
And the beginning and the end is God.
Amen.

Hymn – Gather us in

Here in this place new light is streaming
Now is the darkness vanished away
See in this space our fears and our dreaming
Brought here to you in the light of this day
Gather us in, the lost and forsaken
Gather us in, the blind and the lame
Call to us now and we shall awaken
We shall arise at the sound of our name.

We are the young, our lives are a mystery
We are the old who yearn for your face
We have been sung throughout all of history
Called to be light to the whole human race
Gather us in, the rich and the haughty
Gather us in, the proud and the strong
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly
Give us the courage to enter the song.

Here we will take the wine and the water
Here we will take the bread of new birth
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters
Call us anew to be salt for the earth
Give us to drink the wine of compassion
Give us to eat the bread that is you
Nourish us well and teach us to fashion
Lives that are holy and hearts that are true.

Not in the dark of buildings confining
Not in some heaven light years away
But here in this place the new light is shining
Now is the kingdom, now is the day
Gather us in and hold us forever
Gather us in and make us your own
Gather us in, all peoples together
Fire of love in our flesh and our bone.

Marty Haugen

Prayers for ourselves and others

You may remember that we have an annual cycle of prayer for each member of the Christchurch community.

We don't pray the names out loud online.

But each week, Mandy Pye prays for the people listed in the prayer book.

Each person is named, and held in the light of God's love.

This morning I invite you to pray for others – those we know by name, and those whose lives are a mystery.

All loved by God.

I invite you to take your harvest item.

Hold it in your hands.

Look at it.

Feel it.

Smell it.

You might even want to taste it (but not if it's a teabag!).

In a short time of silence, think of a recent meal you have shared, with family or friends.

Remember the sights, the sounds, the smells, the flavours.

Who is sitting round your table?

See their faces in your mind's eye.

Hold each person in the light of God's love.

Silence...

Think of people who do not have others to share a meal with.

Those who usually eat alone.

Those who have been further isolated by lockdown.

Those who miss Lunch Club, Open Church, coffee on Sundays.

You may have a name in your mind.

This may be you.

God knows each person.

We are held in the light of God's love.

Silence...

Think of people who don't have enough food.

Those who have lost their job in the pandemic.

Those whose hours have been cut.

Those who are dependent on food banks.

Or on benefits.

Those who have fled war and famine and persecution, and are trying to survive in refugee camps in Calais and Lesbos and Cox's Bazaar.

They are held in the light of God's love.

Silence...

Think of our planet.

Its fragile ecosystem.

Of the food we waste and the plastics we throw away.

Or the energy we consume.

Of the damage to oceans and rivers and wildlife.

Think of those who hold our leaders to account.

Who speak truth to power.

Who risk arrest to demonstrate their outrage.

Hold them in the light of God's love.

Silence...

Lord of the harvest,

Comfort us and challenge us.

Console us and change us.

Help us never to take for granted the fruits of your earth.

Amen.

Lord's prayer

I invite you now to say the Lord's prayer out loud.

Use whichever version you are familiar with.

Use whichever language feels like your mother tongue.

Although we are apart, we join together in praying the prayer that Jesus gave us.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Blessing

Into a world of plenty and of hunger,
Into a world of friendship and loneliness,
Into a world of faith and confusion and doubt,
We travel with you. Amen.

Hymn (StF 351)

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 love of God was magnified
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.

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend