

Worship @ Home

Sunday 4th October 2020

Do we believe in

JUDGEMENT?



Worship Leader: Revd Val Reid

Reader: Tony Hankin

Music: Andy Searle, Toby Scott, Rob Bryan

Technician: Tony Edmonds

Call to worship

Creator God, who calls us to follow,
we are on journeys,
individual journeys and shared journeys,
experiences that are ours alone and ours together.
Guide us on our journey this day
and help us to keep our eyes on the goal.
Amen.

Welcome

Opening hymn (StF 331)

King of kings, Majesty
God of Heaven living in me
Gentle Saviour, closest friend
Strong Deliverer, beginning and end
All within me falls at Your throne...

Your Majesty, I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your Majesty

Earth and Heaven worship You
Love eternal, Faithful and True

Who bought the nations, ransomed souls
Brought this sinner near to Your throne
All within me cries out in praise...

Your majesty, I can but bow
I lay my all before You now
In royal robes I don't deserve
I live to serve Your Majesty

Jarrold Cooper

Let us pray...

Lord God, we are all so different,
each our own being;
and yet you love and care for us all,
you nurture and protect us.
How can we not be thankful to you
for all that the journey with you offers!
We thank you that you guide us,
in unexpected ways,
to find our way in life.
We thank you that when we wander, you draw us back to you,
give us new direction
and encourage us to follow where you lead.
We thank you that you know our individual needs and quirks,
and yearn for us to be on the journey of life with you.
We thank you that the pains of life can be overshadowed
by the joy of walking with you.
For all these blessings and more,
we give you thanks and praise.
Amen.

God of the journey of life,
the mystery of our very being,
we confess that the journey we take gets disrupted
and we get sidetracked.
We go off on a wild goose chase that lead us nowhere,
up blind alleys
and into bad and barren places.
We find our way back to you in sorrow for our failings
and in penitence for our wanderings.
May we be enriched by your welcome,
relieved by your forgiveness
and comforted by your all-embracing love.
Amen.

Isaiah 5: 1-7

Let me sing for my beloved
my love-song concerning his vineyard:
My beloved had a vineyard
on a very fertile hill.
He dug it and cleared it of stones,
and planted it with choice vines;
he built a watch-tower in the midst of it,
and hewed out a wine vat in it;
he expected it to yield grapes,
but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem
and people of Judah,
judge between me
and my vineyard.
What more was there to do for my vineyard
that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes,
why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you
what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge,
and it shall be devoured;
I will break down its wall,
and it shall be trampled down.
I will make it a waste;
it shall not be pruned or hoed,
and it shall be overgrown with briars and thorns;
I will also command the clouds
that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts
is the house of Israel,
and the people of Judah
are his pleasant planting;
he expected justice,
but saw bloodshed;
righteousness,
but heard a cry!

Matthew 21: 33-46

‘Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watch-tower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same

way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, "They will respect my son." But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance." So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?' They said to him, 'He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.'

Jesus said to them, 'Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes"?

Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.'

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Reflection

Listen to another parable.

There was once a gardener who created a garden.

There were forests full of unimaginable creatures.

So many you couldn't count them.

So colourful you couldn't find enough pigments in your paintbox to do them justice.

There were deep blue oceans teeming with fish.

There were polar ice caps so bright you couldn't look at them.

There were fertile fields that grew every kind of grain, wheat and rice, corn and oil.

There were mines where every kind of precious metal could be dug from the earth.

There were even vineyards.

The gardener leased the garden to tenants.

Look after it, he said.

I love this place.

And your lives depend on it.

Take care of the forests and oceans, the fields and mines, the animals and insects.

Especially the insects.

They may be small, but you'll find that they're more important than you realise.

When he had gone, the tenants couldn't believe their luck.

They planted huge fields of wheat, flattening all the trees and hedges that got in their way.

They dug up the precious metals, and fought each other for the brightest.

They invented machines to do their work, and they assumed the garden was big enough to absorb all the smoke that poured out of the chimneys.

They threw away all the stuff they didn't want, and didn't notice that it clogged up the oceans and killed the fish.

The garden got hotter.

The storms got fiercer.

In summer, the trees burned for miles around.

When the harvest time had come, the gardener sent a messenger to the tenants.

How are you getting on?

Are you enjoying the garden I leased to you?
How are my precious turtles?
The whales and dolphins?
How many butterflies have you counted in your gardens?
I hope there's plenty for everyone to share.

And the tenants said to each other:
Leased?
I thought he gave it to us?
It's ours to do as we like with!
The economy is booming.
The harvest increases year on year.
We've just discovered Lithium in Cornwall.
Just think how many mobile phones we'll be able to make.
Without all the profits going to South America.

So they put the messenger in a detention centre, until he got his paperwork in order.

The gardener sent another messenger to the tenants.
I'm a bit concerned about my garden.
I'm told that a hundred species are becoming extinct each day.
My golden beaches are knee deep in plastic.
The polar ice caps are melting.
The bees are dying.
What have you done?

The tenants thought the simplest thing was just to ignore her.
To smile, and nod, and put her photo on the front page of the newspapers.
But to pay no attention to what she said.
After all, the economy was booming.
The harvest was increasing year on year.
They'd invested a lot in electric cars.
The next big thing.

Now, when the gardener himself comes, what will he do to those tenants?

... ..

I'm glad I'm not a member of Matthew's church.
Wretches being put to a miserable death.
Stones crushing the disobedient.
Wailing and gnashing of teeth.
Divine winnowing, and everlasting fires to burn up the chaff.
Matthew does enjoy his stories of judgement.

And, if we are honest, isn't there a bit of us that enjoys a touch of schadenfreude?
Not the stone-crushing, eternal hellfire sort.

But just the appropriate karma?

Like a president who doesn't believe in Coronavirus or mask-wearing testing positive for COVID?

That sort of judgement?

Surely it's built into the warp and weft of the universe?

When Matthew re-tells these parables, he always glosses them with his own interpretation.

He is writing for the Jewish Christian communities of the mid first century.

Those who are deeply committed to their identity as the people of Israel, and have recognised in Jesus the fulfilment of all their Messianic hopes.

And who are being cut off and persecuted by their Jewish brothers and sisters who think they are delusional.

Who think Jesus was a subversive terrorist, and his followers are dangerous fanatics.

Matthew can never resist a dig at the chosen people who have – as he sees it – chosen to ignore God's holy truth.

So how much is Matthew and how much is Jesus?

It's impossible to be sure.

But there is a kernel of truth in this parable.

What was Jesus actually saying?

Jesus tells this parable to the chief priests and the Pharisees.

The guardians of the covenant people.

The vineyard, of course, is Israel.

He uses the very same imagery as the prophet Isaiah, to make it perfectly clear.

The same wine press.

The same watch tower.

Who are the tenants?

Who are the slaves?

Who is the son?

Matthew – who always likes to spoon-feed his readers – makes that perfectly clear as well.

In Mark's version of the story, the son is killed, and then unceremoniously dumped outside the vineyard.

In Matthew's story, the tenants take him outside first, and then kill him.

An exact echo of the passion story.

But as Jesus tells the story, he is not the one passing judgement.

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

He asks the question of his listeners.

It is they who condemn the selfish tenants.

Of course, they know the story is about them.

They have been asked to judge themselves.

And they are deeply resistant.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.

They wanted to arrest him...

Don't we always want to arrest the people who invite us to see ourselves clearly?

It's never comfortable to be judged.

Or to be invited to judge ourselves.

And of course, we don't want to believe in a God of judgement.

Surely everything we read in the gospels leads us to a relationship with a God of love.

A God who includes everyone.

Who sends the servants out into the highways and byways to invite the poor and the outcast and the lame to come and share the feast.

Not a God who sends servants to collect the rent.

And condemn the recalcitrant.

But somehow we have to hold in tension the God who passionately wills that all should inherit the Kingdom.

And the God who

expected justice,

but saw bloodshed;

righteousness,

but heard a cry!

The God who expects us to live out of our best selves, the responsible, loving, generous, caring people he created us to be.

Who won't – can't – just sit back and let us behave like the tenants in the vineyard.

The God who asks us to look at ourselves.

Honestly.

To recognise patterns of behaviour that are destructive and violent and selfish.

And unjust.

And to acknowledge that there are consequences to our behaviour.

I think this parable is about ownership.

About thinking that the world is ours to do what we want with.

About failing to recognise our responsibility to other species.

To future generations.

To the environment itself.

About realising that if we go on treating the world as our plaything, our exploitable resource, that there is a kind of inbuilt judgement in the way the ecosystem is put together.

And goodness knows, if we pay attention, we can hear the weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth around the world.

So are we heading to destruction?

Is it too late?

What Jesus has told his hearers is this:

Have you never read in the scriptures:

"The stone that the builders rejected

has become the cornerstone;

this was the Lord's doing,

and it is amazing in our eyes."

Judgement is not about breaking and crushing.

It is about an invitation.

To pay attention to the things and the people that we too easily overlook.

To notice the consequences of our actions.

And then to be prepared to change our ways.

But that is all too often where we get stuck.

It's hard to change our ways.

We enjoy our power too much.

We think we own the earth.

We have thought this for a long time.

When it was only ever ours on lease.

Perhaps judgement is God's recognition of our inability to be the people we want to be.

That if we are going to change, we need help.

And that help will be costly.

Because it all began with love:

Let me sing for my beloved

my love-song concerning his vineyard...

We've turned it into a story of greed and exploitation and selfishness and protectionism and procrastination.

But it began with love.

That's why Jesus embraced betrayal, suffering, an unfair trial, death on the cross.

He became as we are, that we might become as he is.

So that we might be changed through his grace.

Because we can't seem to do it through our own efforts.

Judgement begins with being honest with ourselves.

Opening our eyes to reality.

Being willing to let go of our possessive clutch on things.

And to let God begin the work of redemption in us.

Amen.

Hymn (StF 699)

God of Justice, Saviour to all

Came to rescue the weak and the poor

Came to serve and not be served

Jesus, You have called us

Freely we've received now freely we will give...

We must go, live to feed the hungry

Stand beside the broken, we must go

Stepping forward keep us from just singing

Move us into action, we must go

To act justly everyday

Loving mercy in every way

Walking humbly before You God

You have shown us what You require

Freely we've received now freely we will give...

We must go, live to feed the hungry...

Fill us up, send us out, Lord (repeat)

Tim Hughes

Christchurch Community Moment

A conversation with Val Reid and Tony Hankin

Prayers for ourselves and others

God of one and God of all, we pray for:

Tony, his family and friends, his colleagues at work and at church...

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who don't know who they are,
who can't understand themselves or their place in society –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who don't 'fit in',
who are or seem to be different –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who don't know where they come from,
their heritage or home, their family or bloodline –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who feel lost and isolated, confused and afraid,
rudderless or homeless, strangers in a strange land –

God of all, we pray for them.

Those who wish they were someone else,
or somewhere else, in some other time and place –

God of all, we pray for them.

In your great mercy, Lord,
hear our prayers and grant surer journeys for them all.
Amen.

Lord's prayer

Blessing

Almighty God, we are going on a journey,
from this space of encounter with you,
To whatever this day holds.

But we also go on another journey:
the journey of our Christian life.

Some of it can be seen by others,
some only by ourselves;
some is very obvious,
some more hidden.

But it is there.

It is a personal journey

– no one else's is quite the same

– but you know it and you know all of us,

and we trust you to guide us,

to give us the strength, the courage and the persistence we need
to follow where you lead even if the path is tough.

Be our guide, we pray.

Amen.

Cornerstone

<https://www.worshiptogether.com/songs/cornerstone-hillsong-worship/>

Prayers are from ROOTS for Worship 4/10/20

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