

Full order of service for Anniversary Sunday June 20th 2021 at Christchurch, Hitchin

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to Christchurch Hitchin. Today is our church anniversary and so I am really pleased that we have more people from our church involved in our worship today. Although we cannot see each other, we can share together in worship and members of our church family can join the coffee morning afterwards [details in Christchurch Weekly] when we will be able to see each other's faces and talk. But everyone is welcome today from both near and far – we are following the lectionary reading for this Sunday and it has a message for us all. I'm Christine Warren, a local preacher from North Herts Circuit and a member here at Christchurch and I would like to say thank you to Steve, Mandy, Toby & Paul, our musicians, Emily, Pauline and Alex our readers, the Makaton Angels who will be signing a blessing at the end of this of this service and Tony who is holding it all together technically.

Opening Prayer

God of all ages, you have travelled with your people through the years.

You have shared moments of joy and times of despair.

Be with us now as we, like those faithful believers who have gone before us and those who will come after us, join to praise your name. Amen

STF 65

Sing of the Lord's goodness, Father of all wisdom,
come to him and bless his name.

Mercy he has shown us, his love is for ever,
faithful to the end of days.

Come then all you nations,

sing of the Lord's goodness,

melodies of praise and thanks to God.

*Ring out the Lord's glory,
praise him with your music,
worship him and bless his name.*

Power he has wielded, honour is his garment,
risen from the snares of death.
His word he has spoken, one bread he has broken,
new life he now gives to all.

Courage in our darkness, comfort in our sorrow,
Spirit of our God most high;
solace for the weary, pardon for the sinner,
splendour of the living God.

Praise him with you singing, praise him with the trumpet,
Praise God with the lute and harp;
praise him with the cymbals, praise him with your dancing ,
praise God till the end of days.

Ernest Sands

Prayer of Adoration

Eternal God, we praise and adore you for all that you are:
for being bigger than even our biggest questions;
for caring more than we can fully comprehend .
We praise and adore you for your strength and your silence;
for your peace and power.

We praise and adore you for being in control yet not controlling;
for being in the storms and beyond them.

We praise and adore you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we praise you for ever.

Loving Lord we remember that today we are here to celebrate, to offer our thanks for your immeasurable and inexpressible goodness. For you have greatly blessed us.

For leading this church, Christchurch, in Hitchin, from its earliest days, helping your people here to grow in faith and commitment.

We thank you for all who have been part of the history of this church and have served this church so faithfully, for those who have been an inspiration to us and an example to follow, for you have greatly blessed us.

For the fellowship we share in Christ, even in these difficult times, when we are unable to worship and meet together because of COVID regulations.

We thank you that we are still able to grow and work together through him.

So for all the past has given and all the future holds,

the certainty that nothing shall ever separate us from your love, we thank you.

Greatly you have blessed us, gladly we rejoice in the name of Christ. Amen

Introduction to the readings

You will hear that both our OT and NT readings talk of the power of the wind and the waves. The psalm celebrates God's steadfast love shown as the redeemer and rescuer of His people. We are only hearing part of the psalm today but one phrase is repeated throughout the whole psalm 'they cried to the Lord in their trouble and God rescued them.' The disciples too cried to Jesus in their trouble as a violent storm hit Lake Galilee.

Psalm 107: 1-3, 23-32 from The Message

Reader 1 Alex

Oh, thank God –he's so good! His love never runs out.

All of you set free by God, tell the world!

Tell how he freed you from oppression,

Then rounded you up from all over the place,
from the four winds , from the seven seas.
Some of you set sail in big ships;
you put to sea to do business in faraway ports.
Out at sea you saw God in action,
saw his breathtaking ways with the ocean:
With a word he called up the wind-
an ocean storm, towering waves!
You shot high in the sky, then the bottom dropped out;
your hearts were stuck in your throats.
You spun like a top, you reeled like a drunk,
you didn't know which end was up.
Then you called out to God in your desperate condition;
he got you out in the nick of time.
He quieted the wind down to a whisper,
put a muzzle on the big waves.
And you were so glad when the storm died down,
and he led you safely back to harbour.
So thank God for his marvellous love,
for his miracle to the children he loves.
Lift high your praises when the people assemble,
shout Hallelujah when the elders meet!

Mark 4:35-41

Reader 2 Emily

On that day, when evening had come, Jesus said to them, 'Let us go across to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind, they took him with them in the

boat, just as he was. Other boats were with him. A great gale arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that the boat was already swamped. But he was in the stern, asleep on a cushion; and they woke him and said, 'Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?' He woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Peace. Be still!' Then the wind ceased and there was a dead calm. He said to them, 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' And they were filled with great awe and said to one another, 'Who is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?'

Reflection 'Lord do you not care?' Hearing God in the storms of life

I am not a good sailor - I freely admit that. I think I may have shared with some of you before, the story of a boat trip that I was part of in New Zealand. We had been promised a gentle ride round an estuary but once we were on the boat, the owners decided it would be much more exciting to take us to see an albatross. These birds were not always near the coast and sometimes you have to travel out many miles in open water to catch a glimpse of one. Most people on the small boat were excited [and it was a small boat]. For them, this was an added bonus. But not for me and as we ventured out to sea, the waves swelled and our boat went up and down and we got further and further away from the coastline. I got to the point when I couldn't have cared if I saw an albatross or not [and I knew this was really a great privilege]. I wanted to shout to the boat owners 'Don't you care that we are tossing up and down, that I feel sick and afraid.' I didn't trust them. So I can empathise so much with the disciples in this event that we have heard recorded in Mark's gospel.

Here were men who were seasoned fishermen and yet they were afraid. It must have been a tremendous storm. The Sea of Galilee is surrounded by hills, except for a valley dip at one end, which can act like a funnel for the wind. And this means that the water can go from being still and calm to choppy with white horse waves as the wind whips up the water. These men would have experienced conditions like this before so this must have been a particularly violent storm. And what seemed to aggravate the fishermen more was that Jesus just slept through it all, his head on a cushion. And the cry is not asking him to do something, they question whether he cares. 'Teacher do you not care that we are perishing?' It is a cry from the heart, a rebuke from friends who feel abandoned. [Similar to the way that I wanted to cry to the boat owners in New Zealand because of their lack of sensitivity] I wonder what the

disciples expected Jesus to do - lend a hand in bailing out the boat. Instead Jesus changes the fury of this space of inland water simply by saying 'Peace be still!'

But the encounter doesn't end there – Jesus challenges the disciples about their lack of faith, their lack of understand of who he really is. For we have to remember that this incident comes towards the beginning of Christ's ministry. The disciples are still trying to work out who Jesus is – a good teacher, a prophet, a miracle worker, the Messiah? The sketchy picture that they have is becoming clearer. And none more so after this incident – in the end the miracle itself affects the disciples more than the storm does. In Jewish scripture the sea often symbolises the dark power of evil. Now Jesus has not only calmed the storm, he has power over the forces of nature, evil over good.

'Lord do you not care? Hearing God in the storms of life' is the theme of this morning's service .You may have felt when you read this - how inappropriate for a church anniversary. Usually it is one of rejoicing and thanksgiving. But as soon as I read the set lectionary reading for today - I felt it was actually *most* appropriate. 'Lord do you not care?' was the question the disciples asked in the midst of the storm. It is, if we are honest, a question that you and I have asked sometime and in different circumstances over these past fifteen months. Do you not care about my family circumstances, about the loss of life, jobs, well being, we have suffered, about the fear and anxiety this pandemic has caused? About the separation of family and friends, about the inability to worship and be community together? And not just about ourselves, about the disruption to community life, the toll and strain on our health and social services. And in the wider world the even greater impact when community structures and provision is not as strong, Lord do you not care? Are you not listening? Has it felt during this difficult and challenging time as though God himself is asleep on a pillow?

Jesus' response to the disciples can seem harsh; he challenges them to have more faith. Jesus challenges us to hold onto our belief in a God of love who loved us so much that he sent his only Son to live among us and die for our sins, our uncertainties so that above all the storms of life, we can cling onto the knowledge that God is with us. Through all the traumas, the challenges, so that ultimately whatever happens we can have everlasting life in Him. Faith is sometimes looked on as an accepting thing. Someone with great faith is pictured as a person who accepts with calmness even politeness whatever

happens to them. But if we have faith we have the right to question, to be angry, to cry out [we see this so often in the psalms which are full of emotion]. And it is so often through those times of questioning both individually and as a church that we move forward, that we grow in our faith. We, in our church communities, have to allow people to share their pain and not be silent, we need to take each other's suffering, whatever that maybe, seriously and together in prayerful empathy move forward with a deeper faith in God and a greater understanding and love for one another. The sadness over these past few months has been that it has been harder to come together to do this but please never underestimate the value of a phone call, a conversation and most of all prayer.

For God is with us in the midst of the storm his voice says 'Peace be still' The challenges may still be with us and the sadness and frustrations too but God is, so to speak, in the boat with us. Knowing his presence should itself bring us inner peace. But we have to play our part too. As we have done over the years at this church, we will still experience challenges [these will not end] but we can also experience that great sense of community. As we continue to weather the storm of the COVID pandemic, we need to prayer for each other, be kind to each other, listen to each other and build each other up even if we have to do this virtually or by zoom or other means.

The Latin word for ship is 'navis'. If you imagine the body of a medieval –style church turned upside down, you have a 'boat' and the body of such a church is technically the nave. Wherever and whatever the church is at which you worship, imagine a large space within in, a boat shape and then imagine all your church community in the boat together. We may be all different but in such circumstances, through thick and thin, we have to pull together, be of one mind in Christ. At times, some will need help from others, some will take the lead, and some will get down to the grind of making sure the boat is ship shape. But what we will all need to do, as we travel together, is worship. Worship the one whom the winds and the waves obey. Put our trust and our hope in Him and He will never fail us. 'I am with you, peace be still'. And that is why we can celebrate and we can rejoice on this special day.

Prayer of Confession

God of our questions and our struggles, when we too quickly mistake silence for indifference:

Forgive us and help us.

When the voice of our own needs silences the voice of others:

Forgive us and help us.

When we abandon others in their storm and watch safely from the shore:

Forgive us and help us

When we lose faith because things get tough

Forgive us and help us.

We know you forgive us, you save us, you encourage, challenge and calm us and for this we are thankful, Faithful one so unchanging.

Amen

STF 628

Faithful One, so unchanging,

Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.

Lord of all I depend on you,

I call out to you again and again.

I call out to you again and again.

You are my rock in times of trouble.

You lift me up when I fall down.

All through the storm your love is the anchor,

my hope is in you alone.

Brian Doerksen

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Reader 3 Pauline

God of power and peace when the storm is raging:

You are there.

When our boats are sinking, when faith slips through our fingers

You are there.

When our hearts are sad and courage fails

You are there.

In the roar of the waves, in the sound of the wind, and in the silence you are there.

You have been there for this church during the past 52 years. You have been with all your worldwide church through times past, through the challenges these last eighteen months have brought.

And you will be there with us as we move into the future.

So we praise you.

We thank you

We worship you

In Jesus' name Amen

Song A handful of heaven

1. Talents shared and used together,
Music, drama, dance and more,
Giving just a glimpse of what
The kingdom has in store.

Chorus:

So let's thank the Lord for the church that He's built here,
A handful of heaven, a portion of peace,
Reflections of rays from the Light of the world,
A tentative taste of the heavenly feast.

2. People here aren't heavenly heroes,
People here have feet of clay,
But the Father mends and moulds us
Leads us on his way.

3. Preachers called to share God's message
Spirit sensed in special song,
Young and old join hands together,
Know they all belong.

4. Children needing nurture cared for,
Given light to guide their way,
Given space to seek the Saviour,
Growing day by day.

5. Carrying each other's burdens,
Praying even when it's hard,
Opening the doors to those
That others disregard.

6. All these things come from the Father
Praise is due to him alone
Heaven's fruit grows only where the
Spirit's seeds are sown.

Christine -We have just sung the special song written by Paul Arnold on our 40th anniversary.

A song which recalls special moments in the life of our church.

Today our prayers are led by three people who are part of our church family, different ages, male and female.

So let us pray for God's people here and everywhere.

Emily -Lord God we lift to you all our young people from babes in arms to those who are moving onto further education. Over this past year their education has been disturbed, they have had to learn and develop new ways

to study; there has been uncertainty about the future. All of them have not had the normal opportunities to mix and join in activities with others. Their lives have been more isolated. Father God we pray, bless all those youngsters in our church family and beyond, praying especially for children who do not receive enough food, medication and education. May they find the right support that they need, fresh opportunities to grow. Most of all to grow in your love.

Pauline –Loving and energising God we pray especially for those who, over the past few months have been struggling with life balances; how to educate children alongside fitting in their normal hours of work, concern too about future prospects and plans. Help them in the daily hectic routine to find moments of quiet and peace. Periods of space when they can come to you and realise your presence with them. We pray not just for families but for all who are finding life challenging at this time. We realise, as we watch the news or read the papers, that there are so many in your world for whom daily living is an unimaginable challenge. We see the struggle against disease and not just COVID, the need for good sanitation and material resources to maintain a decent standard of living. Lord of all we lift them to you.

Alex- All powerful God who is with us throughout the whole of our lives, we lift to you those of our church community who are elderly, isolated, frail or facing long term illness. Those who are awaiting a doctor's appointment or who are receiving medical treatment at this time. May your healing hand be on them Lord and may they sense your presence with them as they struggle through dark times. Be especially with those who are grieving the loss of a loved one today. Sustain and uphold them with your love. And we remember too all those who help to care for the frail, ill or the dying. Those who do vital work in care homes, in the community, in hospital and hospices. Lord we have been reminded today that you are with us in the storms of life 'Peace be still 'you say.

Christine- So Lord gather us together as one, even though at this time we worship you at different times and in different places. Help us to focus on you

so that through your Son Jesus Christ, we may move on to the days ahead through the power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen

The Lord's Prayer

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.

Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, and the power and the glory are yours,
now and for ever. Amen

STF 110

In the wonder of creation,
when all nature shares one song,
showing God's imagination,
all may see his love goes on.
Through the Holy Story spoken,
of God's people called as one,
gathered, exiled, saved and broken,
this we learn: his love goes on.

In the Christ who died to save us;
in God's risen living Son;
through the Spirit, whom he gave us ;
this we know : his love goes on.

In the telling of the gospel
Matthew, Mark and Luke and John
join the Church in testifying
through the years: his love goes on.

From the perfect days of gladness
when the sun has brightly shone,
to the slog of working madness,
all the while his love goes on.

Through the times of harsh temptation,
seeking strength but finding none,
in our human desperation,
mercy comes: his love goes on.

In the joys of celebration,
of new birth or victory won,
in the deep peace of salvation,
tell the world his love goes on!

Through the dark days of depression,
when all sign of faith is gone,
hope may find no fresh expression,
but we trust his love goes on.

Through the hopes of our tomorrows,
and the things we've left undone-
future joys and present sorrows-
through all time, his love goes on.
In our Kingdom –shaped endeavour,
when God's glorious work is done,
to the promise of forever,
God is here: his love goes on.

Andrew T. Murphy

Blessing The Makaton Angels