**Act of Worship – Sunday 29th March 2020**

***Introduction:***

Welcome to the second of our Word document services. Please note they are available for all on the Bamford Chapel and Norden URC website: <http://www.bcnchurch.org.uk/worship/> if you scroll down to the table further down the page and click on the hyperlink alongside the “29th March” it will open in Microsoft Word.

For those in the Missional Partnership Churches who already have their own provision re services please feel free to discard this. Feel free to share it with others.

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***Welcome and opening words:***

Welcome to our second of the services produced whilst we are in some form of exile from each other. But rest assured God is with us and we are with God even when we’re in isolation. As Moses is coming to the end of his life he says to God’s chosen people in Deuteronomy 31:6

“ **6Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”** (Deuteronomy 31:6 – New Revised Standard Version)

And a prayer…..

“God of new life,  
God of risen hope,  
as we gather today,  
may we know your resurrection power in our lives.  
May our spirits be renewed.  
May our bodies be restored.  
**Amen.”**

**(from** <https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2020/106-march-april-2020-a/lent-5/gather>)

We continue with sung worship – feel free to use either the hymn and/or the contemporary song (YouTube links for you to listen/sing along to the songs) There are 2 songs/hymns I want to invite you to listen to/sing along to. One is familiar and one probably won’t be. Both focus our hearts and minds on God and upon praise.

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| **Opening Hymn (traditional) Immortal Invisible**  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spE-BE23qxA> | **Opening Song (contemporary) King of my heart**  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-jkMnq2Hfzo> |
| Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  in light inaccessible  hid from our eyes;  most blessed, most glorious,  the Ancient of Days;  almighty, victorious,  Thy great name we praise.    Unresting, unhasting  and silent as light;  nor wanting, nor wasting,  Thou rulest in might.  Thy justice, like mountains,  high soaring above;  Thy clouds, which are fountains  of goodness and love.  To all, life Thou givest,  to both great and small;  in all, life Thou livest,  the true life of all;  we blossom and flourish  as leaves on the tree,  and wither and perish  but naught changeth Thee.    Great Father of glory,  pure Father of light;  Thine angels adore Thee  all veiling their sight.  all laud we would render,  O help us to see  ‘tis only the splendour  of light hideth Thee.  Walter Chalmers Smith (1824 – 1908) | Let the king of my heart, be the mountain where I run,  the fountain I drink from,  Oh, He is my song.  Let the king of my heart, be the shadow where I hide, the ransom for my life, Oh, He is my song.  You are good, good, oh, You are good, good, oh,  You are good, good, oh, You are good, good, oh.  Let the king of my heart, be the wind inside my sails, the anchor in the waves,  Oh, he is my song.  Let the king of my heart, be the fire inside my veins, the echo of my days, Oh, he is my song.  You are good, good, oh, You are good, good, oh,  Yes, You are good, good, oh, You are good, good, oh.  You’re never gonna let,  never gonna let me down.  You’re never gonna let,  never gonna let me down. (x2)  You are good, good, oh,  You are good, good, oh,  You are good, good, oh,  *(when the night is holding on to me)*  You are good, good, oh, *(you are holding on)*  You are good, good, oh,  *(when the night is holding on to me)*  You are good, good, oh, *(you are holding on)*  You are good, you’re good, oh,  You are good, good, oh,  When the night is holding on to me, God is holding on.  When the night is holding on to me, God is holding on.  (King of my heart – [lyric video] Kutless)  Lyric video by Landon Gingerich |

***Prayer:***

Loving God who reigns in light, glory and splendour in heaven,  
yet made known to us in Jesus Christ.

We come before you in this moment on this day to praise and glorify your name.

We come in isolation from one another physically yet joined by the Holy Spirit as we gather to worship.

We come to offer you our praise from our homes, places of love and comfort.

We come into your presence of love and grace.

We come in weakness seeking your strength.

We come in sickness seeking your healing.

We come in doubt seeking the assurance you alone can give.

We come in poverty to see the riches of faith.

When the night of loneliness, sickness, anxiety and fear holds on to us,   
you hold us in your loving and secure embrace.

Be with us as we spend time alone or with family worshipping today.  
May we feel and know your presence with us. In this moment and in every moment.

Lord, we come also acknowledging our weaknesses and frailties.

Help us to confess our wrongdoing in thought, word and deed.

May we know your forgiveness.

Amen.

We say together the prayer Jesus taught those closest to him…

Our Father, who art in heaven….

***Bible Reading 1: Ezekiel 37:1-14 – The Valley of Dry Bones***

1 The hand of the Lord was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. **2**He led me to and fro among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. **3**He asked me, ‘Son of man, can these bones live?’

I said, ‘Sovereign Lord, you alone know.’

**4**Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to these bones and say to them, “Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! **5**This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel+37.1-14&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-21403a)] enter you, and you will come to life. **6**I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord.”’

**7**So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. **8**I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

**9**Then he said to me, ‘Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: come, breath, from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.”’ **10**So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet – a vast army.

**11**Then he said to me: ‘Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, “Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.” **12**Therefore prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13**Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **14**I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.”’

***Reflection – “Everything is possible for God”:***

God sets Ezekiel in the middle of a valley and all around him are dry bones. There, God asks Ezekiel: **““Son of man, can these bones live?” I said, “O Sovereign LORD, you alone know.””** (Ezekiel 37:3)

These bones were dry bones…we get the image/impression that these bones had been there a long time. They were dry…not ever the birds of the air seemed remotely interested in them. The image is one of utter desolation…death…baroness. And into this scene steps Ezekiel called and empowered by God.

It was an image of Israel. Israel was in Exile and Ezekiel was one of the exiles when God called him to be a prophet (Ezekiel chapters 1 & 2.) There had been little hope for Israel up to this point.

Here in this chapter, believe it or not, there is hope! Even in what is pictured as a place of death there is the glorious possibility of new life! For everything is possible for God!

The bones were symbolic of God’s people. Yes, individuals, but also corporately God’s chosen people - Israel. In their exile, away from the temple limited in what they were able to do they had in many ways turned their backs on God.

And what seemed to be an utterly desperate situation in this image of bones that had not seen life for some time, there was hope because God does not let His people down! Even though they, and sometimes we, let God down God can be depended upon no matter what we may do and the choices we sometimes make.

As I read this Lectionary passage for this week my mind went to how we, like Israel who had lost their Temple, are not able to attend the church buildings in which our individual churches meet.

What is stopping us attending our places of worship is a Virus. What stopped Israel worshipping, where and how they’d want to, was being in exile.

But like there was hope for Israel so we must trust in God in these uncertain times…none of us know when we will next sit next to each other in the pews/chairs of our churches. What we can be sure of is that God is here with us in our homes as we offer our worship to Him!

As you read these words, especially if it is on Sunday morning, you will be reading them as others are reading them or just before or just after others will read them. What is important is that we are not alone. We join with sisters and brothers in Christ across our town...county...country and even our world in continuing to worship God wherever we might be.

I have been encouraged to hear of different ways ours churches are continuing to support each other in these days of self-isolation and you are to be hugely commended for those.

May be in days like we are experiencing at present we can perhaps place ourselves in the shoes of the people who are represented as “dry bones” in this Ezekiel passage.

They, like we, were perhaps limited in their movements and what there were able to do. They, in some way, turned away from God…turned their backs on God. We, thankfully, are finding new ways to support each other and encourage each other and continue to worship even when our church buildings are closed!

I wonder if this passage should also challenge us? Are there times in our lives when we are like dry bones? When we perhaps only give God so much of our time…our talents and gifts…our treasure even. Do we sometimes exile ourselves from God and blame others or blame situations?

In Church life generally do we sometimes blame others/situations for reasons why we cannot change and try different and new ways of being Church? The situation, today, is forced upon us by a Virus – but we are finding different ways of worshipping and caring for each other when face to face contact is now allowed.

But when we are allowed to open our doors for worship again will we come with a different outlook on life and worship? Will our priorities for church have changed in these weeks/months when we are unable to meet?

In Ezekiel the dry bones were brought back to life by the breath of God. The breath of God that was breathed into humanity at creation is the same breath that continues to give the church its life and vitality today.

It is the same breath we need to depend on and receive as we live in these times of isolation and as we then, in time, meet again…may the same breath fill us as followers of Jesus today and always.

Amen.

***Song: O breath of life*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbj-ovZo6VM> (instrumental with lyrics) Some have suggested that this is not an appropriate hymn for times of self-isolation/social distancing when we’re meant to keep at least 2 metres apart. Nowhere have I heard that we need to keep our distance from God and the breath of His Holy Spirit. So, I invite you to sing along with this hymn which is an instrumental version…there is a 2 line introduction before we start to sing.

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| 1.. O Breath of life, come sweeping through us,  revive Your church with life and power;  O Breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,  and fit Your church to meet this hour. | 3.. O Breath of love, come breathe within us,  renewing thought and will and heart;  come, Love of Christ, afresh to win us,  revive Your church in every part. |
| 2.. O Wind of God, come bend us, break us,  till humbly we confess our need;  then, in Your tenderness remake us,  revive, restore - for this we plead. | 4.. Revive us, Lord; is zeal abating  while harvest fields are vast and white?  Revive, us Lord, the world is waiting -  equip Thy Church to spread the light.  Elizabeth Ann Porter Head (1850 – 1936)  Copyright controlled |

***Prayers – think of Someone:***

Think of someone who is frightened; someone whose whole world has come crashing down;  
someone who is concerned for their own health or the health of someone they love; someone facing a time of illness and afraid to share their fears that are bottled inside.

*Silence….*

Think of someone who is hurting inside; someone whose pain simply won’t go away; someone who feels rejected, unwanted, or unloved; someone who longs to know compassion, hope and peace, but has no one offer it to them.

*Silence….*

Think of someone who is broken; someone who set out with high hopes and great ambitions; someone who once had important plans for their future but whose tomorrows are covered with clouds of despair.

*Silence….*

Think of someone who is happy; someone who is very much aware of all they have received from God’s gracious hand; someone who overflows with thankfulness and joy; someone whose life is daily set alight with the love and the presence of Christ.

*Silence….*

Think of yourself, and all that you carry within you;  
think of yourself, and all that you must face tomorrow;

think of yourself, and the promises of God to hold you, bless you and love you – from now until the end of all things.

Think of yourself and, in the silence, bring your personal concerns and the concerns of our society and world to the Lord.

*Silence….*

Lord, we acknowledge that you have heard our prayers.

Amen.

*(Prayer 234, Page, 186 “500 More Prayers for All Occasions, by David Clowes adapted  
Published by David C Cook, Brighton, 2010)*

The last hymn we listen to/sing is “Longing for light” in the chorus are the words “Shine in your Church gathered today” For we do gather as church even if we are dispersed for a time. We are still church and still gather as Church. Again instrumental and there is a short introduction before we start to sing….

***Closing Hymn: Longing for light:*** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZc_ujslESE> (music and lyrics)

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| 1..Longing for light, we wait in darkness.  Longing for truth, we turn to you.  Make us your own, your holy people,  light for the world to see.  *Christ, be our light!*  *Shine in our hearts.*  *Shine through the darkness.*  *Christ, be our light!*  *Shine in your church gathered today.* | 2..Longing for peace, our world is troubled.  Longing for hope, many despair.  Your word alone has power to save us.  Make us your living voice.    *Christ, be our light!*  *Shine in our hearts.*  *Shine through the darkness.*  *Christ, be our light!*  *Shine in your church gathered today.* |
| 3..Longing for food, many are hungry.  Longing for water, many still thirst.  Make us your bread, broken for others,  shared until all are fed.  *Christ be our light….* | 4.. Longing for shelter, many are homeless.  Longing for warmth, many are cold.  Make us your building, sheltering others,  walls made of living stone.  *Christ be our light….* |
| 5.. Many the gifts, many the people,  many the hearts that yearn to belong.  Let us be servants to one another,  making your kingdom come. | *Christ, be our light!*  *Shine in our hearts.*  *Shine through the darkness.*  *Christ, be our light!*  *Shine in your church gathered today.*  Bernadette Farrell © 1981, 2000, OCP  ccli 275793 |

It is my intention to provide short acts of worship for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I hope the Easter Sunday Service will have a form of Communion that we can all take part in when we follow the service on Easter Sunday. Watch this space!!

***Blessing:***

May God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit,   
guide us, refresh us and comfort us, now and always. Amen.

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**Finally, I want to say something that might not be popular…in the two acts of worship I have produced, I have not mentioned “offertory” perhaps for obvious reasons that we are not together to bring our offerings. For some of us we give by standing order, for others we give by envelope schemes or by placing cash into offertory plates.**

**For some churches this period of not meeting together will have some considerable financial implications/burdens. Please give this some prayerful thought if you give in ways others than direct from your bank. I’m sure your church treasurer will be happy to speak to you about it.**

God Bless,

Revd Richard Bradley. (Missional Partnership Minister)