**Service of Worship - Sunday 17th May 2020**

Good morning and welcome to worship today. At the start of our time together in worship I want to read the familiar words of Psalm 23….I want to invite you to listen to these words and allow them to flow in and through you……

**Welcome and opening words**

1 The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

2 He makes me lie down in green pastures,

he leads me beside quiet waters,

3 he refreshes my soul.

He guides me along the right paths

for his name’s sake.

4 Even though I walk

through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me

in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

6 Surely your goodness and love will follow me

all the days of my life,

and I will dwell in the house of the Lord

forever.

*Moment or 2 of silence???*

As we have heard the words of Psalm 23 we now turn to sing them in the modern version of “The Lord’s my Shepherd”

**Opening Hymn: The Lord’s my Shepherd I’ll not want (Stuart Townend version)**

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| 1.. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.  He makes me lie in pastures green.  He leads me by the still, still waters,  His goodness restores my soul.  *I will trust in You alone….* | 3.. And though I walk the darkest path,  I will not fear the evil one,  for You are with me,  and Your rod and staff  are the comfort I need to know.  *I will trust in You alone….* |
| 2.. He guides my ways in righteousness,  and He anoints my head with oil,  and my cup it overflows with joy,  I feast on His pure delights.  *I will trust in You alone….* | *And I will trust in You alone,*  *and I will trust in You alone,*  *for Your endless mercy follows me,*  *Your goodness will lead me home.* |
| Psalm 23 adapted by Stuart Townend © 1996 Thankyou Music/Capitol CMG Publishing/Integritymusic.com ccli 1697373 | |

**Prayers of Praise and Confession**

Loving God, we thank you that we can place our trust in you and it is only in you that we can place our trust for everlasting life. We thank you that following you means we can have the absolute assurance that we will have an everlasting home in heaven for eternity. And for that we come and praise and adore you.

We praise you for giving Jesus to be the saviour of the world. We praise you that he trusted you so much that he went to the cross of Calvary for those that have passed before us; for those that are living today and for those who have yet to come in the future. We thank you that as a Good Shepherd he cares for us, His sheep.

We praise you for your creation that we can enjoy - for green pastures and still waters. In this season if Spring we see the beauty of the flowers, plants and trees that after the winter are coming to growth again. We thank you for the rain that allows the colours that we can enjoy in your creation.

We praise you for one another. For family and for friends. In this time of isolation when we cannot see them or touch them, may we be ever thankful for them and, once lockdown is over, may we appreciate them all the more. Thank you that we can still show our love for one another through phone calls…letters and cards…emails and texts and all the many ways we can communicate today. We thanks and praise you, Lord.

But as we come before you with praise we are conscious that we needed a saviour because we can be frail and weak in so many ways. We seek your forgiveness for the wrong we have done in thought, word or deed. When, as Paul reminds us in Colossians, we have not shown **“compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”** *(Colossians 3:12b - NIV)*forgive us and renew us, Lord, we pray.

And whilst apart physically we say together the prayer that Jesus taught those closest to him that joins us spiritually:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,

as we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

for Thine is the kingdom,

the power and the glory,

for ever and ever.

Amen.

As forgiven people we continue in praise as we sing:

**Hymn: Praise my soul the king of heaven**

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| 1.. Praise my soul, the King of heaven;  to His feet thy tribute bring;  ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  evermore His praises sing:  Praise Him! Praise Him!  Praise Him! Praise Him!  Praise the everlasting King! | 2.. Praise Him for His grace and favour  to our fathers in distress;  praise Him, still the same for ever,  slow to chide, and swift to bless:  Praise Him! Praise Him!  Praise Him! Praise Him!  Glorious in His faithfulness! |
| 3.. Father-like He tends and spares us;  well our feeble frame He knows;  in His hands He gently bears us,  rescues us from all our foes:  Praise Him! Praise Him!  Praise Him! Praise Him  Widely as His mercy flows! | 4.. Angels help us to adore Him;  ye behold Him face to face;  sun and moon, bow down before Him,  dwellers all in time and space:  Praise Him! Praise Him!  Praise Him! Praise Him  Praise with us the God of grace. |
| Henry Francis Lyte (1793 – 1847) ccli 169737 | |

**Introduction to the “Thy Kingdom Come” prayer initiative**

In the last couple of years Bamford Chapel and Norden URC have joined in the with “Thy Kingdom Come” prayer initiative that runs from Ascension Day to Pentecost Sunday (this year 21st – 31st May i.e. starting this week!!!) This year the hope is that Christians and Churches will join in again across the churches.

As part of Churches Together in Greater Manchester Christians/churches are hoping to have someone praying for 24 hours a day throughout the 10 day period! This might seem like a huge ask but we can try and fulfil it!!! You are invited to sign up to pray for as long and as often as you would like during that period. If you go to: <https://www.24-7prayer.com/signup/765237> and sign up for a slot. Please, look at it and look to join in.

The focus of this period is to pray that people will come to faith in Christ. The title coming from “The Lord’s Prayer” that we pray most Sundays in our churches.

Resources and ideas for prayer are listed at: There are ideas for how people might use the hour to pray at this page <https://www.24-7prayer.com/downloads/60%20Minute%20Prayer%20Guides(1).pdf> as well as some great resources from Thy Kingdom Come, here <https://www.thykingdomcome.global/prayer-resources>

At the end of the service these website will be on a slide and if you want please take a photo of them so that you can do an internet search for them and join in the wave of prayer happening across the country.

We hear now the Bible reading for today’s reflection….

**Bible Reading: Colossians 3:18 – 4:6**

**Rules for Christian households**

18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Those who do wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favouritism.

4 1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

**Further instructions**

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Thanks be to God for His Word.

**Reflecting on God’s Word – “Submission, love and prayer”**

Let us pray….Lord speak to us through these words today. That they may inspire us and help us on our faith journey. Amen.

*I don’t know if any of you have ever watched “The Royle Family” on TV? (That being “R-o-y-l-e” to “R-o-y-a-l”) with the actors Ricky Tomlinson, Caroline Aherne and Sue Johnston among others?   
I have to say there are times when I have laughed at the programme.*

That programme came to mind when I was preparing the sermon for today. Jim Royle (played by Ricky Tomlinson) is a husband and a father in the sitcom and it would be fair to say that I don’t think he has read these words from Paul in Colossians about how husbands should behave!

These first 9 verses of our reading speak to us about what I have called “Submissive love” Whether that submissive love is between a husband/wife; parent/child or slave/master.

What I think is important from these verses is that all that we do in our family and friendship relationships is done before an all seeing God, an all knowing God and a God that demands great things of His followers.

I don’t think it is any accident that these words start some 6 verses after Colossians 3:12 (which we mentioned in the service last week): **“Therefore as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”** (Colossians 3:12 NIV)

Set in the context of these verses as well I think it helps us to understand more about what Paul us saying about submissive love in verse 18 and the following verses.

*I have said before that my sister and I had a brilliant upbringing with brilliant parents. I think their marriage is exceptional and a real example for me in my marriage! I believe that as I grew up and even now they “submit” to one another; they “love” one another, I never recall them being “harsh” with one another. And I try to emulate that in my relationship with Ruth and my children. Do I always get it right….most definitely not! Do I pray often that I will be the best husband and father I can be? Most definitely!*

But I know that not everyone is fortunate enough to have that sort of experience/upbringing/marriage! And it is *not right* for anyone - wife, husband or child/ren to be in a house where there is amy form of abuse! And where submission is forced, where love is not offered and where harsh can bring real pain and anxiety.

*But,* Paul’s words to the Colossians in these opening verses are set in the context of a spiritual relationship with God! And when God is at the centre, when God is in control, where God has God’s rightful place in the family and friendship groups – is where we can flourish and be the women, girls, boys and men that God has created us to be.

And I believe that leads us on into the final 5 verses of our reading today (verses 2-6). Where Paul encourages his listeners/readers to **“Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”** (Colossians 4:2 NIV) ‘Prayer’ is a theme at the start of this letter – Paul writes:   
**“3 I thank my God every time I remember you, 4 in all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now….”** (Colossians 1:3-5 NIV)

I don’t think it is any accident that following some, what can be, challenging and often controversial words about ‘submission’ etc. Paul now encourages prayer in the final verses of this letter.

Martin Luther once said: **“To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing.”** (from:<https://www.crosswalk.com/faith/spiritual-life/inspiring-quotes/31-prayer-quotes-be-inspired-and-encouraged.html>)

I think Paul would agree with that statement. Paul began opening this letter with prayer for the Colossians and he is now, nearing the end of this letter, also advocating prayer.

But not just for self but for him that he will take every opportunity to share the good news of the gospel as he should. Like we as Christians should share our stories too and share about what God has done and is doing in our lives.

How we live speaks as loudly to people as what we say in any evangelistic way. The people I admire most as Christians are the people who have lived and breathed their faith and do so today.

I want to invite you now to watch a short video that my sister in law has recorded….

My sister in law was taken ill with Covid-19 and has been really poorly with the illness. She was not hospitalised but was very unwell and it is taking her a long time to recover. She was asked by the Pastor of the church they attend to give a testimony of her encounter with the illness and how her faith is helping her through it. With her permission I invite you to watch this video. I thank Jo for allowing me to use this video as I know being in front of a camera is not something she is comfortable with.

**Testimony video (transcript of the video)**

“Good morning, for those of you who don’t know me my name’s Jo, for those of you that do know me you may be a little surprised that I am doing this. To be frank, I am quite surprised too. As Brad *[her husband]* joked yesterday limelight and cameras are the two things that I hate most. So when John *(Pastor)* asked me to do this, my initial reaction was no, I don’t think so. However, as they say, God had other ideas and the morning he asked me part of my reading was this: “share the message God gives you, your test will become your testimony.” So, here I am.

About 6 ½ weeks ago before lockdown started I found out my Mum had contracted Covid-19 and so I went over to her house to look after her. A few days later I caught it too. Mum had quite severe symptoms from the start and was very unwell. To start with my symptoms weren’t that bad. But suddenly about 5 days in I deteriorated and started having breathing difficulties and feeling very ill.

Things didn’t improve and I have to be honest and say I felt really frightened. I was frightened about potentially going into hospital. I was worried for my Mum and my family and I was scared of dying.

I am normally quite rational and cope with most things, but I have to say I fell to pieces. I messaged John and told him how I felt and how I was really struggling. I have a strong faith but my faith has always been based on knowing and serving and doing and not so much on experiencing God.

I knew God was with me but I couldn’t feel Him. I knew I trusted him but I don’t know how in this situation. John rang me and prayed that I would know Jesus as Mary did not just as Martha did. About five minutes after this as I was thinking about what John had prayed I felt my chest go icy cold, I saw a bright light flash and disappear. I suddenly felt like a huge weight had been lifted from me. My breathing eased and I felt like it was going to be ok. I didn’t know how it was going to be ok, but I knew that even if the worst case scenario happened, God had got me and my family in His hand. I believe that in that moment that God not only healed me physically, I really think I may have ended up in hospital otherwise, but also that I experienced Him spiritually like I have never done before. I felt God saying: “Be still and know that I am God.”

I’d love to tell you that from that moment I felt great, but I didn’t. I developed shingles on top of the Covid and spent over a month in bed at my Mum’s away from my family feeling the most ill I have ever felt in my life. Often in tears and feeling very low. It’s now 6 weeks on and I am lot better, but I am still struggling with breathlessness and fatigue after any sort of activity. What I can tell you is despite all this over the last few weeks I have spent more time reading my Bible and praying. I mam learning to reply on myself less and on God more. I have felt more of God’s love and presence more than I have ever done and I felt God remind me of what’s really important in life. I want to thank you all for your prayers for me and for Mum. Mum is now recovered although having to take it very easy. We both felt in credibly blessed to have such loving family and friends and to be part of such supportive and caring church families. Every time I have felt low over the last few weeks I have had a message from someone saying they’re praying for me or sending me an encouraging verse or something to make me smile and it’s really got me through.

I also want to encourage you that at times it’s ok to be a mess because it is when we are at our absolute lowest that God holds us the tightest and teaches us the most. I just want to finish by reading a few lines from a song by Michael W Smith that sums up the last few weeks for me. *“There is strength within the sorrow, there is beauty in our tears, and you meet us in our mourning with a love that casts our fear. You are working in our waiting, you’re sanctifying us. When beyond our understanding, you are teaching us to trust. Your plans are still to prosper, you have not forgotten us, you are with us in the fire and the flood. You are faithful forever, perfect in love, you are sovereign over us.”* Thank you and God bless.”

I want to thank Jo again for that testimony. Jo mentioned a song by Michael W Smith who is my favourite worship leader. The song she quoted from has some powerful words in it and I want to invite you to listen to the song now which will lead us into a time of prayer….

**Song: Sovereign over us – Michael W Smith *(sung left to right)***

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| 1..There is strength within the sorrow There is beauty in our tears And You meet us in our mourning With a love that casts out fear You are working in our waiting You're sanctifying us When beyond our understanding You're teaching us to trust. | *Your plans are still to prosper*  *You have not forgotten us*  *You're with us in the fire and the flood*  *You're faithful forever*  *Perfect in love*  *You are sovereign over us* |
| 2.. You are wisdom unimagined  Who could understand Your ways  Reigning high above the Heavens  Reaching down in endless grace  You're the lifter of the lowly  Compassionate and kind  You surround and You uphold me  And Your promises are my delight | *Your plans are still to prosper*  *You have not forgotten us*  *You're with us in the fire and the flood*  *You're faithful forever*  *Perfect in love*  *You are sovereign over us* (x2) |
| Even what the enemy means for evil  You turn it for our good  You turn it for our good and for Your glory  Even in the valley, You are faithful  You're working for our good  You're working for our good and for Your glory  (x2) | *Your plans are still to prosper*  *You have not forgotten us*  *You're with us in the fire and the flood*  *You're faithful forever*  *Perfect in love*  *You are sovereign over us*  *You're faithful forever*  *Perfect in love*  *You are sovereign over us* |
| Michael W Smith “Sovereign over us” from the album ‘Sovereign”  © 2014 Thankyou Music (PRS) admin worldwide by CapitolCMGPublishing.com excluding Europe which is administered by IntegrityMusic.com / Meaux Jeaux Music / Jack Mooring Music (SESAC) /Worshiptogether.com Songs (ASCAP) [Admin. At CapitolCMGPublishing.com] Streaming Licence 595811 ccli 169737 | |

**Time of prayer**

Loving God, we thank you that you are faithful forever, perfect in love and sovereign over us. We come before you in prayer.

We give you thanks for answered prayer. We thank you not just for hearing us but also for answering the prayers we offer. Sometimes in the way we ask and sometimes not. Give us grace and faith to accept the prayers you answer in different ways to how we ask or desire.

We thank you for the NHS and all who have worked and continue to work to alleviate the suffering of many people whether with Covid-19 or not. We ask for your blessing and protection to be upon them.   
In a moment of silence we lift to God those for whom we are concerned today….. *(a moment of silence)*

We thank you for keyworkers who are working hard in these difficult and stressful times to help others. We lift them to you and ask for your blessing and protection for them.   
In a moment of silence we lift to God those who are keyworkers….. *(a moment of silence)*

We pray for those who are unwell and in hospital or in care homes. We pray for your healing hand and your protection to be upon them.

In a moment of silence we lift to God those who are keyworkers….. *(a moment of silence)*

We pray at the end of this Christian Aid Week for those who have given to the work of Christian Aid. We pray that the monies given will alleviate suffering and pain in the world today.

We pray for your Church, Lord, that as part of it we would play our part in making the name of Jesus known. As the “Thy Kingdom Come” period begins this week we pray that you would help us to respond to the invitation to sign up and pray for a slot on the 24/7 prayer.

And finally we pray for ourselves and the joys we have. The concerns we carry. The anxiety we feel.

Help us to come closer to you in our lives today.   
We offer all our prayers in and through the name of Jesus. Amen.

**Closing Hymn: Be thou my vision**

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| 1.. Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart;  naught be all else to me, save that Thou art.  Thou my best thought, by day or by night,  waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light. | 2.. Be Thou my Wisdom, Thou my true Word;  I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord;  Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;  Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one. |
| 3.. Be Thou my battle-shield, sword for the fight,  be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.  Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower.  Raise Thou me heavenward, O Power of my power. | 4.. Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,  Thou mine inheritance, now and always:  Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,  High King of heaven, my Treasure Thou art. |
| 5.. High King of heaven, after victory won,  may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's Sun!  Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,  still be my vision, O ruler of all. | From *The Poem Book of the Gael* selected and edited by Eleanor Hull  ccli 169737 |

**Prayer of Blessing for the week ahead – Number 6:22-26 (‘New Living Translation’ of the Bible)**

22 Then the LORD said to Moses. 23 ‘Tell Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with this special blessing:

24 May the LORD bless you and protect you.  
25 May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you.

26 May the LORD show you his favour and give you his peace.”’ (NLT) Amen.