**Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester 22nd November 2020 lead by Revd Darren Holland**

In a moment of stillness we posture ourselves in readiness to offer our worship:

We hold up our hands in surrender to the present and living God whose grace is sufficient for all our needs.

We move our hands to a position of receiving and giving. Freely we receive Christ’s love and freely we are ready to share it.

We extend our hands as a sign of our going. We are a people of mission, empowered by the Holy Spirit, called to serve those our society and systems have reduced to least, last and lost.

**Come, let us worship God.**

**Hymn (Rejoice and Sing 373)**

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,

You are one with us, Mary’s son –

Cleaning our souls from all their sin,

Pouring your love and goodness in;

Jesus, our love for you we sing,

Living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, now and every day,

Teach us how to pray, Son of God.

You have commanded us to do,

This, in remembrance, Lord, of you;

Into our lives your power breaks through,

Living Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,

Born as one of us, Mary’s son –

Led out to die on calvary,

Risen from death, to set us free;

Living Lord Jesus, help us see

You are Lord.

Lord Jesus Christ, we would come to you,

Live our lives for you, Son of God;

All your commands we know are true,

Your many hifts will make us new;

Into our lives your power breaks through,

Living Lord.

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**Prayer:**

Loving God

You are the God of faithfulness

The God who keeps his word.

You are the God of hope

Your presence assured now and always.

You are the God of love

Revealed in Jesus, his humility, his example and his sacrifice

You are the God of mercy

Your forgiveness breaks out from the tomb and you speak it over us even now

You are the God of renewal and restoration

Your Spirit moving over the whole of creation and reshaping your people into the likeness of Jesus.

Receive our worship as only you deserve.

Forgive our reluctance to embrace the cost of following Jesus

Forgive our poor stewardship of the world and it’s resources

Forgive our selfishness and envy that has broken relationships and damaged communities

Forgive our weak attempts to share your love with one another.

Heal us, restore us and ready us to begin again.

For we pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

**Amen**

**Reading – Deuteronomy 34 - The death of Moses (NIVUK)**

1 Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, opposite Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land – from Gilead to Dan, 2 all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea, 3 the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. 4 Then the Lord said to him, ‘This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, “I will give it to your descendants.” I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it.’

5 And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. 6 He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. 7 Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. 8 The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

9 Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

10 Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, 11 who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. 12 For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

**Reading – Ephesians 1.15-23 - *Thanksgiving and prayer*** (NIVUK)

15 For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all God’s people, 16 I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. 17 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit[a] of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his

incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. 22 And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Thanks be to God for these readings from His Word!

**Hymn – Be still**

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work to hard for him

In faith receive from him

Be still for the power of the Lord

Is moving in this place

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**Talk**

I love to travel. I love seeing new places and familiar ones, getting the chance to explore new things and have new adventures, revisit the sites of old ones. What I sometimes get frustrated by is the process of getting there. When I was training for ministry I was on placement in New South Wales Australia and had to fly from Sydney to an outback town called Broken Hill. Halfway there the plane was turned back because of fog. I set off again only to find that the connecting flight in Dubbo had left and I would have to put upon the kindness of strangers in order to stay the night. The following day I learned that my Uncle, who had no other family, had died back in Bolton and the office in Sydney were trying to find me a flight home if I needed one. The Minister I was staying with was no help and it was my Dad who made the decision for me. I was to stay and complete my placement. It was one of the hardest decisions I’ve not had to make! I was heartbroken for my family and just wanted to hug them all but I couldn’t. Oddly I believe that my Dad made the right decision and I will be forever grateful.

I can only imagine what Moses must have felt like on top of that mountain looking down on all that was promised but knowing that he would never reach it? He had invested everything in the exodus journey and the over–long wilderness wanderings but the decision was made for him. It was someone else’s task to lead the people on to the next stage of the journey. Maybe he was heartbroken, frustrated, disappointed or maybe he was just relieved that the struggle was over. This was no longer his responsibility but he knew they got there in the end. That God was faithful as he had always been.

There are times in our walk with Jesus, in our life as Christian community, that we have to accept we may not see the realisation of our goals or dreams but we can hold on to the faithfulness of God who will bring all things to pass. Billy Graham once said ‘Salvation is free but discipleship costs everything we have.’

Our walk with Jesus is neither solely about leading people to a place of conversion nor setting up a soup kitchen for the homeless. It is to receive and proclaim the freedom we have in Christ and the fullness of life for all in everything we do and say. It is salvation and liberation; hope and justice; prayer and practice; food and shelter for the body and for the soul.

The overriding message of the book of Exodus is the cost of discipleship against the faithful and holistic love of God who cares for all our needs.

As this weird year continues and we endure our journey through this ‘hug-free’ wilderness I want us to spend a few moments considering what we can embrace.

**We can embrace the discipline of continuing to walk when we cannot see the destination.**

**We can embrace the inevitable change that comes from serving God faithfully in an ever-changing world.**

**We can seek out and embrace all that God is doing acknowledging that we are called and gifted to play our part**

**Embracing the discipline**

As a youngster I was always right. Even when I was wrong. My oldest friend likes to remind me from time to time that I would always assert my belief, knowledge or opinion as right and argue until I was blue in the face even though I knew I was completely wrong! These days I am frequently wrong. But that’s ok. I love the fact that there is more to learn, to be corrected on, to be developed and understood, more to explore and discover. I’m not good at submitting myself to discipline but when I do I appreciate the change that God is seeking to make in my life so that I might understand who I am in Christ.

Hebrews 12: 5-6 puts it like this :

‘My child, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline,
    and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,
because the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
    and he chastens everyone he accepts as his children.’

Embracing discipline really means to give into whatever God has in store for us. It means wrestling with the Bible, with prayer, with doubts and questions, with personal tragedy and global trauma and yet somehow learning to trust that God continues to abide with us and in us.

Just as Jesus called his friends to lay down their nets and other livelihoods so we are called to step in to disciple shoes and walk in the way of Christ. For that we need discipline, constant adjustment if we are to avoid a 40 year wandering in the wilderness.

What is important to remember is that we do not travel this way alone. Jesus calls us into community where we wrestle together, metaphorically speaking of course, where we learn mutual accountability, where we grow into being the body of Christ.

God’s way of discipline is about building, edifying, shaping and life-giving and it is done within the gift of the boundless community that Jesus has made possible just as it was in the time of Moses.

We’re not called to be right but we are called to live righteously owning our mistakes and submitting ourselves to the re-creative work of the Holy Spirit.

Embrace the discipline

**Embrace the change**

Brexit is almost upon us – whatever shape or form our future international relationships will adopt. Like it or not - Change is coming…

I’ve talked before about change being the inevitability of life. We cannot escape it, at times like this politically we have no control over it…there will be good and bad change and church we have to be ready for both. We may not be able to predict the way ahead but if we stand firm on Christ our rock then we will not be shaken however much the rest of the earth around us quivers.

The people of God wanted their freedom from slavery but they weren’t prepared for the change of life it would bring. They wanted liberation but with all the perks of life in Egypt – work, food, a home. Their taste of freedom didn’t lead them to pursue it but to believe that God via Moses should hand it to them on a plate. Their slavery was unfair but freedom was not a call to laziness. They would have to work at their new situation if they were to survive. They would need to trust in God and work together to make the best of the situation they were in until the time when they can enter the promised land.

Moses too needed to embrace this – he needed to recognize that these were generations of people used to being told what to do – they couldn’t think for themselves, they needed help and guidance.

Transition can be hard but when we hold on to the faithfulness of God throughout then Brexit along with the Covid19 storm is one we can weather. Already we have adapted to this very rapid change in our environment. It’s been exhausting at times but we’ve come a long way. There will be many more challenges but I want to highlight two key ones:

First is not to lose the momentum. If we have been moving in this tide of change then we need to be careful not to get beached. Whether it be in our use of technology or our conviction to focus primarily on addressing the stark inequalities that the last year has made apparent, or something else, let’s keep going, moving, giving in to whatever God is doing to shape us how he sees fit.

Second is learning how to love and support those for whom this has been a terrifying or immensely difficult journey and who feel they can no longer travel on. Those who will stay at the mountain and only get to look ahead to the new territory knowing this is where their journey ends.

Embrace the change as inevitable but hold on to the God who remains faithful and whose love is steadfast.

**Seek out and embrace what God is doing**

My daughter Grace and I have been planting bulbs. I’m not the biggest fan of winter but what I love in January and February are the first snowdrops. Eventually they’ll give way to the daffodils and crocus that herald spring but the snowdrops renew that hope that spring will come even when it feels a long time away.

Psalm 121 tells us that God never slumbers or sleeps. God is always active even when it feels like he is distant or even absent. The hope of the cross and the empty tomb is that even in the most desolate of circumstances a light shines, love wins.

People are asking questions because of Covid19. Whenever someone posts a prayer or encouragement on Twitter there is someone ready to jump in and point out that God hasn’t been very helpful in making the virus go away. Somehow through history we have perpetuated the myth that God is like Gandalf or Dumbledore – a kindly bearded wizard who can wave a wand and fight evil. Yet the teachings and example that Jesus modelled, that was wholly consistent with the way in which we see God active in the Old Testament scriptures, is that God’s hope is set in us. After he rose from the tomb and commissioned his disciples Jesus charge was not for his friends to sit back and watch God at work but to own it. To be the outstretched arms, the travelling feet, the healing presence, the good news of God’s kingdom bringing hope and reconciliation to the exiled, the oppressed, the blind, and the captive.

 Seek first the kingdom, seek first the sovereign rule of God that is suppressing the powers of darkness, that cries victory over the accuser. This is seeking the presence of God with our hearts and seeking the activity of God with our eyes and our ears and joining in

Sometimes we get into that spot where we give ourselves to prayer and it becomes all we do – we ask for signs, for words and wisdom and in the meantime God is dancing in the streets of our communities and we miss it. Other times we throw ourselves into one activity after another – it is good work so how can it not be of God and we carry on for ever and flog the life out of it. What does Ecclesiastes say ‘ there is a season for everything’.

Church we are made for mission – it is our reason for being. Our reason is not to be a cosy insular community but a missional force that God is releasing to bring reconciliation to the brokenness that exists in the places where we live.

God is on the move – and he calls his disciples to follow him and join in with all that he is doing. Embrace the activity of our God – after all it’s our purpose for being here.

We can’t embrace each other right now but we can reach out and trust that God hugs us like a mother hen who gathers her brood under her wing. Yet safe as that place is the chicks still need to grow.

We are apart but we remain united through our connection in Jesus. May we own and embrace our discipleship, the inevitable changes that will bring and may we continue to seek his kingdom and embrace our Jesus-shaped purpose to bear the hope and promise of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Amen

**Prayers of intercession:**

**God of love, guide us as we pray.**
God of all nations and peoples, hear our prayers for the people of this world, and for all whose lives are torn apart by hatred and violence, whose heartbreak is more than we can imagine:

For all nations impacted by Covid19, for families grieving, for people suffering. For communities divided by fear and anger
**God of justice, guide us as we pray.**
For leaders and politicians and those who seek to negotiate for peace, whose responsibility is more than we could bear: for those trying to navigate these difficult times; for a peaceful transition for the US President Joe Biden and Vice-President Kamala Harris
**God of wisdom, guide us as we pray.**
For aid workers, medical staff, those who care for refugees, orphaned children and older people, whose daily workload is more than we could tolerate: For the NHS stretched again and for those nations who don’t have the health services we often take for granted
**God of goodness, guide us as we pray.**

We remember those known to us – those who grieve, those who are unwell, those who are fearful, those who are struggling…

**God of compassion, guide us as we pray.**

We pray for your church that we would be known by our love and humility; for our call to be reconcilers; for our charge to bear the hope of Christ as we share the good news of God’s kingdom.

**God of faithfulness, guide us as we pray**
We pray In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit:

And we bring our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus taught his friends:

Our Father in Heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your Kingdom come

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread,

And forgive us our sin

As we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

And deliver us from evil

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,

Now and forever. **Amen.**

**Hymn**

Made in perfect love

Innocent we walked as friends of God

Still we turned away

Traded freedom for a life enslaved

Helpless we were lost

Heaven sent the rescue plan of God

Through the love of Christ

We are found and born into new life

We are watching, we are waiting

We are hoping, we are praying

We’re believing, let your kingdom come

(Chorus) Father in Heaven, your name is holy

Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory

God of salvation, unfold your story

Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory

Amen

King of endless love

Here on earth just as in heaven above

Let your will be done

Wake our hearts and let your kingdom come

We are watching, we are waiting

We are hoping, we are praying

We’re believing, let your kingdom come

(Chorus) Father in Heaven, your name is holy

Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory

God of salvation, unfold your story

Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory

Amen

**The Blessing**

The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you,

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace;

And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us all, evermore. **Amen**