**Service of Communion - Bamford Chapel and Norden URC August 1st 2021**

**Call to worship.**

Jesus said to his disciples: ‘Come away…and rest a while.’
Come into the Lord’s presence now,
away from the burdens and stresses of life.
Come with open arms,
and receive the rest that Jesus offers –
to restore our souls,
and equip us for whatever comes next.

Let’s pray

O God, you are our shepherd.
Your care and compassion
were shown in the life of Jesus.
We ask that, this very day,
we may experience the rest you offer,
the peace that can restore and revive us
and enable us to live the promised abundant life.
In Jesus’ name, we pray.
**Amen.**

**Hymn The Lord’s my shepherd**

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| 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. | *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.* |
| 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. | And though I walk the darkest path,I will not fear the evil one,For You are with me, and Your rod and staffAre the comfort I need to know. |
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**Prayer**

Jesus, our Shepherd,
who makes us lie down in green pastures,
who leads us beside still waters,
who restores our souls:
you anoint our heads with oil
and our cup overflows.
We worship and adore you,
King of kings and Lord of lords.

Thank you, Lord, that you always had time for people.
Even when you were tired and needed a rest,
when the crowds gathered, your compassionate heart
healed and restored all those who came to you.
Thank you that you are kind and caring
and lavish your love upon us.
Your self-giving love has set us free
to be the people you have called us to be.
Thank you that you are present
in the big and small things of our lives,
in the ordinary and everyday times,
and in the extraordinary and special times.
You never leave us or forsake us.
Thank you, Lord.

Gracious God, you always make time for us;
we are sorry that we don’t always make time for you.
When we are rushing around being busy,
sometimes even when we are doing your work,
we forget about you.
We are sorry when we make our lives so full
that there is no room left for you –
no room to get away, to be in a quiet place with you.
Forgive us, Lord, and help us not to hurry but to slow down,
to make space for you to dwell within us.
And in that dwelling place,
may we seek what you want us to do
and who you want us to spend time with.
Help us to get the right balance,
a right rhythm that is in tune with you.

Even though we have gone astray,
you are our Shepherd –
the one who brings us back to the fold.
We are assured of your forgiveness,
and we are set free in the knowledge
that you always make room for us.

Thank you Lord
**Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer**

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.

**Children’s Address**

In the Children’s address I will show pictures of things which they can choose between

Red jumper v blue jumper

Football v athletics

Sprouts v chips

Car v bicycle

Generous v selfish

Smiley face v grumpy face

Generous v selfish

Have time to read the Bible v too busy doing other things

The message being that Jesus wants us to make the right choices.

**Hymn 799 All I once held dear** (1, chorus, 2, chorus, 3, final chorus)

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| 1..All I once held dear, built my life uponAll this world reveres and wars to ownAll I once thought gain I have counted lossSpent and worthless now, compared to this | Chorus: *Knowing You, JesusKnowing YouThere is no greater thingYou're my all, You're the bestYou're my joy, my righteousnessAnd I love You, Lord* |
| 2.. Now my heart's desire is to know You moreTo be found in You and known as YoursTo possess by faith what I could not earnAll-surpassing gift of righteousness | 3.. Oh, to know the power of Your risen lifeAnd to know You in Your sufferingsTo become like You in Your death, my LordSo with You to live and never die |
| Final Chorus: *Knowing You, JesusKnowing YouThere is no greater thingYou're my all, You're the bestYou're my joy, my righteousnessAnd I love You, Lordlove You, Lord**love You, Lord* | Graham Kendrick © 1993 Make Way Music Ccli 169737 Streaming licence 595811 |

**Bible Readings: Mark 6:30-34 – Feeding of the five thousand**

30The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’

32So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

**and Luke 10:38-42 – At the home of Martha and Mary**

**38**As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. **39**She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. **40**But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, ‘Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!’

**41**‘Martha, Martha,’ the Lord answered, ‘you are worried and upset about many things, **42**but few things are needed – or indeed only one.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+10.38-42&version=NIVUK#fen-NIVUK-25406a)] Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.’

**Hymn 50 Be still for the presence of the Lord**

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| 1.. Be still, for the presence of the Lord,The holy One, is here;Come bow before him nowWith reverence and fearIn him no sin is foundWe stand on holy ground.Be still, for the presence of the Lord,The holy One, is here. | 2.. Be still, for the glory of the LordIs shining all around;He burns with holy fire,With splendour he is crowned:How awesome is the sightOur radiant king of light!Be still, for the glory of the LordIs shining all around. |
| 3.. Be still, for the power of the LordIs moving in this place:He comes to cleanse and heal,To minister his grace -No work too hard for him.In faith receive from him.Be still, for the power of the LordIs moving in this place. | Songwriter: David Evans Be Still lyrics © Thank You Music Ltd. Ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Sermon**

Making Choices.

I suppose it’s true to say that we are make choices every day of our lives. Some of them are rather trivial. What to wear? What to buy at the shop for dinner? How shall I have my hair cut, when will it be safe for us to go on holiday and so on, while others are considerably more important. For younger people it might be which subjects they should choose to study either in school or university. Then later on, who is the right person for them to marry, when is the right time to start a family, when to move house and so on. At each stage of our lives there are choices to be made.

We heard two passages from the NT. Today. The first was from Mark’s Gospel and told of Jesus and the disciples choosing to leave the crowds behind to find somewhere where they could be quiet and rest. Unfortunately for them it didn’t quite work out as planned for the crowd followed them but the very fact that Jesus saw the need for the disciples to be quiet so they could listen to him and recharge their batteries, so to speak, is worth taking note of. We do fill our lives with so much business that we can be in danger of running out of steam. Maybe one of the effects of the pandemic has been to make us slow down a bit as our activities have been restricted, but gradually things will return to normal and we will have to decide whether our priorities have changed, I really do fear that many people who were part of church communities will decide not to return. They will have got used to having more time to spend doing other things.

The second reading was from Luke’s gospel and told the well known story of Mary and Martha which again focusses our mind on the choices we make.

 Martha had invited Jesus and his friends to join them for a meal and they had accepted. Martha had set about the work of preparing the evening meal and it was natural that she would assume that her sister would help her.

But, as we read, that is not what happened. For Martha, the practical and efficient one, there really was no choice; it was hospitality that was the most important thing. She was a good hostess, busy showing her love for her special guest in practical ways, making sure that food would be on the table when Jesus and the disciples were ready to eat. But Mary was a different personality; she didn't choose to be on the catering committee so to speak; she didn't choose to help her sister. She chose to sit near Jesus so that she could listen to what he was saying, even if it did mean neglecting the usual customs and incurring her sister's anger.

 Martha was doing what was expected of her. It was the role of women to look after the needs of the men and to stay in the background. Although she was the one who had issued the invitation, she saw it as their joint responsibility to perform the task of entertaining. You can understand Martha's resentment. It's more than likely that she too would have liked to listen to Jesus but there was just too much to do. Finally she could stand it no longer and she told Jesus to intervene to tell Mary that she ought to be helping with the chores instead of sitting listening to him.

Poor Martha I can sympathize with her. How many times have you been up to your neck in doing some job or other while somebody else just stands by watching. I've got to be honest, I know I've grumbled many a time when I've thought I was doing more than my share. But Jesus didn't seem to sympathize at all. On the contrary this is what he said. ''Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled over so many things, but just one thing is needed. Mary has chosen the right thing and it will not be taken away from her.''

The fact that Jesus was unwilling to respond to Martha's demand to rebuke her sister is interesting for several reasons because as I've said it was Martha that was behaving in the accepted manner of the day. It was Mary who was being the unconventional one. Women were openly despised by the Judaism of the time. They were exempt from the study of the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, and in fact many Rabbis actively discouraged them from learning. But as we so often see in the gospels, Jesus cut across his culture's expectations and adopted a totally different attitude towards Mary, the one whom **we** might think wasn't doing her bit.

 Just as in the first story we heard, Jesus wanted to demonstrate that there are times when being still, listening to him and learning from him is more important than rushing about filling our lives with so much business that there is no time to spend with him. There is nothing wrong with being practical, efficient and serving others so long as it doesn't interfere with the more important things in life.

Being a doer rather than a thinker I find that this is a very hard lesson for me to learn. I like to be in the midst of the workers, the ones that don't mind rolling up their sleeves to get the jobs done whether it be washing up or sweeping floors....even if I do grumble sometimes. But we are not all alike are we and it is so easy to compare ourselves with others just like Martha did. To think that we are the life-line of the church, to adopt the attitude "what would the church do without me?"

 Maybe I should be asking myself what Jesus wants of me and not what the Church expects. We have choices to make as to whether we seek the ''good part.'' which Mary sought. Jesus tells us that the highest priority in life should be to ''seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness'' . He also gives us guidance in how to do that when he says ''Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word of God''. Mary had made the wonderful discovery that Jesus' words were the most important needs of her life. She was literally being fed with the bread of life. Martha's life, on the other hand, was taken up with so many chores which she was doing for Jesus that she had no time for herself or Jesus.

 I suppose it’s true that I am very much like Martha. Before the pandemic, I would find myself dashing about visiting this person and that, attending meetings, preparing services and so on. And sometimes I can almost hear Jesus saying “Be still and know that I am God” There are days when I don't find enough time left in the day to pray or read my Bible and perhaps Jesus is saying to me "Margaret, Margaret you are worried and troubled about many things but are they the things that really matter?"

The trouble is that there are so many demands on our time when we try to obey Jesus' commands to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. Jesus told us that we shall be judged by how we have cared for the hungry, whether we visited the sick, whether we clothed the hungry or visited those in prison because if we have failed to do these things for the least of God's children, we have failed to do it for him. So we really are faced with tremendous choices and it’s so difficult to get the balance right.

I wonder how often we make the wrong choices. AS the pandemic restrictions hopefully come to an end and church resumes it’s normal activities, we may be under pressure to take on jobs and tasks that we do not feel are within our expertise to do. It is important to make the right choices Jesus said it was all right for Mary to choose the option she did. There was nothing wrong with Martha's choice either. Her mistake was to grumble about it. So often we burden ourselves with guilt that we are not doing enough for Christ and it could be that we're not. But we do need to prioritize and to make prayerful decisions about what God wants us to do.

 Carlo Carretto, one of the little Brothers of Jesus in his ''Letters from the desert'' records how he heard Jesus saying to him ''Come with me into the desert. It is not your deeds I want. I want your prayers and love''. As people get older they often bemoan the fact that they are not able to do the things for Christ that they used to. They say ''All we can do is pray''. It would be interesting to know whether Jesus' response to that would be something like ''Well done. Like Mary you have chosen the good part''.

 In the same way that we show people that we care by our willingness to spend time with them so it’s the giving of our time to Jesus which shows our love for him. Sometimes the time we give will be taken up in doing service for others in his name, by seeking for justice for his people, by working for his church and so on. But in our business let's not forget to show our love for Him too by spending time with him in quietness, in reading his word and in prayer as we seek for his guidance.

Amen

And now I’d like us to think about the words of Take time to be holy because I think they sum up what I’ve tried to say

**Hymn 625 – Take time to be holy**

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| 1..Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek. | 2.. Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see. |
| 3.. Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide;And run not before Him, whatever betide.In joy or in sorrow, still follow the Lord,And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His Word. | 4.. Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,Each thought and each motive beneath His control.Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.  |
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**Communion**

We come now to share in our act of remembrance as we share bread and wine.

The bread and wine have been prepared ready to be served and shared,

We remember Jesus sharing a meal like this with his disciples, his friends. He included everyone, those he could trust and those he could not trust.

Today we are his disciples, his friends. Each one of us is welcome. How amazing it is to be loved and wanted even when we have not been perfect.

How wonderful it is to be included just as we are.

When Jesus shared the bread with his friends, he explained that he is the bread of life. Like bread, Jesus nourishes and strengthens us so that we can know right from wrong and not be confused,

When we eat bread together, we are strengthened as a community to remember Jesus and do the things that Jesus would do in our world.

Jesus also used a cup of wine to teach his disciples. He compared the wine to his blood to help them and us to remember his suffering.

Drinking wine together helps us to remember that we are part of a special covenant or agreement with God.

God loves us so much that when we make mistakes, or make bad choices, God has agreed to forgive us and give us a second chance when we say we are sorry.

This is ordinary bread and wine but when we eat and drink it, something extraordinary happens which brings us closer to Jesus and one another. We become the “Body of Christ”.

This helps us to see and hear what Jesus would see and hear in our world and respond to it by helping others.

So we come to share in the bread and wine but first we give thanks as Jesus did.

Father in heaven we thank you for your love and acceptance shown through Jesus. We thank you that he has called us his friends, that as we share in this act of remembering, he is by our side,

Lord Jesus we marvel afresh at all you have done for us and all you continue to do. Though we don’t deserve your goodness, we come with confidence, knowing that however much we fail you, you never fail us.

We now share in the bread and wine

This is the Bread of life. May we be strengthened to do what is right,

This is the cup of forgiveness. We remember God’s covenant to give each of us another chance to be better people.

Let us pray

God of love we thank you for strengthening us with the Bread of Life.

Thank you for forgiving us and giving us another chance to do what is right.

We promise to be the living Body of Christ, nourished by this special meal.

We promise to try to follow Jesus and make the world a better place for everyone.

**Prayers of Intercession**

We come now to our prayers of concern for others but before I lead in corporate prayer, let’s be quiet for a few moments and bring to our loving heavenly father the concerns which are at the forefront of our minds.

Lord we thank you that you are pleased to hear our prayers that we can come to you with our concerns for others

We pray for people across the world who are hungry…hungry for food, for peace, for education, for love. Help us, in whatever way we can, to help to satisfy their needs.

Lord we pray for the many countries of the world where there is conflict, brutality and killing. We pray for those who govern and lead, that they may seek the good of their citizens. We pray in particular for the situation in Yemen, in Afghanistan after the US and British troops have withdrawn, in the Holy Land and in many of the African countries where there is great instability. We pray for all those who have been injured or maimed during these conflicts who will spend the rest of their days coming to terms with the physical scars or the deeper mental and spiritual wounds. Grant healing and peace to each one. Equip with compassion, wisdom and skill all those who strive to give support in these difficult situations. We pray too for the thousands of people who have been forced from their homes and, leaving everything behind, have made the long journey seeking a better life. We thank you that there are those who have welcomed them with open arms. Lord help us to show hospitality and generosity to those who will come to be our neighbours.

We pray for all whom we know who are grieving at this time and for the many we don’t know. Bring comfort Lord. May we be among those who are able to offer support in practical ways or by just being there for them.

We pray for all we know who are sick. We remember those within our Church fellowship. We ask that you will ease their pain and bring healing of body, mind and spirit. We pray for all those currently affected by the Covid virus, for those whose treatment has been disrupted by the pressure faced by the NHS over many months and for those involved in research that their labours may be rewarded; that cures for all the world’s diseases as yet unconquered, may be found.

We pray too Lord for those who are lonely. For those who are old and unable to attend church any more. We pray for those who are frightened and anxious; for those who are unemployed, worrying how they will pay their bills.

Loving heavenly Father there is so much need around us, in our neighbourhood, our town, our country and our world…so many people crying out for help.

Show us where and how we can respond. Give us the means, the will, the commitment and the love to reach out in the name of Christ, offering something of ourselves to others.

We offer our prayer in that same precious name. Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**Closing Hymn: What a friend we have in Jesus**

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| 1.. What a Friend we have in Jesus,all our sins and griefs to bear!What a privilege to carry,everything to God in prayer!Oh, what peace we often forfeit,Oh, what needless pain we bear-all because we do not carryeverything to God in prayer!  | 2.. Have we trials and temptations?Is there trouble anywhere?We should never be discouraged:take it to the Lord in prayer!Can we find a friend so faithful,who will all our sorrows share?Jesus knows our every weakness;take it to the Lord in prayer.  |
| 3.. Are we weak and heavy laden,cumbered with a load of care?Precious Saviour, still our refuge!Take it to the Lord in prayer.Do Thy friends despise forsake Thee?Take it to the Lord in prayer!In His arms He'll take and shield Thee,thou wilt find a solace there. | Joseph M. ScrivenCcli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Blessing**

As we return to our busy lives,
may we know the rest that Christ offersevery day of this week.
**Amen.**

We bring our worship to a close as we sing the words of the blessing

**460 May God’s blessing surround you each day**

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| May God’s blessing surround you each day, As you trust him and walk in his way.May his presence within guard and keep you from sin,Go in peace, go in joy, go in love. | © 1982 Cliff Barrows Ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811 |