

Welcome to everyone worshipping with us today, on behalf of the Enfield Methodist Circuit.

This short act of worship has been produced for you by Nancy Hands. If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church - pray for them as they pray for you.

Call to Worship

God says to Jeremiah: 'You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and I will rescue you.'

A prayer: Still within us now, O Lord, any voice but yours, lest we hear but do not receive, lest we listen but do not act, lest we know but do not love, and let your Holy Spirit turn our hearts and lives to your truth. Amen.

(Liturgy of the French Reformed Church)

As we enter into worship we sing

When the music fades (Singing the Faith 437)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YeXCTXj8SbM>

When the music fades, all is stripped away
and I simply come;
longing just to bring something that's of worth

that will bless your heart.

I'll bring you more than a song

for a song in itself

is not what you have required.

You search much deeper within, through the way things
appear,
you're looking into my heart.

Refrain:

I'm coming back to the heart of worship,

and it's all about you, all about you, Jesus.

I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,

when it's all about, all about you Jesus.

King of endless worth, no-one could express
how much you deserve.

Though I'm weak and poor, all I have is yours,
every single breath.

I'll bring you more than a song

for a song in itself

is not what you have required.

You search much deeper within through the way things
appear,
you're looking into my heart.

Refrain

*I'm coming back to the heart of worship,
and it's all about you, all about you, Jesus.
I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing I've made it,
when it's all about, all about you Jesus.*

Matt Redman (b. 1974)

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Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Father God, you created the world and set us in it: you cared for your people and loved them.

You are our God and we are your people.

You sent your Son into the world: through him you spoke to us of love, your love for us and our love for others. He revealed your love by his life, death and resurrection, and he called us his friends.

You are our God and we are your people.

You poured out your Holy Spirit on the world: you set us free from the chains of sin; you raise us from death to new life; you live in the hearts of all who love you.

You are our God and we are your people. We praise you.

Hospitable God, forgive us for making judgements which distinguish between those who are like us and those who are not.

Sometimes we have made the Church a closed place, where only those who know the unwritten rules are welcome. We have claimed you as our wisdom, and yet we have made our minds a closed place, where only those who think as we do are welcome.

We have vowed to be inspired by your love, but have made our hearts a restricted place, where only those who love as we do are welcome.

We have clung tightly to what we have and have made our hands closed fists where we share only with those we love. Forgive us and enlarge our hearts and minds.

Thank you for loving us as we are and for calling us to grow into the image of your Son, in whose name we pray.

Here is good news for all who put their trust in Christ. Jesus says, 'Your sins are forgiven'. **Amen. Thanks be to God.**

(Prompted by a prayer by Michaela Youngson, from Methodist Prayer Handbook)

First reading: Jeremiah 1:4-10 - Contemporary English Version

The Lord said:

“Jeremiah, I am your Creator,
and before you were born,
I chose you to speak for me
to the nations.”

I replied, “I’m not a good speaker, Lord, and I’m too young.”

“Don’t say you’re too young,” the Lord answered. “If I tell you to go and speak to someone, then go! And when I tell you what to say, don’t leave out a word! I promise to be with you and keep you safe, so don’t be afraid.”

The Lord reached out his hand, then he touched my mouth and said, “I am giving you the words to say,¹⁰ and I am sending you with authority to speak to the nations for me. You will tell them of doom and destruction, and of rising and rebuilding again.”

Introduction to the Gospel

Our Gospel reading continues the narrative in the synagogue in Nazareth, begun last week, when Jesus read from the scroll of Isaiah: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.’ Everyone was watching him as he handed back the scroll and sat down.

Reading: Luke 4:21-30

Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that

we have heard you did at Capernaum.” And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Reflection

Jeremiah is the longest single book in the bible, written in a traumatic period of Israel’s history, leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Jeremiah, at about 17 years old, is charged by God to deliver messages of judgement because of the Israelites’ disobedience, but also messages of hope and affirmation of God’s faithfulness to his people. Throughout the book, Jeremiah is honest about how hard he finds his task and expresses his own turmoil and struggle, as he strives to do God’s will. The people and leaders respond to his warnings with denial, anger and persecution. God didn’t ever promise him it would be easy; he said he would give him the words to say and would be with him.

Jeremiah was young, had a difficult message and a hostile audience.

Jesus was older than Jeremiah when he was commissioned by God, but he was a lad everyone in the village knew; the son of the local carpenter, not the son of a priest like Jeremiah. He was respectful and respectable, God-fearing and observant, a pleasure to have in the synagogue: predictable. Luke tells us in chapter 3 that he was about 30 years old when he began his ministry, and this is significant. In the Torah, the age 30 is a moment of truth and decision, an age worthy of leadership. No rabbi would be listened to until he was 30, as he would be thought spiritually immature before then. It was the right time for Jesus: the first time he had sat down to preach in Nazareth. 'The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him'. It was his debut, in front of the home crowd. And he was good - very good.

On TV shows like Strictly or X Factor, towards the end of the competition, contestants are filmed going back to their home town to rally support. There is often a sort of mania, the whole town suddenly 'owning' the contestant, so proud that *they* have been put on the map by having a quarter or semi-finalist from among them. Fame by association.

One can imagine similar excitement among the Nazareth worshippers. Wouldn't it be great if he stayed here, as he talks

so well? He is our boy after all. And think of all the miracles, if Capernaum is anything to go by! It would bring visitors in and Nazareth would grow - could be a place to reckon with at last, instead of being dismissed as a backwater.

What they couldn't have anticipated was that Jesus knew their self-indulgent thoughts and closed minds. They were happy to listen to familiar words of Scripture, but they wanted God's gracious favour just for them. They believed they knew what God should be doing and they knew what the Messiah would be like when he came.

Jesus however, understood from the same words that the fulfilment of Scripture and the hopes of Israel were being proclaimed through himself as the Son of God that day, and - anointed by the Spirit - he made it plain that his mission was to those abused by power and authority, those denied the basic necessities of life, those on the social and religious scrap heap. Pious Jews were not his priority.

The people of Nazareth had only one lens through which they read the Scriptures: God had made an exclusive covenant with them, that involved promises of deliverance from their oppressors. How they read stories of Elijah and Elisha ministering to and working miracles among Gentiles instead of Jews, we don't know, but we do know they took great exception to Jesus pointing it out. Perhaps, as can be true of us

too, they airbrushed the bits of Scripture that didn't fit with their world view. They understood God's mercy, faithfulness and grace as being only for them. Perhaps we, as Christians are tempted to do so too. This passage could be a warning that our own lens through which we read Scripture may be too narrow: entitled and not universal.

There should have been joy in Nazareth that the Son of God was in the midst of them; they could have been witnesses to heaven on earth - to the dawn of a new age of truth and goodness, but instead, they clung on to their jealously guarded position as the chosen ones, unwilling to share God's grace, as if they owned it. It made them defensively angry and violent.

Jesus' aim was to correct the thinking of the congregation - and by extension, ours too. We can understand how shocking it was for someone they had known as a child to claim to be the Messiah and it may surprise us that he wasn't diplomatic or gentle. He was challenging and bold, speaking the words he was given to say, making clear his manifesto. His role was to fulfil the kingdom of God, not the expectations of his friends and neighbours.

That takes courage and faith - as it did for Jeremiah. It will for us if we dare to challenge interests and agendas of the rich and powerful: dare to speak out on behalf of refugees or prisoners, on behalf of nations denied access to medicines and vaccines,

on behalf of addicts or street-sleepers. If we disrupt and disturb the privileged status quo, we will have opposition. The message that God's grace and favour extends to all those with whom people disagree or don't associate with is unwelcome. But God is with us. He touched Jeremiah's mouth and gave him the words to say and told him not to be afraid. He anointed Jesus with his Spirit and protected him from a murderous crowd. He equips us for the task he gives us and he keeps his promises.

I watched an inspiring film last week - a 2009 true contemporary story called *The Blind Side*. It is about a black boy in Mississippi, who had been bounced around the care system, had virtually no education, no home and no friends. A white wealthy mother of two took him in to her home knowing nothing about him, treated him as a son, gave him a private education and had him coached for an American Football team, just because her heart went out to a rejected, vulnerable teenager. She faced hostility and incredulity from her privileged Republican friends, and threats of violence from the run-down, deprived black side of town, as well as abject racism from football supporters. Michael - this silent, sad giant of a boy - her boy - was the only black player. What she had done was invite trouble, driven by what she believed to be right. She was told that taking him in would endanger her daughter and damage her son's prospects; she would lose friends, family and

respect. But she persisted - in spite of the risks - out of compassion and love. The result was joy.

What can we take from these stories? I think they encourage us to listen and trust; to hear the truth and urgency of God's call, and to be brave and obedient. God's message of love, equality and compassion hasn't changed, from Jeremiah's time. Where there is injustice, bigotry, prejudice, self-righteousness, greed, heartlessness and jealously-guarded privilege, God moves on.

Jesus came to free us of all those things: things that enslave, stifle and strangle us, which prevent us from being who we are meant to be. The kingdom of God, which is love, hope, joy and peace, knows no boundaries, but we will find that God's heart lies on what we see as the 'wrong' side of town, time and again. When faced with anger and violence in Nazareth, Jesus didn't argue or retaliate; he walked through the crowd and went on his way.

Holding tight to our entitlement, what we own or think we deserve, makes us closed, and we need to hear ourselves being challenged. When our hands are full, we can't open them to receive. Seed clasped in a fist will rot, but seed in an open palm will be scattered by the wind and grow somewhere..

The Spirit of the Lord was on Jesus, the amazing grace of God is that he gifts us with the same Spirit, when we are open to him

and allow him to direct our thoughts, words and actions. If we invite his mercy to temper our judgement of others, his love to be shared without restraint, his favour to be shown indiscriminately to all through us, it is we who will begin to understand that every day, the Scripture is being fulfilled.

Amen.

Song from Nicaragua by Jose Agular

Sent by the Lord am I (Singing the Faith 239)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRGy2XNJDnQ>

Sent by the Lord am I;
My hands are ready now
To make the earth a place
In which the kingdom comes.

(Repeat)

The angels cannot change
A world of hurt and pain
Into a world of love,
Of justice and of peace.

The task is mine to do,
To set it really free.
O help me to obey;
Help me to do your will.

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Prayers of Thanksgiving, Intercession and Lord's Prayer

We give thanks for people different to us: for our neighbours of other cultures and faiths - in our families, communities, nation and world - who hold fast to the same values of love, justice and peace that we have in Christ. We give thanks for those places around the world, where dialogue and service exist and strengthen communities, and for those who speak your truth without fear for themselves.

We pray for an end to violence and hostility against people of different races and religions and for a deepening of understanding and relationship, so that together we can work with commitment for the common good.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

We pray for a culture of open handed welcome in our churches and a spirit of welcome in all Christian people; for the wisdom to perceive God at work in unexpected places and unlikely people, and compassion to seek the ones others pass over.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

We pray for those in authority, for the humility to listen to young people and those with different views; to acknowledge when they are wrong and to seek to make amends with honour.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

We pray for your kingdom to come in our lives, our communities and our world, challenging injustice, prejudice and hypocrisy.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

We pray for those we love and have concern for, in need of your healing touch and peaceful presence.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

Finally, we pray for ourselves, that by your grace we may learn to listen to your voice and dare to speak when you prompt us, constantly learning from Jesus who trusted you and knew no boundaries.

Lord in your mercy **hear our prayer**

(Adapted from prayer by Sally Dyck, MPH Day 30)

We pray together in the words Jesus taught his disciples, saying:

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 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.

Have you heard God's voice (Singing the Faith 662)

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=JzJr9T5JYRU>

Have you heard God's voice; has your heart been stirred?

Are you still prepared to follow?

Have you made a choice to remain and serve,

Though the way be rough and narrow?

Refrain

Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?

Will you use your voice; will you not sit down
when the multitudes are silent?

Will you make a choice to stand your ground
when the crowds are turning violent?

Refrain

Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?

In your city streets will you be God's heart?

Will you listen to the voiceless?

Will you stop and eat, and when friendships start,
will you share your faith with the faithless?

Refrain

Will you walk the path that will cost you much
and embrace the pain and sorrow?

Will you trust in One who entrusts to you
The disciples of tomorrow?

Will you watch the news with the eyes of faith
And believe it could be different?

Will you share your views using words of grace?
Will you leave a thoughtful imprint?

Refrain

We will walk the path that will cost us much
and embrace the pain and sorrow.

We will trust in One who entrusts to us
the disciples of tomorrow.

Jacqueline G Jones

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Blessing

Let us not be afraid to go out into a world that does not understand us.

Let us not be afraid to love, though loving takes and drains and hurts.

Let us not be afraid

For God the Father goes before us, God the Son walks beside us and God the Spirit is within us, guiding our way.

May the Lord bless us and keep us this day and for ever, Amen.

*For private worship: **Rend Collective - Build your kingdom here***

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqZX08DDWiA>

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