

Sunday 21st March 2021 - Rev. Bethany Willers

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Prayer

O Lord, I come to you this day, to hear your word and to rejoice in your presence in my life, now, and always.

Hymn: Great is Thy Faithfulness (Singing the Faith 51)

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKlqmdfH5k>

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail not;
as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be:

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
all I have needed thy hand hath provided.
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love:

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Thomas O. Chisholm (1866-1960)

Let us pray together

O God I give thanks to you this day for your great faithfulness.

May I match your faithfulness with my own.

You have sustained me in times of trouble, and carried me when I could not bear my own weight.

Thank you for the gift of your love and grace, shown to us in Jesus Christ.

I seek to give my life to you in service and to love others as you have first loved me.

May I do all these things with the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Today's Reading from the Old Testament
Jeremiah 31:31-34**

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, 'Know the Lord', for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Today's Gospel Reading: John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.' Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, 'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

'Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.' The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.' He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Time to Reflect

I love reading multiple translations of a passage to help me make sense of what I am reading. One of my favorites is one called "The Message" - which translates scripture into modern-day English. Here is how The Message interprets John 12:24-25:

"Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never

any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over. In the same way, anyone who holds on to life just as it is destroys that life. But if you let it go, reckless in your love, you'll have it forever, real and eternal."

It's hard to believe, but it has been over a year now since the pandemic began and we all had to change how we go about living our lives. We changed how we work, see family and friends, travel, and worship, among many other things. It has been hard, and awful, and at times, devastating. Many of us wanted, instead, to cling to what life had been before - and many of us are still longing to go back, for life to return to "normal" - whatever that was. We liked being the grain of wheat and we want to continue being the grain of wheat if we can.

But perhaps we have been given a chance to do what Jesus calls us to do in this passage - to give up our lives for something new, for something more closely resembling the kingdom of God. This time of struggle has made us get more creative about caring for our neighbor. At times it has opened our eyes to neighbors who were in need right under our noses before. If we take this time of continued upheaval to let go of the life we had before, and be reckless in our love, perhaps something new will flourish that looks more like what God wants for us.

Is God calling you to be more than just a grain of wheat? How has God cared for you and nurtured you in this time of being buried? Where have you seen signs of new life and new growth spring forth? Are there areas of your life you need to tend to? Are there areas of your life you need to let go of and realize that you cannot or should not go back to?

May we ponder all of these things in our hearts with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Take a time to sit quietly

A time of prayer

Loving and gracious God,
We lift our prayers to you this morning, knowing that you hear all of our prayers, whether spoken or unspoken, for you know all that is on our hearts and minds.

We pray this day for the world... for the distribution of the vaccine, for people affected by war or natural disaster...

We pray this day for our nation... for the NHS and all who work hard to care for people within it, for our leaders, for all the people as we find new ways to live in community with one another...

We pray this day for our church... that we might shine with the light of Christ in the world, that others will come to know him through our actions, help us to be the hands and feet of Jesus...

We pray this day for our own concerns...

Oh God, let us pray now as Jesus taught us to pray...

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Hymn: Listen to Lauren Daigle singing "You say"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=slaT8Jl2zpl>

or sing a verse of a hymn that comes to mind

A prayer of blessing

Lord, may I be as a grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies so I can rise up to new life in Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Original Materials by Rev. Bethany Willers

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