

## St John's home worship 25th October 2020

Today we consider the difference it will make if we have the courage to ask Jesus to show us what is really important in life. We begin by praising God in the words of the song 'Jesus, God's righteousness revealed'.

### Song

Jesus, God's righteousness revealed, The Son of Man, the Son of God, His kingdom comes.  
Jesus, redemption's sacrifice, Now glorified, now justified, His kingdom comes.

*And His kingdom will know no end, And its glory shall know no bounds,  
For the majesty and power of this kingdom's King has come.  
And this kingdom's reign, and this kingdom's rule, and this kingdom's power and authority,  
Jesus, God's righteousness revealed.*

Jesus, the expression of God's love, The Grace of God, the Word of God, revealed to us.  
Jesus, God's holiness displayed, Now glorified, now justified, His kingdom comes.

*And His kingdom...*

Geoff Bullock © 1995 Word Music inc./ Maranatha! Music

### Prayer: Psalm 103:1-5

Let all that I am praise the Lord; with my whole heart, I will praise his holy name.  
Let all that I am praise the Lord; may I never forget the good things he does for me.  
He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.  
He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies.  
He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's!

Lord we come today to praise you and to remember all the good things you do for us. Thank you that although your thoughts are higher than ours and we do not always understand what is going on in the world, we can be certain of your power to heal and to forgive and to save. We are sorry for the times when we have put our own comfort and convenience before the needs of others. We are sorry for the times when we have been caught up in the things we feel are important and have been distracted from your clear and simple command to love you more than all else. Thank you, heavenly Father that you are merciful and that you love us so much that you sent your only son Jesus so that through his life, death and resurrection our sins can be forgiven and we can take hold of your promise of eternal life. By your Holy Spirit transform us and help us to know you better so that we can be bearers of your light and truth in this world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

### Reading: Matthew 22:34-46

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them this question: "What do you think of the Messiah? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David by the Spirit calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet"'? If David thus calls him Lord, how can he be his son?" No one was able to give him an answer, nor from that day did anyone dare to ask him any more questions.

## Sermon

'Why? why? why?' Anyone who has ever spent even the briefest time in the company of 3 and 4-year-old children will be familiar with the incessant questions which are of course the very means by which they enlarge and enrich their understanding of the world around them. 'Why?' is a question on many lips at the moment as the familiar patterns of life have been swept away leaving a sense of vulnerability and uncertainty, and a longing to understand what is going on and to see the bigger picture. 'How long will it go on?' and 'What's going to happen next?' are questions echoing in our minds – ongoing questions which often have no answers just at the moment.

The Pharisees we hear of in today's reading were also living in uncertain times. Their land was under Roman occupation and tension was often in the air as people resented having to pay taxes to Caesar and resisted the restrictions imposed upon them. Into this situation came Jesus, challenging the status quo, and further adding to their sense of insecurity. Although the cause of unrest is different from our current situation, the Pharisees too were asking questions. They had been studying the scriptures and longing for a richer and deeper understanding of God. They were trying with every fibre of their being to gain the respect of others and to get to grips with the requirements of the law to ensure that they were acceptable to God, fearing his condemnation if they did not. Jesus unsettled them and made them feel vulnerable; after all he brought into question their pious practices and suggested that they didn't have things quite right. However, if any proof was needed that Jesus had come, not to catch out and condemn but rather to save, then we have it here in today's gospel. Just before this passage, Jesus' response to the Sadducees, putting them right in an area of understanding about resurrection, appeared to have the effect of making some of the Pharisees much more open to Jesus. This time, it seems, they come not to trick him as they had tried previously, but rather to sound out more of his teaching on the law, the subject on which they considered themselves experts. They were used to having debates with the Sadducees about emphasis - from the gospels and letters we see that debate was often centred on such matters as observation of the Sabbath, tithing, and the question of purification, and they want to know where Jesus stands on such matters - who was right? And so, they ask Jesus the 'big' question – which commandment is the greatest? Typically, Jesus does not get drawn into details, but takes them back to the very heart of the matter, actually to the commandments, to love God first – and by extension as a natural consequence, our neighbour. The Pharisees must surely have accepted the truth of that on an intellectual level, but in their lives it was being crowded out by all the detailed laws and rules. Although they had the knowledge in their heads, it did not, at this point, seem to be touching their hearts, and Jesus longs for the underlying truth to dawn on these over-conscientious law-keepers. I've heard this process likened to the restoration of an old painting. As with old paintings, the years of familiar yellowed varnish needed removing so that the original vibrant colours could once again shine. Jesus patiently chips away, flake by flake. He asks them to look again at the Messianic promises (v41 onwards), to look deeper than the traditional responses towards a curious questioning which might lead them to look at wider possibilities of fulfilment than they have previously dared. Who is Jesus? Could he be the one?

Have we allowed years of familiar yellowed varnish to build up and obscure the wonderful vibrant colours of Christian truth? Have we cluttered up our hearts and souls and minds with rules and rituals that mask God's glory and smother his love? If that might be the case then let us start asking questions - questions that will lead us to wonder, to ponder, to think things through, to clear away the clutter and allow God's truth to become clear.

With Jesus we are always being drawn forwards, deeper into the love and meaning of God, and he will use all our doubts and experiences of life to help us. We need not be afraid to question where God is concerned – after all that is how we learn. Alpha online is of course a great opportunity to ask questions about life and faith, so please do encourage those you know who might be wondering about such things to sign up and join in – I'd love to hear from anyone who is interested.

We have currently had the old varnish stripped away from the way we express ourselves as Christian communities. Are we able to see the clear vibrant colours of our love for God and for one another? My hope is that we will not be tempted to try and piece together the flakes of old varnish that would once again mask the true focus of our lives as Christians. Let us seek to love God with our whole heart, soul and mind, and as a result to also love one another. If we truly love God and one another then all else will fall into place as we seek to follow his plans for us.

**Prayers** *written by Malcolm & Pauline Newman*

We join together in prayer: let us pray .....

Father: holy, almighty Creator God we come before You totally and utterly unprepared to be in Your Presence.

Our minds, lives, outlook and actions are entirely caught up in what we want; consider necessary and in fact at times we demand. Our selfish nature has blotted out the Being who has given us the canvas of beauty and colour which is breathtaking ... this season of autumn.

Our lives could be so enriched if we but pause in our self-made hustle and bustle to soak in the many shades which bring such beauty at this time of year: which can enlighten our days and even strengthen our resolve even in these darkest of times.

Our lives have become so full of questions and questioning that we have forgotten, or even set aside time for that 'still small voice'.

Help us Lord, even now to 'stop and let go, so that we can let you Father God penetrate the darkness; stubbornness; sinfulness of our daily lives.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

**Come, Lord Jesus TO OPEN OUR EYES TO THIS DARK WORLD**

To those who struggle with poverty; homelessness; drought.

Where daily they fight for the basics of living which we take so much for granted and as they battle are ignored by those who have so much.

For those who are struggling through the results of natural disaster and human greed. From the results of others stripping the earth of its natural resources with devastating effect.

From the results of forgotten wars and famine in many parts of this fair earth and those also in many lands who struggle with corona virus and all that that brings.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

**Come, Lord Jesus TO OPEN OUR LIPS TO GIVE THANKS**

Thanks for those who give all they have in service for others in battling disease and disorder; dismay and distrust.

For all those in NHS; for national and local government; for the shopkeepers and delivery drivers; transport co-ordinators; for those who produce all news outlets and information hubs which we daily take for granted.

For the farmers and producers of our foodstuffs; for those who struggle at sea and all those who present the goods for our purchase.

For all those with whom we are in regular contact – by 'phone, e-mail, Zoom and so much more – and to those who help us do so and for the love we know and the love we share.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

**Come, Lord Jesus TO DEMAND FROM US THE SPACE YOU DESERVE.**

Time to hear the words You wish to share and to cease our babbling and demanding and to take heed of all You have to share and to share in the silences You invoke among the squabbling and divisiveness which has become our norm.

May we hear that 'Shalom' You seek to share and feel the beauty of that peace which only You can give and to live our lives in You.

May we be still and know the beauty of life and living which is Yours to give and that 'giving' is free when we turn to You.

Heal us and help us in these dark times so that our eyes can see the beauty that is around; the possibilities which abound and the life which can be lived when You and You alone are at the centre.

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

### **Song**

All I once held dear, built my life upon, All this world reveres, and wars to own,  
All I once thought gain I have counted loss; Spent and worthless now, compared to this.

*Knowing you, Jesus, Knowing you, there is no greater thing.*

*You're my all, you're the best, You're my joy, my righteousness, And I love you Lord.*

Now my heart's desire is to know you more, To be found in you and known as yours.

To possess by faith what I could not earn, All-surpassing gift of righteousness.

*Knowing you, Jesus...*

Oh, to know the power of your risen life, And to know you in your sufferings.

To become like you in your death, my Lord, So with you to live and never die.

*Knowing you, Jesus...*

Graham Kendrick © 1993 Make Way Music

### **Blessing**

Loving Father, full of compassion, merciful Saviour, full of grace, life-giving Spirit, full of power, sovereign God, full of majesty, fill our hearts, minds and souls, change us, and send us out to build your kingdom.

And the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you today and always and fill you with his peace. Amen

CCL: 5347