

Hornsea URC Apart but Together Worship – Sunday 28th June 2020

Written by Mary Young

Introduction.

Welcome everyone to our e-mailed act of worship. It's good to share worship with you, knowing that others are also sharing our words of hope and assurance. If we'd been meeting in church, I may have welcomed you with a smile, a handshake, a hug or a kiss. With the written service, I'm restricted to the typed word "welcome", but it still carries with it my Christian love and a cordial invitation to receive and accept again the forgiving love of God today.



All around the world people greet each other in different ways.

- Tibetan monks stick their tongues out to greet people



- In Japan people bow.



- In Oman, men greet each other by pressing their noses together.



- The traditional Maori greeting in New Zealand is to press foreheads together and look into each other's eyes.



- In Malaysia you would stretch out your hand and touch the other person's fingertips, and then bring your hands to your heart as a sign that your greeting is heartfelt.



- In Kenya you will be in for a treat when tribal warriors perform a magnificent jumping dance!



God calls us to be a welcoming community offering others a sense of belonging and hope. Wherever we may be, let us all today be both welcoming and also welcomed as God representatives in the world.

Call to Worship.

The steadfast love of the Lord is established for ever.
His faithfulness is as firm as the heavens.
The Lord invites us and welcomes us.
Let us worship the Lord.

Opening hymn.

Our first hymn speaks of God's forgiving and saving love. We sing together Timothy Rees' hymn 'God is love: let heaven adore him;' (Tune: Blaenwern)

[Click here to start the video.](#)

If you do not wish to use the video, here are the words of the hymn for you to meditate on:

God is love: let heaven adore him;
God is love: let earth rejoice;
let creation sing before him,
and exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
he who spread the heavens above,
he who breathed through all creation,
he is love, eternal love.

God is love: and is enfolding
all the world in one embrace;
his unfailing grasp is holding
every child of every race;
and when human hearts are breaking
under sorrow's iron rod,
that same sorrow, that same aching
wringings with pain the heart of God.

God is love: and though with blindness
sin afflicts and clouds the will,
God's eternal loving-kindness
holds us fast and guides us still.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is love, so love for ever
o'er the universe must reign.

Prayers of approach and confession.

O God, your Spirit draws us into your presence,
and so we come – drawn by love, upheld by grace –
to encounter Jesus, our Saviour.

We know him as our master.

We know him as our friend.

In him we see the Father, whose love sent Jesus to us.

Spirit, Son and Father,

we draw close in faith to offer our praise and worship. **Amen.**

We are sorry, dear Lord, for the times we judge others and find them wanting.

We are sorry that we turn away from your children in their need.

We are sorry that we think we are too busy.

We are sorry for the times our welcome has been lukewarm.

Forgive us, and help us to remember the warmth of your welcome, and to be inspired to
share that warmth with all people. **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

A reading from Paul's letter to the Romans.

The Lectionary epistle for today is from Romans 6: v.12 – 23. Throughout this passage Paul speaks of sin as if it were a person or agency, using the picture language of slavery, an institution with which his hearers would be very familiar.

“Sin must no longer rule your mortal bodies, so that you obey the desires of your natural self. Nor must you surrender any part of yourselves to sin to be used for wicked purposes. Instead, give yourselves to God, and those who have been brought from death to life, and surrender your whole being to him to be used for righteous purposes. Sin must not be your master; for you do not live under law but under God's grace.

What, then? Shall we sin, because we are not under law but under God's grace? By no means! Surely you know that when you surrender yourselves as slaves to obey someone, you are in fact the slaves of the master you obey – either of sin, which results in death, or obedience, which results in being put right with God. But thanks be to God! For though at one time you were slaves to sin, you have obeyed with all your heart the truths found in the teaching you received. You were set free from sin and became the slaves of righteousness. (I use everyday language because of the weakness of your natural selves.) At one time you surrendered yourselves entirely as slaves to impurity and wickedness for wicked purposes. In the same way you must surrender yourselves entirely as slaves of righteousness for holy purposes.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free from righteousness. What did you gain by doing the things that you are now ashamed of? The result of those things is death! But now you have been set free from sin and are slaves of God. Your gain is a life fully dedicated to him, and the result is eternal life. For sin pays its wage – death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.”

[Good News Bible]

Hymn.

We sing together John Newton's familiar hymn 'Amazing Grace' (Tune: Amazing Grace)

[Click here to start the video.](#)

If you do not wish to use the video, here are the words of the hymn for you to meditate on:

Amazing grace (how sweet the sound)
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
was blind, but now I see.

As grace first taught my heart to fear
so grace my fear relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed !

Through many dangers, toils and snares
I have already come;
God's grace has brought me safe thus far,
and he will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be
as long as life endures.

And when this heart and flesh shall fail
and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil
a life of joy and peace.

A reading from the Matthew's Gospel.

Today's short gospel reading is from Matthew 10: v.40 – 42. The passage discusses how those who respond positively to the disciples, will be understood to have welcomed Jesus.

To put it simply, Jesus wants us to welcome everyone as we would welcome him.

“Whoever welcomes you welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes God's messenger because he is God's messenger, will share in his reward. And whoever welcomes a good man because he is good, will share in his reward. You can be sure that whoever gives a drink of cold water to one of the least of these my followers because he is my follower, will certainly receive a reward.” [Good News Bible]

No more admirably arranged lives.

[A reflection on Romans 6:12-23]

A minister was visiting a church member at his country home. In the conversation the minister asked, "How's your relationship with God?" The old chap replied, "Well, there's not much to tell. I like sinning. God likes forgiving. And we get along together just fine."

That story is an adaptation of some lines from W. H. Auden's poem, 'For the Time Being: A Christmas Oratorio'. In the poem, King Herod responds to the magi's news of the Saviour's birth and the grace and forgiveness it brings, with these words: "Every crook will argue: I like committing crimes. God likes forgiving them. Really the world is admirably arranged."

I sort of like the "admirably arranged" world that Auden describes. It's comfortable. It's easy. It doesn't ask much of me. I can make my apology to God when I've done something wrong or hurtful; offer a quick "Please forgive me God," and go to get on with life. It's business as usual. I get to do what I like and God gets to do what God likes. What about you? Does this sound familiar? Does your life and faith sometimes express Auden's "admirably arranged" world? I know that at times that is how I've lived my life and I guess you probably have too.

The trouble with an "admirably arranged" world is that wounds aren't healed. Relationships are not put back together. Lives are not transformed. Nothing really changes. Too often we settle for an "admirably arranged" world, instead of striving to be God's representatives in today's world. This is particularly relevant for us as we slowly ease ourselves out of Covid-19 lockdown. We're not, however, the first or the only ones to think or live this way. Before Auden wrote his lines St. Paul dealt with the same issue in his letter to the Romans. "What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" ([Romans 6: v.15](#)).

Our relationship with God in Christ is more than an admirable arrangement. We have an identity with Christ. "Whoever welcomes you," Jesus told his disciples, "welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me" (Matthew 10:41). By our baptism we have been immersed in Jesus' death and resurrection. We share his life. We have been made in his likeness. We speak with his mouth, see with his eyes, walk with his feet; touch with his hands. That means we now 're-present' Christ to the world. We live his life in this time and place.

Sometimes, however, we choose not to live that life. We turn away. We deny ourselves the life Jesus has given us. We live less than who we most truly are. In his letter, Paul calls that sin. This isn't simply a question of good or bad, right or wrong, keeping or breaking rules. Ultimately, it's a choice between letting life just tick-over until death, and living life each day in all its fullness.

Maybe that's why Paul was so adamant in his letter to the Romans. Christ is our way and our life. We are a part of him, and he is who we are now, and who we are to become. In some ways St. Paul is telling us to become who we really are.

Do not sin.

Do not be an instrument of wickedness.

Present yourselves to God.

Be an instrument of God's righteousness.

Paul used the illustration in everyday language of the slave and his master, which perhaps is a bit distant from our 21st century life. Being a slave might seem repugnant to us, but in Paul's day, having the right master might give a degree of protection to those who had no status. We are all slaves to our desires, and the remedy is not to give up desire entirely, but to desire something more perfect.

Paul was being a bit like the parent who says to his or her child, "I expect more of you. Do this. Don't do that. You can do better. You are more than that." As children, we hear those words as harsh, critical and judgemental. Loving parents, good parents, however, say those words seeing more in their child than he or she sometimes sees for themselves. They are words that call their child into the fullness of life, to be whole, complete, and fully alive. That's exactly what Paul was doing.

I am uncomfortably grateful for his words. He challenges me to examine my life and see the ways in which I have denied myself the very life I say I want. He reminds me that I have a choice and so do you. We are responsible. We choose what our life will be like. We choose to whom we listen. We choose to whom we give ourselves and our obedience.

This is not to deny God's grace. Grace is absolutely real. But it is not a 'get out of jail free' card. Rather, grace is the power of God's love and the means of God's presence that enables us to make a different choice, a better choice, a choice to live and to love as Jesus. That is something an "admirably arranged" world can never give us.

The crook about whom King Herod spoke will forever be sneaking around, hiding in the dark, lurking in the shadows, and living in fear of being found out. That is no way to live and it is not the life Jesus offers. That kind of life is just like living a dreary existence. It leaves us empty, hollow, and impoverished. We weren't meant for that. We have been freed from that, freed from the power of sin. We are now free to live Jesus' life – eternal life, right here and right now.

So today I challenge you to go and live that way. Receive the gift. No more sneaking. No more hiding. No more lurking. No more fearing. No more admirably arranged lives.

Amen



Hymn.

The next hymn, which prepares us for our prayers of intercession, comes from the Iona Community. 'Christ's is the world in which we move,' was written by John Bell and Graham Maule. [Tune: Dream Angus (Scottish folk melody)]

[Click here to start the video.](#)

If you do not wish to use the video, here are the words of the hymn for you to meditate on:

Christ's is the world in which we move;
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love;
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,
and Christ is the one who meets us here.

Chorus: To the lost Christ shows his face,
to the unloved he gives his embrace,
to those who cry in pain or disgrace.
Christ makes, with his friends, a touching place.

Feel for the people we most avoid –
strange or bereaved or never employed.
Feel for the women and feel for the men
who feel that their living is all in vain.

Chorus:

Feel for the parents who've lost their child,
feel for the women who men have defiled,
feel for the baby for whom there's no breast,
and feel for the weary who find no rest.

Chorus:

Feel for the lives by life confused,
riddled with doubt, in loving abused;
feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,
which longs to be pure but fears to begin.

Chorus: To the lost Christ shows his face,
to the unloved he gives his embrace,
to those who cry in pain or disgrace.
Christ makes, with his friends, a touching place.

Prayers of intercession and hope.



Loving, living God;

We pray for those on the fringes of society;
feel rejected;
overlooked;
others avoid.

May they know they are welcome in your kingdom.
And may they know the welcome of your love.

for those who
for those who are
for those whom

We pray for those who are lonely.
May they know they are welcome in your kingdom.
And may they know the welcome of your love.

We pray for those in prison; especially those kept in isolation.
May they know they are welcome in your kingdom.
And may they know the welcome of your love.

We pray for children excluded from school; for their families and those with responsibility for their education.
May they know they are welcome in your kingdom.
And may they know the welcome of your love.

Loving God, as you welcome us, may we welcome others with warmth and steadfast love.

Amen.

Now we pray to the God of wind and dove and fire.

Speak freedom, peace and change over lands divided by war and creed.

Speak refreshment, assurance and warmth over lives affected by exhaustion and illness.

Speak integrity, humility and challenge over churches crippled by fear and finances.

Speak calm, gentleness and comfort over lives broken by grief and loss.

Speak power, anointing and healing over each one of us,

that there may be new beginnings and a catalyst for change.

We offer these prayers in the strong name of Jesus, your risen Son.

Amen

Closing hymn.

We conclude our worship with Timothy Dudley-Smith's hymn, 'Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,' [Tune: Lord of the years]

[Click here to start the video.](#)

If you do not wish to use the video, here are the words of the hymn for you to meditate on:

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that Word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the Word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our world, when we disown and doubt you,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without you:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us –
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Closing prayer.

Go in the name of Jesus,
to follow the way of Jesus,
to welcome with the love of Jesus,
and to be sustained by the peace of Jesus.

Worship prepared by Mrs Mary Young

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