

Apart but Together Worship
Sunday 6th September
'Back to School Sunday' – prepared by Rev Steven Knapton

Welcome to our service this morning, entitled 'Back to school Sunday'. As many of our children head back to school this week after the long COVID-19 break, we reflect on our own memories of school, and how God can offer hope and re-assurance for us all.

Call to Worship: Psalm 24.4-5



Show me the right path, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by the truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.

Our opening hymn this morning, reminds us in our busy lives to look to God. Click the link below to listen/watch:

Hymn : [I lift my eyes to the quiet hills.](#) (Rejoice and Sing 64)

Opening prayers and Lord's Prayer

Let us pray: -

We lift our eyes to worship You God
Fill us with wonder; understanding what we need to understand,
And marvelling at that which is beyond our understanding.
To the ever-present God we say-

Here I am Lord

We come to You knowing we have done wrong.
For all that we have done, thought and said that we shouldn't have,
And all we haven't done and said that we should have.
We are truly sorry.

To our Loving heavenly Father, we say-

Forgive us and renew us

We come, having received so much love, grace and mercy, with our grateful thanks.
We offer our money- moving digitally to church accounts or waiting in envelopes at home.
We offer the things we don't find it easy to be generous with - maybe our time, or our forgiveness of others. So, we bring our promise - We will not offer to God -

Offerings that cost us nothing

Amen

We say now together, the prayer taught to us by Jesus:

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.

Consider:

As we begin our worship this morning, take a few minutes to consider the following 2 questions. If you are with someone perhaps you can discuss together, if you are on your own maybe jot down whatever comes to mind:



**What particular memory comes back to you from your school days?
Looking back can you see God in any of it?**

Our next hymn is O God your life creating love, sung to the tune 'It is a thing most wonderful'. Click below to listen/watch (words below for reference as they don't appear in the video):

Hymn : [O God your life creating love](#) (Rejoice and Sing 467)

1. O God your life-creating love
This sacred trust to parents gave,
In Christ your power came from above
Your children here to claim and save.
2. Help us who now our pledges give
the young to cherish, guard and guide,
to learn of Christ, and so to live
that they may in your love abide.
3. Grant, Lord, as strength and wisdom grow,
that every child your truth may learn.
Impart your light, that each may know
Your will, and life's true way discern.
4. Then home and child, kept in your peace,
and guarded, Father, by your care,

will in the grace of Christ increase,
and all your kingdom's blessings share.

A. F. Bayly (1902 – 84)

We have 2 readings this morning:

Reading:

Our first reading is from Romans 14.1-12 and is entitled “Do not judge others”:

Welcome those who are weak in faith, but do not argue with them about their personal opinions. ² Some people's faith allows them to eat anything, but the person who is weak in the faith eats only vegetables. ³ The person who will eat anything is not to despise the one who doesn't; while the one who eats only vegetables is not to pass judgment on the one who will eat anything; for God has accepted that person. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servants of someone else? It is their own Master who will decide whether they succeed or fail. And they will succeed, because the Lord is able to make them succeed.

⁵ Some people think that a certain day is more important than other days, while others think that all days are the same. We each should firmly make up our own minds. ⁶ Those who think highly of a certain day do so in honour of the Lord; those who will eat anything do so in honour of the Lord, because they give thanks to God for the food. Those who refuse to eat certain things do so in honour of the Lord, and they give thanks to God. ⁷ We do not live for ourselves only, and we do not die for ourselves only. ⁸ If we live, it is for the Lord that we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord that we die. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. ⁹ For Christ died and rose to life in order to be the Lord of the living and of the dead. ¹⁰ You then, who eat only vegetables—why do you pass judgment on others? And you who eat anything—why do you despise other believers? All of us will stand before God to be judged by him. ¹¹ For the scripture says,

“As surely as I am the living God, says the Lord,
everyone will kneel before me,
and everyone will confess that I am God.”

¹² Every one of us, then, will have to give an account to God.

Question. What stands out for you on hearing this? Take a couple of minutes to consider this.

Reading:

Our second reading is from Matthew 18.21-35 and is entitled “The parable of the unforgiving servant”

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?”

²² “No, not seven times,” answered Jesus, “but seventy times seven,^[d] ²³ because the Kingdom of heaven is like this. Once there was a king who decided to check on his servants' accounts. ²⁴ He had just begun to do so when one of them was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. ²⁵ The servant did not have enough to pay his debt, so the king ordered him to be sold as a slave, with his wife and his children and all that he had, in order to pay the debt. ²⁶ The servant fell on his knees before the king. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged,

'and I will pay you everything!' ²⁷ The king felt sorry for him, so he forgave him the debt and let him go.

²⁸ "Then the man went out and met one of his fellow servants who owed him a few dollars. He grabbed him and started choking him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he said. ²⁹ His fellow servant fell down and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay you back!' ³⁰ But he refused; instead, he had him thrown into jail until he should pay the debt. ³¹ When the other servants saw what had happened, they were very upset and went to the king and told him everything. ³² So he called the servant in. 'You worthless slave!' he said. 'I forgave you the whole amount you owed me, just because you asked me to. ³³ You should have had mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you.' ³⁴ The king was very angry, and he sent the servant to jail to be punished until he should pay back the whole amount."

³⁵ And Jesus concluded, "That is how my Father in heaven will treat every one of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart."

Question. What stands out for you on hearing this? Take a couple of minutes to consider this.

Our third hymn this morning is Come Spirit all our hearts inspire. Click below to watch/listen:

Hymn: [Come Spirit all our hearts inspire](#). (Rejoice and Sing 312)

Sermon: 3 thoughts by Rev. Steven Knapton

1. My particular memory

I started school later than my contemporaries as I was ill. It was a strange experience as my first teacher at Chapel Street Infants school was Mrs. Wake. However, she was known as Miss Mosby, her maiden name, because the other teacher and Headmistress was her aunt Miss Wake. After that I progressed to Weeland Road Primary School. My teachers in the 4 years were; Mrs Hargreaves, Mrs Davies, Mrs Coward and finally Mr Hargreaves, who was married to Mrs Hargreaves. The remarkable thing was they were all Christians and active within their churches. Miss and Mrs Wake along with Mrs Coward were Congregationalists and all the others were Methodists, and it did show. Mrs Coward was instrumental in getting me to join the scouts, run by her husband and brother-in-law, and so I began attending the Congregational church. I was part of the Sunday School and my teacher was Miss Wake. Looking back, I can see the hand of God in all of this. I spent many a Sunday morning in a corner of the church hall with Cynthia Wake reading and talking about the stories from the Bible. It is a memory that has always stayed with me.

2. What these readings say to me

What stands out for me in hearing the Romans passage is the endless ways we can find to disagree with one another about something and nothing. I well remember a church meeting, not Hornsea, that was about whether there should be ham salad, apple pie and Wensleydale cheese, the traditional harvest supper or whether it should be chicken salad, apple pie and cream. It became very heated and the sense of betrayal felt by each side was palpable. Paul tells us to welcome those with whom we disagree, welcome them.

As I have listened to other people's responses to the stories we thought about in 'Alternative August' I have found my views challenged. 'How could they see that in the story?' was a

typical thought, quickly followed by 'Why didn't I see that?' The truth is my mind was so full of me and what I thought. Paul, it seems to me, here and in so many other places is saying 'Fill your minds with Jesus'. Here it takes the form of whatever you do, do it for God's sake. Remember we are all guests of God and guests do not insist on getting their own way. As Jesus so aptly put it; 'take the log out of your own eye before thinking about taking the speck out of your friend's eye'.

I know how easily I criticise and how quick I am to find fault. I want to appear bigger in my own eyes and can only do this by making the other person look smaller. I once found myself, along with several others, invited to a private visit to a small stately home of an earl. On arrival our coats were taken by a none too tidy person and we were shown into a large sitting room. The scruffy man then welcomed us to his family home, yes it was the earl himself. So quick to judge and criticise, so often left with egg on my face. In all these circumstances I need to remember who God is and what, through Jesus, he has done for me.

The Matthew reading shouts Forgiveness at me. Forget counting how many times, like doing a check list, this is total forgiveness. It is a clear reminder of God's total and complete forgiveness of me. All the things I have done wrong, do wrong and will do wrong; All of them completely gone, totally wiped out. I hear people say 'I am not good enough. All the things I have done wrong. God can never forgive me'. It is the wonderful good news that God has forgiven us. Every group that calls itself church is made up of such people who do not deserve such forgiveness yet know that they have been forgiven and so try to live lives that show that forgiveness in practice. It has nothing to with, and never can have anything to do with, being good enough at all.

So, do my words and actions reflect the forgiveness God has shown me? Writing to the Corinthian Church and whilst talking about love Paul wrote this, 'Love keeps no score of wrongs'. Is that true of me or do I treasure them up in my heart for use at a later date? God's love for each one of us, me included, is total and so his forgiveness for each one of us, me included, is total. So I am challenged to go out and live a life that makes that obvious. Jesus, living and dying on the cross for me, requires a response.

3. Where I think this leads me and, possibly, all of us.

As children and young people go back to school and college, for some this will be a new experience. Starting school, or a new school is challenging enough but for everyone going back will, this time, be different. There are new regulations and procedures for everyone to follow. Adjusting to these changes will not be straightforward. In my experience in the classroom one of the greatest obstacles facing young people was their lack of self worth. They were filled with doubt about who they were and how good they were, fearful of what others thought about them, highly self critical. Some responded by trying to shrink away, some played the fool, some were aggressive and full of false bravado. Yet beneath it all they did not value themselves. They had never heard how wonderfully they had been made by a loving God. How they were uniquely glorious in the eyes of God who made them. They thought they were worthless and useless.

As this new school year begins there will be even more full of worry and concern. Hesitant about what the future may hold for them. Local authorities are warning there could well be a surge of school exclusions as youngsters struggle to adjust to the 'new normal'. The challenge to accept all these different responses, understand the pressures and be forgiving will place great strain upon children, school and parents alike.

School was for me a ladder to a different future, an opportunity to show something of my potential and my first teachers, full of Christian love, made that a possibility for me. It is for

others to judge how well they succeeded. In this 'new normal' society will make great demands upon our schools and colleges as well as our children and young people so how can we be of help in this?

By carefully listening to them and not judging or criticising.

By forgiving them when they appear ill at ease and uncomfortable with us.

By praying for them.

As I look back on my life I am so grateful for all those who helped me learn and grow. And for all those who continue to help me now, and that includes so many of you. I can see so many blessings and I think being thankful has helped remove some of that critical spirit and encouraged a spirit of forgiveness. I am for ever thankful to those who helped me see Jesus. The ones who first told me of Jesus love for me and the ones who have enabled me to see more and more of that love. I am still learning, still a work in progress but a bit more thankful and grateful.

Like the young people we have a 'new normal' to negotiate and so can perhaps in our fears and concerns understand something of theirs. Let each one of us take to heart the words with which we began our service:

'Show me the right paths, O Lord; point out the road for me to follow. Lead me by your truth and teach me, for you are the God who saves me. All day long I put my hope in you.'

Prayers of intercession

Here are some suggested headings for prayer. You may well want to add your own. Feel free to do so. God hears all our prayers spoken or otherwise.

Let us thank God for the education we have received. Let us thank God for the opportunities for us to continue learning.

Let us pray for our local school, all who work there and for the students.

Let us pray for those we know who work in education.

Let us pray for our colleges and universities.

Let us pray for all those we know starting school, college or university.

As we give thanks for the educational opportunities in this country let us pray for those without such chances in many parts of the world.

Let us pray for the work of the churches in Hornsea, making the good news of Jesus Christ known to our community.

Let us pray for those known to us who need to feel the love of God close to them at this time

Let us pray that the Lord Jesus Christ may be recognised as the source of all truth and that we, as his disciples may not be afraid of that truth.

Amen

Our final hymn this morning reminds us that God provides us with all we need and that we go not in our own strength, but in the strength of the Lord. Click below to watch/listen:

Hymn: [I'll go in the strength of the Lord](#)

Blessing:

We say together The Grace:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore, Amen.