

Sunday 18th July 2021

Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit Worship at Home

Whether you are celebrating or commiserating after all the recent sporting events we come to worship knowing that we have something amazing to celebrate that outpasses all other celebrations, the love of our God shown in Jesus Christ. Yes we truly do have a Redeemer.

Hymn - STF 338 There is a Redeemer

There is a Redeemer:
Jesus God's own Son,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
Holy One.

***Thank you, O my Father,
for giving us Your Son
and leaving Your Spirit
'til the work on earth is done.***

Jesus, my Redeemer,
Name above all names,
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,
all for sinners slain.

When I stand in glory,
I will see His face,
and there I'll serve my King forever,
in that holy place.

Introduction

Back when the Old West was being settled, pioneers flocked across the country to California and Oregon. In one particular spot on the Eastern slopes of the Rockies there was a large, dirt covered rock protruding in the middle of the trail. Wagon wheels were broken on it and men tripped over it. Finally someone dug up the odd stone and rolled it off trail into a nearby stream. The stream was too wide to jump over, but people used the stone as a step to cross the cold creek. It was used for years, until finally one settler built his cabin near the stream. He moved the odd stone out of the stream and placed it in his cabin to serve as a doorstep.

As years passed, railroads were built and towns sprang up. The old settler's grandson went East to study geology. On a visit to his grandfather's cabin, the grandson happened to examine the old lump of stone and discovered within that lump of dirt and rock was the largest pure gold nugget ever discovered on the Eastern slope of the Rockies. It had been there for three generations, and people never recognized its value. To some it was a stumbling stone to be removed. To others it was a stepping-stone, and to others it was just a heavy rock. But only the grandson saw it for what it really was--a lump of pure gold.

Jesus is the precious rock that God has given us to be the both the cornerstone and the capstone of our lives. As we begin to grasp our new found or returned freedoms, as we grasp how to return to 'church', will we take time to consider how we build, what will we place as essential, what has to be at the heart of all we do - and most important of all, who is at the centre (not in theory, but in practice).

Jesus, be the centre
Be my source, be my light
Jesus

Jesus, be the centre
Be my hope, be my song
Jesus

Be the fire in my heart
Be the wind in these sails
Be the reason that I live
Jesus, Jesus

Jesus, be the centre

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

Liberating God, walk with us into our new freedoms, taking care to remember that we all approach life differently;
Give us sensitivity to people's feelings.
Enable us to share your enduring love for all people and creation.
Give us wisdom every day, by your spirit.

We have shown love to our neighbour through the restrictions we have followed, may we not stop now loving our neighbour now. In our desire for 'normality' give us patience; let us not forget all that has been.

We seek forgiveness when we have not followed your way these last 16 months, when we became the centre of our own lives and you were lost in the mist. May we act wisely, show mercy and live love, seeking and relying on you in all we do. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN

Among the many 'reality' TV series, is one entitled 'Rich House, Poor House' where two families from opposite ends of the social scale swap houses and lifestyles. King David had a Rich House made of cedar wood, God's House was a tent. As the people of God have journeyed to the promised land, as they have covered many miles, God has been with them, his presence has accompanied them, his 'house' has been flexible! David is concerned about this - not so much that he will leave his own house behind, but he does think God needs an upgrade to live in.

God acknowledges David's concern, but in a nutshell says 'Thank you David, but no thank you. I have a much better plan of how I want to build my house!!!!'

God's Promise to David – 2 Samuel 7

7 After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

³ Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

⁴ But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

⁵ "Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?' ⁶I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

⁸ "Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you have gone...

When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.

But what sort of house- The answer to that is found in Ephesians - there we find that God's house is not constructed with bricks and mortar but is made of people, those saints and sinners who recognise God's love in Jesus Christ, who place him at the centre of all they do, say and think, a house where the Cornerstone is Christ.

Paul writes to both Jews and Gentiles... (to you and to me)

Ephesians 2.14-21

¹⁴ For Christ is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached

peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Christ is our peace who has made the two groups one - Gentiles and Jews were united through Christ - may we not let anything divide us, from choice of hymnbook and colour of paint, to decisions made in the Conference of our Church. For it is about Christ and not about us - It is Christ who said I have come that they may be one.

Hymn – STF 351 In Christ alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This Cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease
My Comforter, my All in All
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live
There in the ground His body lay

Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day!
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

As we move into this new phase of our lives, after so much lockdown, what will our church be made of? What will be its design? What will God's house look like today and in the future? What will be at the centre as we move forward, will it be a place where barriers and dividing walls are no more, as Jesus Christ died for?

Will it be a place like the tabernacle which was flexible and could move as God moved, will we be flexible too?

Remember God's house is not made of bricks and mortar but people - can you and I be God's flexible friend, can we move as his Holy Spirit directs and just like the 'Weebles that wobble but they don't fall down' will we contain that core strength, that golden nugget, will Jesus Christ be the centre, will he be at the heart of all we do? May we as Christ's disciples today not become fixed lumps of concrete, heavy and difficult to upkeep. Instead may we be houses flexible enough to move with God

Prayers

Let us pray to the Lord,
who is our refuge and stronghold.

For the health and well-being of our nation,
that all who are fearful and anxious
may be at peace and free from worry:
Lord, hear us,
Lord, graciously hear us.

For the isolated and housebound,
that we may be alert to their needs,

and care for them in their vulnerability:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For our homes and families,
our schools and young people,
and all in any kind of need or distress:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

For a blessing on our local community,
that our neighbourhoods may be places of
trust and friendship,
where all are known and cared for:

Lord, hear us,

Lord, graciously hear us.

We commend ourselves, and all for whom we
pray,

to the mercy and protection of God.

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer...

Hymn STF 364

1. Oh for a thousand tongues to sing
my great Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of God's grace.
2. My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim,
and spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of thy name.
3. Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
and bids our sorrows cease:
'tis music in the sinner's ears;
'tis life and health and peace.
4. He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free,
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood availed for me.
5. He speaks, and listening to his voice
new life the dead receive;

the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.

6. See all your sins on Jesus laid;
the Lamb of God was slain;
his soul was once an offering made,
that all may heaven gain.
7. In Christ, our Head you then shall know, shall
feel, your sins forgiven,
anticipate your heaven below,
and own that love is heaven.

Closing prayer

Let us not be people of fear:

for we are people of courage.

Let us not be people who protect our own
safety:

but people who protect our neighbours' safety.

Let us not be people of greed:

but people of generosity.

We are your people God,

giving and loving,

wherever we are,

whatever it costs

For as long as it takes

wherever you call us.

Amen

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