

## Christ Church Woodley 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021

You can use pictures of light and dark to characterise the present Covid situation. Depending on your experience, you could say we are beginning to see light at the end of the tunnel. Or, if you look at the numbers hit by the virus, you could see the present as the dark time before the dawn. I see people queueing for vaccination at the Salvation Army Centre round the corner from where I live – so maybe light at the end of the tunnel is the way to see things, although there's no doubting the pain that is around us.

We come together to worship a light that shines through whatever darkness surrounds us – a light that will at the end banish all darkness.

Jesus said: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Our first hymn uses the image of light and darkness. It begins, "Light of the world, you stepped down into darkness." The hymn leads us into worship: "So here I am to worship, here I am to say that you're my God."

### **HYMN: StF175 Light of the world** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdfrijGy-FIU>

Light of the world,  
you stepped down into darkness,  
opened my eyes, let me see  
beauty that made this heart adore you,  
hope of a life spent with you.

*So here I am to worship,  
here I am to bow down,  
here I am to say that you're my God,  
and you're altogether lovely,  
altogether worthy,  
altogether wonderful to me.*

King of all days  
oh so highly exalted,  
glorious in heaven above.  
Humbly you came to the earth you created,  
all for love's sake became poor.  
*So here I am to worship ...*

And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross.  
And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross.  
So here I am to worship ...

Tim Hughes

God is with us as light in the darkness.

I'm going to read some words from Psalm 36. It's a hymn to God's love.

It mixes metaphors, speaking of God

as a bird under whose wings we shelter,  
as providing a house in which we feast, a river of delights from which we drink;  
as a fountain of life-giving water, a light that illuminates our way.

Psalm 36:5-9

Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the skies.

<sup>6</sup>Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,  
your justice like the great deep.

You, LORD, preserve both people and animals.  
<sup>7</sup> How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!  
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.  
<sup>8</sup> They feast on the abundance of your house;  
you give them drink from your river of delights.  
<sup>9</sup> For with you is the fountain of life;  
in your light we see light.

### **Let us pray.**

Lord, you are the light of the world. You enter the darkness to bring light. You bring peace where there is upset. You bring joy where there is sadness. Enter our world this morning as we bow before you. Forgive us our sin. Restore us to your kingdom.

Lord, we lay before you the things on our mind, our regret for the times we have wandered from your path of love, our thanks for the joys and pleasures of this week, our concerns for those close to us and the separation imposed on us by lockdown.

Lord, you are never far from us. Your presence is often hidden, but we know that you are with us at all times. You are part of our lives - especially when we worship and pray together as your people.

Lord, make yourself known to us now. Fill us with your Spirit. Teach us and mould us into faithful servants who at the last will share in your eternal presence.

In the name of Jesus, we make this prayer.

The Lord's prayer (said as projected on the screen), or in its traditional form:

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

### **All-age talk**

I have something in the house that is very precious to me. It's a medal awarded to my grandfather for bravery more than 100 years ago. He had the misfortune to spend most of the First World War in the trenches in the Somme. On the other hand, he was fortunate to survive. He was injured once. He was shot in his bottom. But they patched him up and sent him back out to fight. We don't know much about why he was given the medal – he never spoke about it. Something to do with rescuing other soldiers from no-mans land between the trenches. Whatever – he must have been very brave, because this is the Distinguished Conduct Medal which is one of the highest medals to be awarded.

My grandfather was called Alfred (Alf as my grandmother called him) after one of the greatest kings of England. King Alfred fought against the Vikings and established the Saxon kingdom of Wessex. My grandfather lived up to his name, but they wouldn't have known this when he was born and named him Alfred.

Sometimes in the Bible, children were given names that meant something. One was named Ichabod, which meant 'the glory has departed' after the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and Ichabod's father was killed in battle as he was born. Alfred, or Alfie, has become a popular name again today, but not Ichabod.

One of the most famous names in the Bible was 'Israel'. The man given the name Israel was so important that his descendants were called the 'people of Israel'. When he was born he was called Jacob, but we was given the extra name 'Israel' later in life. It's not certain what 'Israel' means. This happened more than 3000 years ago. It seems to be a combination of words meaning God and struggle.

We can partly work it out from the story of how Jacob came to be renamed Israel. Jacob was returning home after many years in a foreign land. He had previously seriously fallen out with his brother Esau and they were about to meet again. Jacob was unsure how this was going to go. Part of his plan was to send all his family and possessions ahead of him and follow them later. You might wonder why – you can read about it in Genesis. Jacob and his family came to a stream called Jabbok. His family crossed first and Jacob followed later during the night – that was his plan. But a man came and stopped him as he started across the stream. The man fought with Jacob all night. Jacob finally got the better of the wrestling bout, but only after his leg was put out of joint. Jacob discovered that the man was really an angel or God himself in disguise. Jacob said, "I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." The man, or the angel, or God, blessed Jacob and gave him a new name Israel, meaning either 'God struggles' or 'one who struggles with God'. In this way, Jacob's children, grandchildren, and all his descendants became the people of Israel. They were all, and continue to be, a people that struggles with God.

Being God's people is not always easy. Life can be a struggle. God can come to us, unknown in the darkness, and struggle with us. Sometimes it seems that God opposes us, but in the end God blesses us and helps us to grow as his people. This can be worth remembering when times seem dark and we are struggling.

## Junior Church Prayer

**HYMN: SoF 433 Shine, Jesus Shine** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvMeTWAiUz8>

Lord, the light of Your love is shining,  
In the midst of the darkness, shining;  
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us,  
Set us free by the truth You now bring us,  
Shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus, shine,  
Fill this land with the Father's glory;  
Blaze, Spirit, blaze,  
Set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, river, flow,  
Flood the nations with grace and mercy;  
Send forth Your word,  
Lord, and let there be light.*

Lord, I come to Your awesome presence,  
From the shadows into Your radiance;  
By the blood I may enter Your brightness,  
Search me, try me, consume all my darkness.  
Shine on me, shine on me.

As we gaze on Your kingly brightness  
So our faces display Your likeness.  
Ever changing from glory to glory,  
Mirrored here may our lives tell Your story.  
Shine on me, shine on me.

Graham Kendrick

## Children's Blessing

## Introduction to readings

The gospel is the well-known story of Jesus healing the woman with a haemorrhage. Life had been a prolonged struggle for her. She had suffered from the condition for 12 years. She had spent all her money on doctors and it had only got worse. The physical condition was bad enough, but the flow of blood also made her ritually unclean. It placed her on the margins of society. Her healing restored her to a full place in the people of Israel.

The other reading is part of Paul's letter to the Romans. It may seem disconnected from the gospel, but it covers ground theologically related to the in-life events of the gospel. It speaks of restoration to communion with God and relates it to being powerless and to suffering both by ourselves and by Jesus on the cross. Salvation takes place in the middle of the realities of life.

## Readings (NIV)

### Mark 5:24-34

<sup>24</sup> A large crowd followed and pressed around him. <sup>25</sup> And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. <sup>26</sup> She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. <sup>27</sup> When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup> because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." <sup>29</sup> Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering.

<sup>30</sup> At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?"

<sup>31</sup> "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'"

<sup>32</sup> But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. <sup>33</sup> Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

### Romans 5:1-8

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>2</sup> through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. <sup>3</sup> Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup> And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

<sup>6</sup> You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

<sup>7</sup> Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. <sup>8</sup> But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Both these readings speak of love – the love that Jesus showed to the woman who had been sick for twelve years – and the love God shows to us on the cross.

We sing now a hymn thanking God for his love and receiving that love into our lives, healing us spiritually.

## **HYMN: SoF 433 O Lord, your tenderness & SoF514 Such Love**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7a5abPFX7tU>

O Lord, Your tenderness,  
Melting all my bitterness,  
O Lord, I receive Your love.  
O Lord, Your loveliness,  
Changing all my ugliness,  
O Lord, I receive Your love.  
O Lord, I receive Your love,  
O Lord, I receive Your love.

Such love, pure as the whitest snow;  
Such love, weeps for the shame I know;  
Such love, paying the debt I owe;  
O Jesus, such love.  
Such love, stilling my restlessness;  
Such love, filling my emptiness;  
Such love, showing me holiness;  
O Jesus, such love.

Such love, springs from eternity;  
Such love, streaming through history;  
Such love, fountain of life to me;  
O Jesus, such love.

Graham Kendrick

## **SERMON**

Jesus healing the woman with the haemorrhage is one of those stories in the Bible that comes across as true to life. The relentless suffering of the woman permeates the story. Morna Hooker gives us the background to the story in her commentary (Black's New Testament series) on the story. Morna Hooker writes of how severe the illness was, lasting twelve years. The woman suffered from vaginal bleeding, and it was more than a physical ailment. It made her unclean and an outcast from society as decreed in the book of Leviticus. This was why she approached Jesus secretly to touch his clothes.

Our hearts cannot help but go out to her on many levels, not only on account of the protracted physical suffering. One can imagine the humiliation that went with the illness – the useless examination by doctors who took her money but could do nothing for her – the exclusion from the temple because she was unclean.

It would have been easy for a Rabbi to have nothing to do with her. As Morna Hooker points out, she would have known this when she approached Jesus. In other healing stories, people cried out to Jesus to heal them. Others got friends to lower them in through the roof. But this woman crept up behind Jesus to touch his clothes – as though in the hope that Jesus might not notice.

Jesus was no conventional Rabbi. He did notice the woman touching his clothes, even though he was hemmed in by a great crowd. Jesus turned and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" He was looking round to see who it was. The woman, trembling with fear, came and fell before him. She was vulnerable to further humiliation in front of the crowd. Despite the demands for his attention by the crowd, Jesus listened to her as she told him the whole truth. For as long as it took, she was the centre of Jesus's attention.

When she had poured out her story, Jesus said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." She was healed, but more than that, he called her 'daughter'. She was now restored to the community, accepted by God, no longer unclean, no longer excluded. Morna Hooker translates the Greek into English as 'your faith has saved you' for the woman had received much more than physical healing. The word

usually translated as 'healing' had a broader meaning. And it was through faith that she had been healed and saved.

There are messages here for us to listen to. We are not just physical bodies. When we are ill, we are affected psychologically and spiritually. And this applies to all afflictions, including the present pandemic. Some people contract the virus and need invasive treatment in hospital, and some sadly die. But the lockdown affects all of us, even if we do not ourselves contract Covid. Lockdown places a strain on us – not being able to go out or meet friends and family. And for some, there is the strain of home-schooling in parallel with working from home. Others have a whole host of anxieties that I need not spell out. On the news we hear of fears of widespread mental health problems.

The first lockdown had an element of exciting novelty about it – working at home, learning to use zoom. But this time round I find myself weighed down. Watching the grandchildren open their Christmas presents by zoom was not the same as sharing Christmas Day with them. I even miss the human contact of commuting for an hour and a half each way to work.

In lockdown, it's easy to feel isolated, less significant to others, and even less loved. If these feelings take hold, we can recall the story of the woman with the haemorrhage. She had suffered physically for twelve years, learned that nothing could be done for her, and she was marginalised in society. Yet there was one person who loved her. His love was not generalised love in the sense that he loved everybody in the crowd. Jesus loved her herself as an individual. He looked to pick her out from the crowd, he gave her his attention, and he called her 'daughter'. When Covid gets me down I find it important to come to Jesus in prayer and read his Word. For a short time I can bring to mind that he seeks me out and gives his attention to me. This is a mystery. It was true in the Bible, and it is true for us now.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans says pretty much the same thing in a different way. Paul speaks of love and faith, and of finding peace - and all of this while we were powerless and sinners. As Paul writes,

*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Paul is great at developing an overall understanding of the gospel, but Jesus rarely teaches in the manner of Paul. Jesus taught in parables about specific people like the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son. And we learn the gospel by reading about how Jesus interacted with individual people like Zacchaeus or Nicodemus. At the end of the day, the gospel is less about schemes of salvation – although one has to say that for Paul himself, his relationship with God was intensely personal. It's about how God interacts with us individually. We are all individuals and God speaks and listens to us individually as he did to the woman in our gospel story today. Ours is to listen to what he is saying to us personally and trust him. And sometimes, we need to be like the woman in the gospel – we need to take the initiative and reach out to touch him.

Our next hymn uses Psalm 91 to reflect on how we can trust in God's love for us.

## HYMN: StF509 Safe in the shadow of the Lord <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jPuJBuwBqXQ>

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| 1 Safe in the shadow of the Lord<br>beneath his hand and power,<br>I trust in him,<br>I trust in him,<br>my fortress and my tower. | 4 His holy angels keep my feet<br>secure from every stone ;<br>I trust in him,<br>I trust in him,<br>and unafraid go on.             |
| 2 My hope is set on God alone<br>though Satan spreads his snare ;<br>I trust in him,<br>I trust in him,<br>to keep me in his care. | 5 Strong in the everlasting name,<br>and in my Father's care,<br>I trust in him,<br>I trust in him,<br>who hears and answers prayer. |
| 3 From fears and phantoms of the night,<br>from foes about my way,<br>I trust in him,<br>I trust in him,<br>by darkness as by day. | 6 Safe in the shadow of the Lord,<br>possessed by love divine,<br>I trust in him,<br>I trust in him,<br>and meet his love with mine. |

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)  
Based on Psalm 91

### **Intercessions** *Beryl Wootton has kindly agreed to lead our prayers this week.*

*Friends, some of us have heard the awful news that one of the Ministers from Basingstoke, Alison Parker, died suddenly on Monday. I wish to begin our prayers of intercession with a prayer she gave us.*

Almighty God,

You are calling us, and we want to respond.

Help us to be more aware of your presence within your church and in the wider world.

Enable us to celebrate with confidence your ever active, transforming love revealed to us in Christ.

You are calling us and we want to respond.

Teach us to underpin everything we do with worship and prayer that always keeps you at its centre. May we have the vision to encourage fresh ways of being church, and to discern when you wish us to worship you in new ways or new places or with new communities.

You are calling us and we want to respond.

Make us urgent in our efforts to work for community development and justice, especially where people have been marginalised, or are in poverty and deprivation both in Britain and worldwide. Make us channels of hope in everything we do.

You are calling us and we want to respond.

Help us to speak out in growing confidence, enabling others to grasp something that makes sense to them and that enables them to come to faith in you.

We ask that you will help us to do all these things, working in partnership with others wherever possible, and always with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and in your strength.

We ask all this through your son, Jesus Christ, Amen

Living God,  
We pray for the Church and the world.

Bless your Church here and around the world.  
Give your Church a renewed hunger to be about your will;  
a strengthened courage in a world that is often hostile;  
a deepened sense of commitment;  
and the wit and the wisdom to imitate your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

*Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer.*

Bless your world and all its nations and peoples.  
Deliver it and all its peoples  
from the destruction of violence, and the poison of bitter anger;  
from the web of twisted and perverse hatred;  
from glorying in the pain and loss of others;  
from misplaced pride and a delight in division;  
from all strategy where love is a casualty and enmity is enthroned.

We pray for the victims of violence:  
for lives shattered by intimidation, or terrified by nightmare;  
for families scarred by oppression  
or ruined by a bruising lack of consideration.

We think of places at war like the Yemen, Nigeria, where insurgents have so recently renewed their hostility – especially against Christians.

*Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer.*

And we pray for ourselves.  
Bless us, Living God,  
with such an overflowing of your love  
that we become as bursting dykes of Grace flooding the land.

*Unmute yourself if you would like us to pray for someone/something*

Father God, bless everyone named before you today...and any unnamed.

All these things we pray  
in the name and for the sake of Jesus Christ  
who gives us the way to be, and the way to do,  
to be, and the way to do,  
so that we become your people and do your will.

*Amen*

## HYMN: SoF 780 How deep the Father's love for us

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4brqdi\\_yEx4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4brqdi_yEx4)

1. How deep the Father's love for us  
How vast beyond all measure  
That he should give his only Son  
To make a wretch his treasure.  
How great the pain of searing loss;  
The Father turns his face away,  
As wounds which mar the chosen one  
Bring many souls to glory.

3. I will not boast in anything,  
No gifts, no power, no wisdom;  
But I will boast in Jesus Christ,  
His death and resurrection.  
Why should I gain from all of this?  
I cannot give an answer;  
But this I know with all my heart,  
His wounds have paid my ransom.

2. Behold the man upon a cross,  
My sin upon his shoulders;  
Ashamed, I hear my mocking voice  
Call out among the scoffers.  
It was my sin that held him there,  
My pardon he accomplished;  
His dying breath has brought me life-  
I know that 'it is finished'.

Stuart Townend

Jesus said: "Know that I am with you always, to the end of time."

May Christ the Sun of Righteousness shine on us, and scatter the darkness from before us.

May the blessing of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – be with us now and always.

*Amen*