

Woodley Airfield Church 13 September 2020

WELCOME by James

NOTICES by Mary

INVITATION

Minister We meet in the name of God, creator of the universe,
Source of true humanity, mother and father of all.

All **AMEN**

Minister We meet in the name of Jesus, Word made flesh,
Saviour of fallen humanity, lover of all.

All **AMEN**

Minister We meet in the name of the Holy Spirit,
Lord and giver of life,
Midwife of new humanity, inspirer of all.

All **AMEN**

Minister Come then, eternal Lord, be present here, befriend us here,
Renew us here.

HYMN StF 595 Lord, we have come at your own invitation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=73wEs36-fZE> (different tune)

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|--|---|
| 1 Lord, we have come at your own invitation,
chosen by you, to be counted your friends ;
yours is the strength that sustains dedication,
ours a commitment we know never ends. | 3 When, at your table, each time of returning,
vows are renewed and our courage restored,
may we increasingly glory in learning
all that it means to accept you as Lord. |
| 2 Here, at your table, confirm our intention,
give it your seal of forgiveness and grace ;
teach us to serve, without pride or pretension,
Lord, in your Kingdom, whatever our place. | 4 So, in the world, where each duty assigned us
gives us the chance to create or destroy,
help us to make those decisions that bind us,
Lord, to yourself, in obedience and joy. |

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

RESPONSES

Voice A In the beginning, before time, before people, before the world began

All GOD WAS

Voice B Here and now, among us, beside us

All GOD IS

Voice C In all that is to come, when we have turned to dust, and human knowledge has been
completed.

ALL GOD WILL BE

Voice D Not despairing of earth, but delighting in it, not condemning the world, but redeeming it
through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit

ALL GOD WAS, GOD IS, GOD WILL BE.

Kathryn introduces **Junior Church video: Saint Columba**

Prayer by Theo

Junior Church blessing

The Lord bless you and keep you
The Lord make his face to shine upon you
And be gracious unto you
The Lord lift up his countenance upon you
And give you peace.

Prayers of Approach

Psalm 71

In you, O God, is my security; let me never be put to shame.
By your saving power deliver me, hear me and keep me safe.

Be a rock of refuge for me, to which I can always come.
Keep me safe from the power of the wicked, from the grasp of the cruel and unjust.

In you, as long as I can remember, my hope and my trust have been placed.
I have leaned on you since my birth, since you brought me out of the womb.
Keep close when energy fails me, and I spend my last years on earth.
Let me wait in continual hope and praise you again and again.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the space is thin between them.
Distance may divide, but Christ's promise unites
Those bounded by time, and those blessed by eternity.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the church above and below is one.
Peter is here, and Paul, Martha and all the Marys,
Columba and Francis, Theresa and Luther King;
The saints from far back, and those who left us not long ago.
And only sight prevents us from seeing them,
One with us on the other side.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Minister Heaven is here, and earth, and the God who made them is present.
The Lamb, glorious on the throne, sits beside us;
The Spirit of God, the Dove, makes her resting place among us.
God inhales the breath of our prayers and spreads a table for our satisfaction.
Let heaven be glad

All **Let the whole earth cry 'Glory'.**

Reading: Matthew 18:1-14

¹At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

²He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. ³And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

⁴Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

⁵And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

⁶“If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come! ⁸If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. ⁹And if your eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell.

¹⁰“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. (¹¹ The son of Man came to save what was lost.)

¹²“What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? ¹³And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. ¹⁴In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

HYMN The Solid Rock <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkIr6eHjqXI>

1. My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Refrain:

On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

2. When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace;
In every high and stormy gale,
My anchor holds within the veil.

3. (His oath, His covenant, His blood
Support me in the whelming flood;
When all around my soul gives way,
He then is all my hope and stay.)

4. When He shall come with trumpet sound,
Oh, may I then in Him be found;
Dressed in His righteousness alone,
Faultless to stand before the throne.

Edward Mote, ca.1834

Sermon: *On being childlike*

“There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.
It is not now as it hath been of yore;—
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.”¹

¹Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood
<https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1463391>

Jesus understands this and says we have to re-live the life we have left behind, and start with the outlook of children, which he says is marked by a lowly position. What I want to do is look with you at what is included in this 'lowly position', and what it means for a person to humble him or herself in this way.

Is that how Jesus was himself? Was Jesus child-like? Was he notably humble? No, he was a controlling adult. He behaved like a parent. That is a good thing, because we look to him for an example, and to follow him in his Way. But it does create some difficulties for us if we set out to be humble and also to follow the behaviour of Jesus (his 'Way'), because we are not as he was and is.

Indeed, there is a lot of pressure on us in everyday life, and as Christians, to be, and act, grown-up. We have responsibilities. We have to guide other people. We may even think of ourselves as important. We do not wish to be seen as simple or frivolous.

I wonder how childlike we are inside. Many of us feel a lot younger than we are. I remember once talking to a lady of about 85 on this subject. She said that mentally she had never got beyond the age of 31. What that must mean is that the inward feeling normally does not show externally, because she certainly did not come across as a 31 year-old. We cannot stop our appearance from aging, though some try. Voice is maybe a better guide, but even then there are limitations. But I think that Jesus is hoping that in some way, we will stay child-like, by resisting the shifts in attitude that normally define and mark our behaviour.

Now humility is one thing that we can train ourselves to monitor. If we suddenly notice a tendency to be overbearing, or even traits of Basil Fawlty (who is a caricature of a weak bully), then that would be a give-away. But, friends, I cannot imagine any of you falling far into this trap, and joking aside, it's not comical outbursts that are the real sign here, but something much more subtle – an almost invisible progressive assumption of status. I know I do it, and I expect some of you do it, too. Jesus tells us to fight it. As a minister, to take that example, I have to challenge any feeling I get within me, or any signal I send outwardly, that I am any closer to God than any of you are. Fortunately, within our system we have less of a hierarchy that some denominations do, and so I am not immediately led to think that by my position alone, I am elevated about my congregation. But think of the experience in recent years in which priests have been found to have been taking unacceptable liberties with weaker members of their congregations, children particularly. I suggest that part of the reason probably was that they thought that they were above the rules, that something was permitted them that was not permitted to the ordinary person. Humility was not required.

Management theory now includes Servant Leadership, a theory that will not cause any surprise to followers of Jesus, who demonstrated that theory not just in the washing of his followers' feet, but in many ways. "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all"² The word translated servant in the Greek is 'Diakonos', which has as its first meaning, a waiter. Its second meaning is the role which we have in the church. So I, and all ministers and priests should think of ourselves as servants in the sense of waiters – we are available to bring you what you need.

But if Jesus wanted to make this point only, he would not have used the simile of children. He is asking us to become child-like in a more complex sense than just this. Authors who write for children are often child-like inwardly. It's the secret of their success. That is not to say that they go round sucking their thumbs. But in their writing they may be expressing something that is no longer part of the outward person. What they write may be both a celebration and a lament for something which they themselves know they have lost.

² Mark 9:35b

Create space in our lives for wonder “an astonishment that does not cease when the novelty wears off”³. Wonder at emergent qualities is common; lack of wonder at normality is also common, but

*Every common sight...Apparelled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream...*

cannot be supported by a pessimistic view of the world. So, the first thing that Jesus is asking of us is to take an optimistic positive view of the world and of our lives. Within such a view, it becomes possible to maintain a perspective on life that can detect God’s glory in ordinary situations.

So Jesus is asking us to look at things anew, and avoid conditioned reactions. To foster wonder. Jesus told us to be like little children – to shed the preoccupations and assumptions that we have in adulthood and to go back to a former state. This is to be born again. Think of Nicodemus.

Jesus goes on to say something which is interesting and amazing. First, that no-one is to pervert little ones, and he goes out of his way to say that the most serious consequences await any who set out to corrupt youth. Then he says,

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.”

So, he is saying that children are particularly represented to God by angels who have direct access to the Father. The implication is that for the rest of us, the grown-ups, access to God is not so direct.

How well this bears out Wordsworth’s suggestion that as adults we have lost something which children have:

“But yet I know, where’er I go,
That there hath past away a glory from the earth.”

We should pray to recover the humility and the vision that children naturally have. Should that be granted, the glory that has passed away will return.

HYMN StF 569 An upper room <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2lukOxMrBA>

- 1 An Upper Room did our Lord prepare
for those he loved until the end ;
and his disciples still gather there
to celebrate our Risen Friend.
- 2 A lasting gift Jesus gave his own —
to share his bread, his loving cup ;
whatever burdens may bow us down,
he by his cross shall lift us up.
- 3 And after supper he washed their feet,
for service, too, is sacrament ;
in him our joy shall be made complete —
sent out to serve, as he was sent.
- 4 No end there is ! We depart in peace ;
he loves beyond the uttermost ;
in every room in our Father's house
he will be there, as Lord and Host.

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)

³ Immanuel Kant, A Critique of Judgement § 29

Communion

Introduction

We come as we are, because Jesus told us only to have a loving heart, and we remember his invitation and his promise:

“Come”, he said, “all ye who travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you peace. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest”

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger; and he that believes in me shall never thirst. I will not cast out the one that comes to me. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; they shall be satisfied.”

We come today in that peace, to inherit that rest.

Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Lift up your hearts

We lift them to the Lord

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God

It is right to give thanks and praise

It is indeed right, it is our duty and our pleasure to give thanks to God for his grace; for his bountiful creation, for the love which has fathered us forth, for his great gift to the world, our Lord Jesus; for his guiding ministry, for his death on the Cross, and for his presence ever with us, alive in the world, we give our heartfelt thanks and praise. Amen

Breaking

In doing this, we follow Jesus’s example and command.

On the night when he was arrested, Jesus took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in memory of me. Likewise, after supper, he took the cup, and said, “This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me.”

Sharing *Please take bread and wine/juice as you are able*

Grace

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

And also with you

Peace

On the evening of the first Easter Day, when the disciples were together behind locked doors for fear, Jesus came and stood among them. “Peace be with you!” he said; then he showed them his hands and his side. On seeing the Lord, the disciples were overjoyed. Jesus said again, “Peace be with you”.

Joyful in the presence of our risen Lord, let us share, as we are able, signs of peace.

HYMN: StF 328 Jesus shall reign https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcxdvJy_t_8

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| 1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does his successive journeys run ;
his kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
till moons shall wax and wane no more. | 4 Blessings abound where'er he reigns ;
the prisoner leaps to lose his chains ;
the weary find eternal rest,
and all who are in want are blest. |
| 2 For him shall endless prayer be made,
and praises throng to crown his head ;
his name like sweet perfume shall rise
with every morning sacrifice. | 5 Let every creature rise and bring
its grateful honours to our King ;
angels descend with songs again,
and earth repeat the loud amen. |
| 3 People and realms of every tongue
dwell on his love with sweetest song ;
and infant voices shall proclaim
their early blessings on his name. | |

Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Prayers of Intercession & Thanksgiving

Minister Lord, take us from the worn clothes of adulthood
 And dress us up like children
 So that we can dream and imagine and play again;
 Let our conversation with you move from formality to friendliness,
 Until all of life and all of us become open to your Spirit.
 Because you, not we, are God. We need you, God

All **WE NEED YOU, GOD.**

Minister Listen, for the God who created us says,
 “Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you;
 I have called you by name; you are mine.”

And so, we are that are redeemed respond to your love; we will walk in your light, we will follow your Son, we will live by your Spirit. We will not offer to you things that have cost us nothing. We will use ourselves as your agents to convert wrong into right; to bring happiness to the afflicted; to seek justice and mercy for all. Use our hands, use our minds and our energy.

Help us to speak for the voiceless, to defend the persecuted, and to be advocates for a fairer world. Help us to share our faith in Jesus in places where faith is suspected.

Hear our prayer, and make participants in your gracious purposes, through Jesus Christ Our Lord, Amen

Hymn StF 487 You shall go our with joy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCJ7BfLZm2Q>

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,
and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy and the trees of the field
shall clap, shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,
and you'll go out with joy.

Stuart Dauermann
and Steffi Geiser Rubin

Blessing

Minister Is it true that God loves the world?

All AMEN. THIS IS TRUE

Minister Is it true that God loves all people?

All AMEN. THIS IS TRUE

Minister Is it true that Jesus came to make all things new?

All AMEN. THIS IS TRUE

Minister Then let us go as those whom God has called, to bear witness to the love and justice of heaven, to be beacons of light and signs of transformation, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

All AMEN

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David Wesley for *The Solid Rock*