

Order of Service – Sunday 23rd August 2020

Welcome to all watching or using our printed service sheets. Special welcome to those who are first time with us. We are all gathered to worship our heavenly Father.

Prayer : *Lord we do not come as a guests but as a members of your family. We do not come in fear but with joy and thanksgiving, we do not come alone but with all your people of every age and in every place. Lord we come as your family, for you are our heavenly Father, and Christ is our brother, our Saviour and Lord. We are here because you called us. We here in the name of Jesus. We have come to declare the Father's love. We have come because you are worthy, because you are here. Lord empower us through your Holy Spirit to truly acknowledge your presence and to worship you alone.*

Hymn: stf 264 Make way

Hymn: Ancient words or stf 164 Your words to me

Bible reading: (The readings were recorded by Newington Methodist church)

Exodus 1: 8–2:10; Matthew 16: 13– 20

Reflection

Egypt - once so generous to Jacob's family became hostile. This did not happen overnight. It came gradually, after Joseph and all his generation died and the new pharaoh took over. Life became much harder. First hard labour, then sneaky birth control and finally an open order to kill every new born boy. We can only imagine that this official policy generated a network of spies and traitors who did not hesitate to win the authorities favour or pay revenge to those they disliked. Evil power was established over a community which God had chosen to be his people.

Surprisingly the story quotes in v 12. *"The more they were oppressed, the more they grew and spread"* All these hard conditions did not really enslave people. We are used to hard work. As much as there was evil, there was grace. The Hebrew mid wives did not get deceived and chose to fear the real God instead of the false, manmade imitation that pharaoh was.

Moses was born, in this atmosphere of fear and death. It must have been a dreadful dilemma for his parents. Imagine the parents going through the time of pregnancy. Fearful expectation of what is the child be – boy or girl. What are they going to do? Obey or rebel. It was a challenge to his own parents, the wider family and community. The most convenient thing to do was to hand him over and get on with life. But they did not.

Let's pause at that moment when Moses' mother looked at him. A freshly born child. The word to describe him in Hebrew is "tov". The same word used in the creation story at the end of each day, God concluded it was tov. The Russian author of revolution in 1918 in his novel "Mother" wrote: *"Only a mother can think of the future because they give birth to their children"*. It can be hard to see that our children can bring us freedom. Break the chains of fear and give us courage to face the dangers. Yet Moses' mother in that moment of introduction realised the baby is special. I believe God has given this moment to every mother - parents. We see this moment recorded at the birth of many other children (*John the Baptist, Jesus, Samuel, Sarah's Isaac*).

Every movement during pregnancy is a child reminding its mother about the future, uncertain and filled with challenges to which she has no means to compete. In full view of potential difficulties and dangers there is life coming to claim its place and space.

The battle for our minds. Jesus said that we are slaves when we sin. When we choose to conform with the things this world throws at us instead of standing firm and faithful to him. It is exactly what

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Exodus presents. God's people settled and got used to life under an evil power. They grew into it gradually and cooperated willingly. Prosperity, comfort, and the prospect of a settled life – who could refuse. Often only a moment of truth when looking at a new-born child can wake us up.

This world can offer us a lot, but it is not for free. It doesn't show us the other side of its face, the side where broken lives are hiding in the dark lonely hidden places. Propaganda has its clear rules of making things look perfect and silencing all that is different. The more we favour its offers, the more we distance ourselves from God. It is done in such a way that we do not even realise that we are no longer free and so dependent on what this world says.

Proverbs 4:23 “more than anything you guard, protect your mind for life flows from it”

Apostle Paul is calling us: “do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what is God's will..” **Rom 12:2**

2Cor 10: 3-5 “although we live in the world, we do not fight our battles with human methods. Our weapons that we fight with aren't human, but instead they are powered by God for the destruction of fortresses. They destroy arguments and every defence that is raised up to oppose the knowledge of God. They capture every thought to make it obedient to Christ. “

Jesus is important. He clearly draws the true picture of the world we live in. If everything is all right he would not do what he did. This world crucified Jesus because he came to set us free. The evil was publically exposed in its true face at the cross. This is not impersonal abstract power acting but our corrupted nature, our inclination to oppose everything God is. It goes so deep and I could not easily express it in this reflection. We are authors of this world we live in. We are able to deceive ourselves, we are capable of hating ourselves. Everything that is sacred and originates from God our creator we love to transform, abuse and destroy. As I said it would take another sermon to bring all of these up, but let's rely on the moment of truth as it happened to Moses's mother and more profoundly to Peter. He realised Jesus is the restorer, liberator, healer of his soul. Leading him into a new life, liberating his mind from perversion and deceit. Peter answered a question from Jesus that we have to answer as well. “Who do you say I am?”

We all love this world and life in it. And it is ok. Christians are sometimes accused that they hate this world. It is not the truth. We love life and the world but not as the world teaches us, we love this world as God teaches us. And that is different. The difference comes up clearly as we spend time with Jesus and enter a precious life long conversation with him. That inspires us to the same answer Peter came up with.

“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”

Hymn: stf 365 And can it be

Prayers of intercession by Martin S.

Holy and gracious God, we pray for others,
prayers that bring to mind the world's realities.
Please teach us not to be afraid, because it is here we find you,
sharing this deeply troubled world with us.
We know that in our living and in our dying we belong to You, Love never fails us.

Please bless all who are continuing to make a difference:
scientists working faster than ever before to find cure or vaccine for Covid-19;
chefs, volunteers, entertainers, cleaners, neighbours and countless more.

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May they know your laughter and love.

As the new term nears we remember all teachers and others preparing to open schools in September. And we remember those young people who will be moving to a new school or leaving school and entering the world of work, college and university or who face an uncertain future. May they know that you are on their side and by their side.

We ask you to bless all who are there to care for those who are at their lowest, especially in health and care services.

We remember ministers moving to a new appointment. We recall with love and thanks Kan and Vera and look forward to meeting Gill and Paul.

May they know your persevering strength.

We pray for the hundreds of thousands who are grieving here and across the world:
for the loss of loved ones,
loss of livelihood,
loss of confidence and hope,
loss of any sense of wellbeing.

And we lift to you all those known to us personally, who are in need today and those for whom prayers have been asked here on-line

May they know your comfort, strong and everlasting.

The Psalmist writes: If only the leaders of our disjointed world would listen to Your words and direct their people in accord with Your will,
they would then know the meaning of peace,
We pray for people who need the world to be a more just and equal place,
and for those who have power to make changes.
May it happen quickly and peacefully. May they know your righteousness.

We pray for all who need the world to remember them:
refugees and asylum seekers,
all living in poverty and suffering from climate change.
May we remember; may they know your provision through us.

Thank you for all, profoundly known and loved, who enrich our lives every day.

Lord, we know You hear our cries and complaints. You give us strength. However we feel You will never leave us, never forget us.

Thank You, Lord.

AMEN

Hymn: stf 94 To God be the glory

Blessing:

Lord in our weakness be our strength,
in our pain be our comfort,
in our despair be our hope,
in our joys be our fulfilment,
in our coming and our going be our way,
be our guide and be our Lord. **Amen**