



# SUNDAY WORSHIP SURVIVAL KIT

## THE WORKINGS OF CREATION

OCTOBER – NOVEMBER

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HIGH LITTLETON · FARRINGTON · PAULTON



**Welcome to the October and November service booklet. This set of services will take us through a number of festivals including Harvest, Remembrance and All Souls, and lead us up to Advent.**

**We have journeyed through Romans and established our identity as beloved children of God, and our attitude towards life as we go out into the world. That we are free to love and give, knowing that God will be with us in both our triumphs and our failures.**

**However in doing this we have seen that Jesus was pointing to an understanding of creation that turns much of the values of our social systems and society on their head.**

**This next series of sermons will help us to explore the workings of creation that Jesus points to and how this can influence our thoughts and actions in our daily lives.**

**I pray that we will be able to continue to grow and learn in our faith together and to show our love for God and for our community as we share the good news.**

**Every blessing**

**Adam**

# Sunday 4 October 2020

## Greeting:

The Lord be with you

## Gathering Prayer:

Gracious God,

you call us to fullness of life:  
deliver us from unbelief and banish our anxieties  
with the liberating love of Jesus Christ our Lord

Amen

## Readings:

Exodus 20.1-4, 7-9, 12-20, Psalm 19, Philippians 3.4b-14, Matthew 21.33-end

## Thoughts for today:

For this new series we will be looking at the scope and scale of God's plan, the vastness of creation, and the closeness of Jesus and the Spirit.

We have seen in the story of both Joseph and Moses in Egypt the way that God can work on a vast scale, changing the course of empires and fortunes, but also with close intimacy as he hears people's cries for help and speaks personally to individuals as He calls them out to serve Him.

I believe that the whole journey of the people of God in the Old Testament can be regarded as a journey with God where he tries to communicate the workings of the world to humanity so that they might comprehend the events of Jesus as God repairs the damage that they have done to this relationship.

In the reading this week Israel is in the wilderness, having been led out of Egypt, through the red sea and out into the desert. Here God sustains them in spite of their grumbling and complaints, and as a people they start learning to trust and rely on God for their needs.

Now that this relationship is being established, God speaks to Moses on the top of Mount Sinai and gives him the laws by which the people could live in this relationship, to be God's treasured possession. He expresses both personal love and care and through the shock and awe of clouds and lightning.

The laws God gives are to govern both their relationship with God and with each other to live in harmony with the order of the world. All of the emphases of these commands is, at heart, to encourage turning to God, not relying on your own strength or needing to hoard or hold back.

Jesus' parable is an illustration of the struggle with God as we attempt to take control of the world and its resources, all given by God in the first place, and acting with anger and violence as God tries to turn us back towards Him.

Our attitude should always try to emulate Paul's, that life is not about acquisition, or status, but that all we have, all that ends with us, is loss. It is only when we turn to God, acknowledging Him as the provider, the author, the creator, that we then find our own place within creation, that of beloved and cared for children, God's treasured possession.

# 11 October 2020

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

God, our judge and saviour,

teach us to be open to your truth and to trust in your love,  
that we may live each day with confidence in the salvation which is given  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Exodus 32.1-14, Psalm 106.1-6, 19-23, Philippians 4.1-9, Matthew 22.1-14

## Thoughts for today:

This week sees another example of both God's generosity and challenge as Jesus tells the parable of the guests at the wedding banquet. This parable is a direct challenge to the embedded religious sensibility that Jesus encountered in His time, but is also a side of human nature that we should all be wary of.

The generosity of God is shown in the constant invitation to be with the host of the banquet. That all this host does is invite wave after wave of people to feast with Him, first to his chosen guests and then to anyone who wishes to come. This is an exposition of what God is doing through Jesus and will through the sending of the Holy Spirit to all people, Jews and Gentiles alike.

However, what this generosity is greeted with is entitled indifference. The religious sensibility has a deceptive way of placing the religion in control of God, rather than the truth of a free and wild God who comes to us. Or perceived control of God, like our perception of the world, causes us to think that we can pick and choose our relationship. That we can dictate the terms and the timing.

But God's warnings about this religious idolatry are stark. Refusing to take up this invitation, or not respecting it, yields that same wrath and severed relationship that we see when God gives the law to Moses and finds that even as this invitation is being given the people are busy forging their own idol and worshiping it for saving them.

This defining moment in the life of Israel, reflected in the wedding guests who reject the invitation, is again a reflection of our own personal struggles to live in the world that God has made for us. Our tendency is always towards making the world in our image, rather than allowing ourselves to be the image bearers of God that we were intended to be. And in so doing, we again destroy our relationship with God, tearing up the invitation to the feast.

However, this is not the end of the story for Israel or for us. The wrath of the host, and of God at Israel's idolatry are real, but so is His compassion and love. The parables are necessary, like the clouds and lightning, that God not be domesticated, not taken for granted or thought to be controlled. The danger of our destruction is all too real, but so is the hope of our salvation.

Here Moses is the shadow of the coming of Jesus as he stands before God and saves his people by standing in the gap, appealing to God's own promises and ordering of creation. And in the crucifixion Jesus steps in for all the people in their disobedience, for you, for me, knowing in our heart that we would be found out as imposters among the guests even if we made it in. Jesus clothes us in righteousness the we may join Him and feast with His father in heaven.

# Sunday 18 October 2020

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Faithful Lord,

whose steadfast love never ceases and whose mercies never come to an end:  
grant us the grace to trust you and to receive the gifts of your love,  
new every morning,

in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

## Readings:

Exodus 33.12-end, Psalm 99, 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10, Matthew 22.15-22

## Thoughts for today:

In our new testament reading this week Jesus is again challenged by the religious leaders of His time to try and trap him into saying something that can be used against him. But what Jesus demonstrates instead is both our tendency towards idols and a further glimpse of the workings of the world that challenge, undermine and upturn our human structures.

The particular plot this time is to challenge Jesus to rebel in human terms by refusing to pay taxes to Caesar. But Jesus' response amazes His listeners by changing the whole notion of what has value and how it can be used. His question to the religious leaders is 'whose name and image are on this'. Jesus is referring to the coin, which bears the name and image of Cesar to give it power and authority as currency. But the allusion is to the concept of 'imago dei'

This is the idea that we as humans are made in the image of God, that we have both an emotional and spiritual commonality with God. Jesus is pointing out that in the same way that the Roman money is given value by bearing the mark of Caesar, we are given

infinite value by bearing the image of God. So we can happily give Caesar his coins back, tokens of human arrogance that point to idols, and give to God what is God's, our whole selves made in his image.

This is why Paul calls on his fellow Christians to imitate the Lord, because that is how we are made and it is the fulfilment of our place in creation. Not to try and be God, but to be His ambassador in the world and to reflect His image.

We must always remember that we will only be shadows of this image. As God explains to Moses when he asks to see God face to face. It is too much for us, too great, too powerful. We are made in his image, but the true vision for God is far beyond our capacity. God says that you will only be able to glimpse me as I pass by.

And this is still the case with us. As we witness to God's love in the world, as we imitate the Lord, we give ourselves back to God, and get glimpses of His glory.

# Sunday 25 October 2020

## Greeting:

The Lord be with you

## Gathering Prayer:

Merciful God,

teach us to be faithful in change and uncertainty, that trusting in your word and obeying your will we may enter the unfailing joy of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

## Readings:

Nehemiah 8.1-4a [5-6] 8-12, Psalm 119.9-16, Colossians 3.12-17, Matthew 24.30-35

## Thoughts for today:

This week is Bible Sunday when we reflect and give thanks for the fact that we have access to the Bible. In the old testament reading this week sees the moment in the history of Israel, when after a period in exile and the destruction of the temple, the law is read again for the first time.

This is a moment of both reverence and fear for the people of God as they simultaneously realise the closeness of their relationship with God and the great distance that they have fallen away. This is maybe the feeling that we should all have if we are to start to comprehend what it is to have the word of God in our hands. That we read with reverence, with trembling fear, but then also with hope, reassurance and love and the word of God acts upon us.

To have a Bible is something to be celebrated for many reasons. It is a celebration of liberty and human freedom as it was a long road to wrestle this text from the hands of those who would seek to contain and control it. That each person is free to read and interpret the Bible it a precious new chapter in human history, not even fully written yet, as many people still do not have this opportunity. We should seek to support the work of organisations such as the Bible Society who continue the project of making the Bible available to all people.

We also celebrate the Bible because it comes to us as a library of texts that can tell us about the history of our faith. In particular the great story of God's love for His creation and the long journey that brought about the restoration of our relationship and adoption as His children.

We celebrate the Bible because it contains wisdom and guidance, encouragement and warnings, that are food for the soul and nourishment for the spirit in a world that constantly challenges you with conflicting values. It provides a counter-narrative to the tales of a world defined by money, power, greed and strength, where love and mercy have the final word.

But most of all we celebrate the Bible because of how God chooses to use it. The Bible is a book written by humans, using human language, translated and interpreted by other humans, with all the flaws and problems this entails. But God, as the Holy Spirit is able to choose to work through this, and in spite of this, to bring revelation to us. That the Bible, a bundle of paper or an image on a screen, can and does become God's revelation, is a beautiful gift that we can marvel at and rejoice in.

However, the most crucial thing that we celebrate is the Word of God that the Bible describes. For whilst we have a book, and we celebrate this and are thankful for all its glorious and subversive content. God did not send a book, He sent His son to be the living word, the word of God is not a book but a person, Jesus is the word of God. It is His living, dying and rising again that we truly celebrate today and every day, because through this the word can dwell in us and we in Him, until He comes again in Glory.

# Sunday 1 November 2020

## Greeting:

The Lord be with you

## Gathering Prayer:

God of holiness, your glory is proclaimed in every age:  
as we rejoice in the faith of your saints, inspire us to follow their example  
with boldness and joy;

through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

## Readings:

Daniel 7.1-3, 15-18, Psalm 149, Ephesians 1.11, Luke 6.20-31- beatitudes

## Thoughts for today:

The theme that we have been exploring in this series is in understanding how God's creation 'works', which is not the same, or in fact is the reverse of the world we are born into. God often speaks of this in terms of kingdoms, that there is a kingdom of heaven that sits in opposition to human or other spiritual kingdoms. By this I mean either power structures we create, or other forces that are in conflict with God.

Another way of describing this in more contemporary language may be 'mindset' or possibly 'world' view. This is to understand that we see and think about the world in a particular way that may make sense on its own limited terms, but does not necessarily represent a true picture.

In Daniel's dream he describes these warring world views as kingdoms that are battling against each other each one trying to be supreme. This is because we cannot hold competing world views, it goes against the nature of truth to have it as something that is contested. But in Daniel's dream we see that God's kingdom is ultimately victorious over these other competing powers.

But how does this great battle of truth, world view and kingdom play out? What is the nature of God's creation that can bring a truth that overturns every other kingdom.

The beatitudes, where Jesus blesses the last, least and lowest in society is an illustration of this other kingdom. It is a worldview that honours mercy over greed, self-sacrifice over self defence, and where those who are marginalized but the power structures of this world are held up as precious beloved children.

The kingdom of God is different because it loves without limits and its abundance reveals the lie of value in all things that seek to limit love and make it exclusive.

But this battle of kingdoms still puts us at odds with the pretenders to the throne. With idols of money and power that seek to draw us into a false kingdom where love and grace must not be free. This conflict is uncomfortable and can draw persecution as it exposes the idols and points to the true nature of a creation stemming from overflowing love.

And as followers of Christ, because of his abundant love and sacrifice on our behalf we have become His children. And as His children we can live in this truth, following the examples of those faithful saints who have gone before us and laying a path for those that may come after. With the ultimate knowledge that we point to Christ as they did, the one who fulfilled the law, secured our adoption and so also our inheritance of living in loving relationship with God forever.

# Sunday 8 November 2020

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

God, our refuge and strength, bring near the day when wars shall cease and poverty and pain shall end, that earth may know the peace of heaven through Jesus Christ our Lord

**Amen**

## Readings:

Wisdom of Solomon 6.12-16, Amos 5.18-24, Psalm 70, 1 Thessalonians 4.13-end, Matthew 25.1-13

## Thoughts for today:

What is it to be wise? To have wisdom? It's not to be in possession of knowledge necessarily. There are two things that the old testament has to say about the beginning of wisdom. The first is that wisdom begins with a desire to be instructed, not with knowing, but with a willingness to learn. The second is that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

I used to find the notion of fear of the Lord quite troubling. For a religion that proclaims a god of love it's an unusual position to take. But if you believe in the existence of an all powerful, all knowing God who judges you then, knowing how lost our cause is, fear is the most logical response. It is from this place that a relationship can build as you understand the extent of God's mercy, grace and self sacrifice.

Today we are remembering those who have died in war, and particularly in the two great wars that our world has seen. In remembering their sacrifice we open up the possibility of honouring their memories. But that possibility only becomes a real honouring if we allow ourselves to begin in wisdom by being open to instruction, to learning from that sacrifice so that it is not made in vain. We do not remember this sacrifice so that it can be repeated again and again, but so that it will never be

necessary again as we have seen where the path of greed, hatred, nationalism and alienation of others can lead.

In this way this act of remembrance echoes the remembrance that we hold every Sunday as, through bread and wine, we recall Jesus' sacrifice once for all upon the cross. This is the sacrifice that is our model for love, that is our knowledge of God as we move from fear into awe and wonder at the extent of this love. This is the sacrifice that gives us the hope that those who have fallen will be with us in God's family for eternity,

We do not know what the future holds, the time that God will choose to roll up the scroll of history, to bring us all into a new heaven and new earth. But wisdom instructs us that there will be turbulence and conflict, that the principalities and powers of this world will continue to grasp for control, spreading lies, hatred and fear in people's hearts. But will keep the light of love shining so that people can know that there is hope, and that the great price that was paid for their freedom was made to bring in a kingdom of peace, that we would make war no more. Lest we forget, both the sacrifice of our brothers and sisters, and the ultimate sacrifice that God made to secure us for Himself, we perform these acts of remembrance, we give thanks, and we pray for peace.

# Sunday 15 November 2020

## Greeting:

The Lord be with you

## Gathering Prayer:

Heavenly Lord, you long for the world's salvation:  
stir us from apathy, restrain us from excess and revive in us new hope  
that all creation will one day be healed

in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

## Readings:

Zephaniah 1.7, 12-end, Psalm 90.1-8 [9-11] 12, 1 Thessalonians 5.1-11, Matthew 25.14-30

## Thoughts for today:

As we approach advent and the unveiling of God's plan to save creation we look again at trying to understand our position in the great workings of the universe. This all can sound very big and complicated, but actually God makes it very simple for us, life becomes complicated when we make it that way by trying to be God, or make gods for ourselves. The approach of advent is the time for considering the approach of God, that He is coming and that this thought should be the stirring and motivating factor for all that we are doing.

This should not be a fearful thing, in the vein of 'Jesus is coming, look busy!'. But actually the approach of a loving parent to a child is a time of joy and excitement. The note of caution that we see both in our Old and New Testament readings comes from the fact that we are constantly turning away from God and therefore fear His coming as though we were back in the garden, cowering because we had just realised our nakedness. We become aware of our childlike vulnerability as we realise that all our silver and gold, chunks of metal and pieces of paper that we hold so dear, cannot save us after all.

But this is not who we are, lost in the garden cowering from God, we need to stay awake to the nature of the world, but also to our own identity. We are children of light, God's beloved, we don't need to hide from this love but remember that we are showered with it. We can let this love be our armour and our shield in a world full of the slings and arrows of the enemy.

From this position of safety, we are then free not to hoard what we have and live in fear, but to be lavish and extravagant with the gifts that God entrusts to us.

That is the greatest irony of our hoarding, that God's creation was here before us and will be here after us. We tie ourselves in knots trying to hold on to it, but it was never ours to have. Our place in creation is just to reflect God, by giving in love, and through this, seeing love multiply in the world.

# Sunday 22 November 2020

## Greeting:

**The Lord be with you**

## Gathering Prayer:

Christ the King God the Father, help us to hear the call of Christ the King and to follow in his service, whose kingdom has no end; for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, one glory

**Amen**

## Readings:

Ezekiel 34.11-16, 20-24, Psalm 95.1-7, Ephesians 1.15-end, Matthew 25.31-end

## Thoughts for today:

This is now the final week of our series on the working of creation and the ultimate perspective we are given is framed by the festival of Christ the king. This is again the anticipation of God entering into the world of God revealing the nature of creation as he is enthroned as its Lord, entering His temple.

But as we know God's kingdom is not like an earthly kingdom, in need of all the symbolism of power. The trappings of gold and silver, of fine clothes and soft living, these are not required for God to show His power and authority in the world. In fact, for God to use these things would be to take away from Himself. We only need these tokens of power, or strength or security because we don't feel that we are enough.

But God has shown His power and authority over all of creation, that He is Lord of all, and therefore He can come into the world without any of this, being born among the least and the lowest.

But even more than this, we can look to Jesus' coronation, His crowning as king, His raising up, is the moment where He lays down His life to save us.

The celebration of Christ the King is therefore the celebration of God's subversion of all our idols and false values, as what God institutes is the rule and reign of self sacrificial love in the world.

And this rule is then embodied in Jesus' call to act in the world as servants of Him, saying that wherever we serve those who are excluded, imprisoned, marginalised, lost or alone, then we are serving Him. That to be with Jesus in His kingdom is to show love for those who are furthest from the trappings of power. For whatever we do to the least of these, we do Him.