

## Worship at Home – 01 August 2021

**Call to worship: Isaiah 55:1-2** says

<sup>1</sup>“Is anyone thirsty?

Come and drink—

even if you have no money!

Come, take your choice of wine or milk—

it’s all free!

<sup>2</sup> Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength?

Why pay for food that does you no good?

Listen to me, and you will eat what is good.

You will enjoy the finest food.

One of the joys of preparing the Service at Home is that you can look at resources that are not often used in church. Below is a hymn I remember from my youth! And, when looking back on it, I was surprised to find that it was written by Isaac Watts, possibly the greatest hymn-writer of his generation. Let’s use the words below and the words of Isaiah above, as a reminder that we are invited to know the presence of almighty God and that worship draws us deeper into that place.

1 Come, we that love the Lord,  
and let our joys be known.  
Join in a song with sweet accord,  
join in a song with sweet accord,  
and thus surround the throne,  
and thus surround the throne.

Refrain:

We’re marching to Zion,  
beautiful, beautiful Zion.

We’re marching upward to Zion,  
the beautiful city of God.

2 Let those refuse to sing  
That never knew our God;  
But children of the heavenly King  
But children of the heavenly King  
May speak their joys abroad  
May speak their joys abroad [Refrain]

3 The hill of Zion yields  
a thousand sacred sweets,  
before we reach the heav’nly fields,  
before we reach the heav’nly fields,  
or walk the golden streets,  
or walk the golden streets. [Refrain]

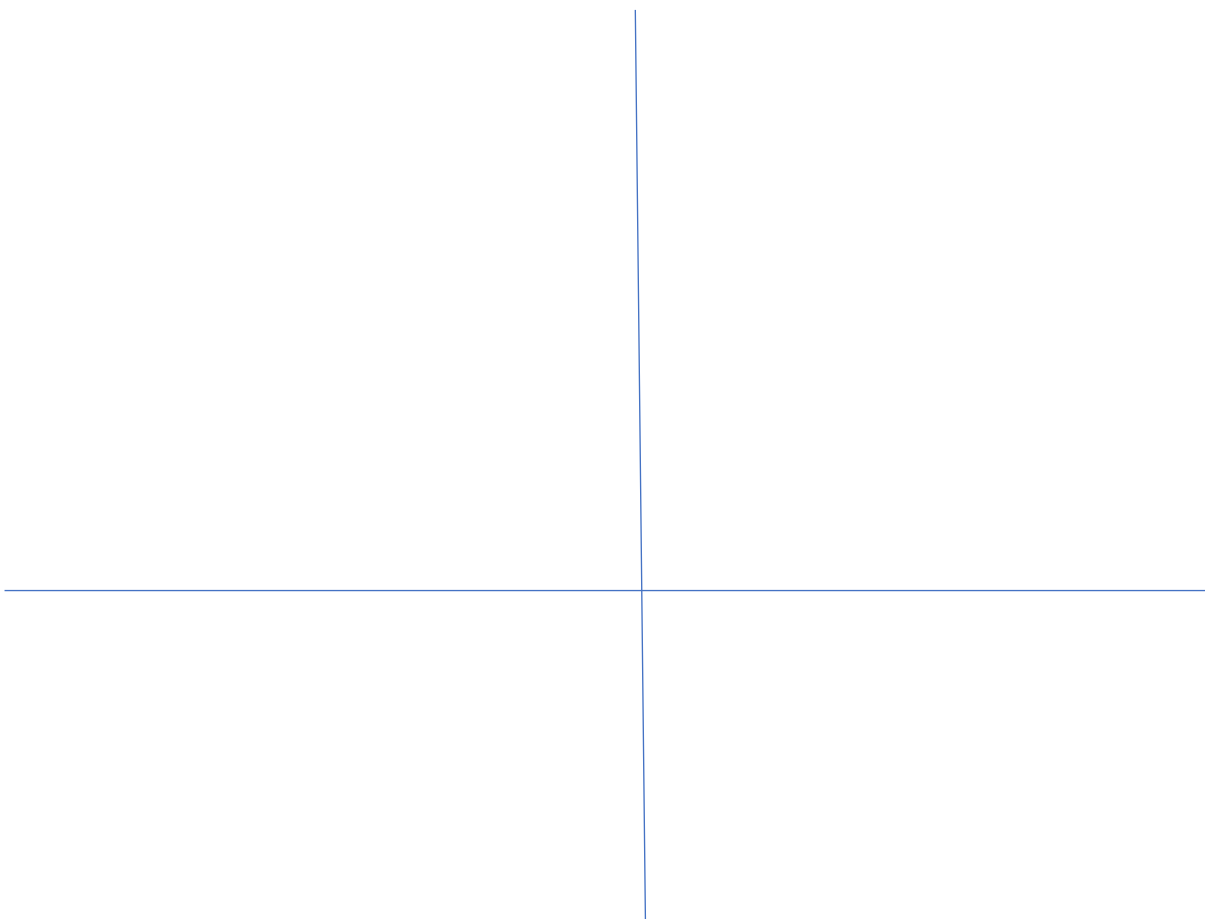
4 Then let our songs abound,  
and ev’ry tear be dry.  
We’re marching thro’ Immanuel’s  
ground,  
we’re marching thro’ Immanuel’s  
ground,  
to fairer worlds on high,  
to fairer worlds on high. [Refrain]

5 There we shall see his face,  
And never, never sin;  
From there the rivers of his grace,  
From there the rivers of his grace,  
Drink endless pleasures in,  
Drink endless pleasures in. [Refrain]

**An opening prayer:** Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for this new day and your promise to us to make all things new, both here and in eternity. Though we may be on our own, we join with those around the world who today will worship you; some in large gatherings, others on their own or in small numbers; some in comfort and others in prison or house arrest because of their faith. We remember, Lord, that we are a worldwide family, seeking to honour and worship you. And as part of that family, we find that when we are in the presence of your light, we need to seek your forgiveness and so we do that now, asking that you forgive us and cleanse us again. Amen  
Please use the words of **The Lord's Prayer** at this point.

**A Psalm to read:** One of the blessings of Covid-19 for me has been the need to find other ways of worship in church. Being unable to sing is quite restricting so we have to be resourceful and find other means. The Psalms were Jesus' prayer book and are a great source of encouragement. I particularly love the group of Psalms known as the Songs of Ascent, songs which the pilgrims sang as they made their way to Jerusalem and **Psalm 121** is one of those. As you read it through now meditate on how it applies to your situation and allow the Lord to speak to you. Try reading the psalm from the New Living Translation if you have it.

**Prayers for others.** I know that those of you who do this service each week have seen this before, but these are always good things to pray for! Below are 4 images; for the first 3 write down on the paper 3 or 4 things that you would like to pray related to that particular image (the silhouette represents you!). The fourth, the question mark, is for you to select one thing you would really like to pray for that isn't in any of the other 3 categories.





**Today's reading is Mark 4:35-41, the stilling of the storm**

**Meditation:** This passage, although it looks close to the beginning of the gospel is  $\frac{1}{4}$  way through! Mark's stories (parables, dialogue, etc) tend to come thick and fast and, many would agree, don't necessarily get recorded in the order they happened; but it looks as though chapter 4 was probably all on the same day. Verse 1 commences: "Again Jesus began to teach by the lake (Galilee, almost certainly near Capernaum) ...", a large crowd gathered so Jesus sat in a boat and taught ... And what was Jesus teaching about? The parables Mark includes here are: the sower, a lamp on a stand, the growing seed and the mustard seed – all of these about the Kingdom of God – Jesus' favourite theme. I would like to suggest that the passage we read was also about announcing the Kingdom of God.

So, what does Mark tell us about the scene?

- It was in the evening
- There were other boats with them
- Jesus was asleep on a cushion in the back of the boat
- There was a storm
- The disciples were concerned – even cross – "Don't you care?"
- Jesus commanded the wind and the waves
- Jesus rebuked the disciples' lack of faith
- Who is this man???

Chapter 5 tells us that the next day (it would seem) they were in the region of the Gerasenes. Galilee, about 21 miles long and 8 miles wide. Capernaum to Gergesa was about 7 miles. It was in the evening, possibly dark, storms brought clouds so they could not see the sky to navigate so it could be very scary. Galilee was noted for sudden winds and storms. Many cars (nowadays!) have been caught out in beach side car parks alongside Galilee by massive waves.

For his Jewish readership, Mark's story would have had **echoes of Jonah or Israel coming out of Egypt** and God being the creator of the raging seas. They may have thought of these passages from the psalms:

Psalms 65:6-7 God ...who formed the mountains by your power, having armed yourself with strength, who stilled the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations.

Psalms 93:3-4 The seas have lifted up, Lord, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea— the Lord on high is mighty.

You can find similar elsewhere.

Israel didn't have a strong history as a sea-going nation – those using boats were mainly fishermen, mainly on Galilee, a lake. Daniel describes the sea as a place for monsters like leviathan.

So, the stilling of the waves is a demonstration of the Kingdom of God, what Mark has been writing about in previous pages and one of Jesus' main themes; God's sovereign power is being unleashed, the kingdom is at hand.

This is a picture of what is to follow – God's agent (Jesus) defeating the forces of chaos and darkness in the cross and the peace and calm is a picture of what is to follow; the storm is stilled; the tomb is empty and is further exemplified by the restoration of the demon-possessed man in the Gerasene area that Mark leads into in chapter 5. Maybe you are in a storm. Are you at peace or in the eye of a hurricane? Jesus brings calm in the storm and that can be true for us too.

If you spoke to someone on the street about these events today, they may well say that they are not "reasonable". My answer to them would be – "no, they aren't", and they would not have been thought of as "reasonable" then. Their reaction had been: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" They were sceptical, as many of us may have been in the past and many out on the street may be today. Indeed, one could argue that, with this gospel being the first to be written (55-60AD) there would be several people still alive who could, if this were untrue, refute it and challenge Mark's credibility for including it. And in any case, this is Jesus who, as part of the Godhead that established the natural rules that govern the universe so if anyone had the right to "break" or "contravene" those rules it was Jesus! Miracles, by definition, are rare, yet Jesus had the sovereign right to work miraculously. His purpose, after all was to announce the kingdom of God to those he was ministering to.

The start and end of Jesus' life were marked by the miraculous: the incarnation, the resurrection and finally the ascension – all defying natural laws and these have all been

challenged since the enlightenment yet for us who believe, are all part of the (in)credible Christian message.

But to close, we must go back to the disciples in the storm because there is a conundrum here: they were all on a boat with Jesus who, presumably because he had been teaching and interacting with people for most of the day, was asleep. They saw Jesus asleep, but they were worried for their lives, so they woke him and said: "Don't you care if we drown?" Why did they wake him? Because they knew he could do something!!! And in the account we have here, Jesus first rebukes the wind and the waves, the storm calms, THEN he rebukes his disciples for fear and lack of faith. I wonder what Jesus expected his disciples to do. Perhaps rebuke the wind and waves themselves? He was certainly challenging them to demonstrate greater faith. And that challenge comes to us too.

What storm is your boat in right now? We not infrequently find ourselves in positions of being in storms in life, maybe not literal storms but certainly figurative ones, facing difficult situations, even death. I think the first thing we need to recognise is that Jesus is in the "boat" with us. Pete Greig in "God on mute" says that, when we pray, we often hope or expect the Lord to "airlift" us out of our situation whereas, he more often "parachutes in" to be with us in it. Prayer and miracles prove to be a conundrum for us too. As I said, by definition, miracles are unusual. That does not mean they do not happen or that we do not pray for them, we should and do. Yet more often, the Lord is with us in the storm and brings his peace, comfort and counsel. We are not promised a life of continual success, it is and should be sufficient that Christ is with us. Paul exhorted the Philippians (and us) us to "rejoice in the Lord" – unconditional of the outcome we may hope or pray for. And yet we do have to come back to the passage and join with the disciples in their amazement and ask: "Who is this man?..." Maybe today you could spend a few minutes pondering that question.

Let's use the words of the following hymn to finish:

1 When peace like a river attendeth my way,  
when sorrows like sea billows roll;  
whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say,  
"It is well, it is well with my soul."

Refrain:  
It is well with my soul;  
it is well, it is well with my soul.

2 Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
let this blest assurance control:

that Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
and has shed his own blood for my soul.  
Refrain

3 My sin oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
my sin, not in part, but the whole,  
is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;  
praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! Refrain

4 O Lord, haste the day when my faith  
shall be sight,  
the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
the trump shall resound and the Lord

shall descend;  
even so, it is well with my soul.  
Refrain

**A closing prayer:** Gracious Father, give me diligence to seek you and wisdom to find you thtoday and throughout the week ahead. May my ears hear your voice, my eyes see your goodness and my tongue proclaim your name as I commit my life to pleasing you. Amen (Benedict of Nursia; adapted)