

Celebration Service Transcript

15th November 2020

Service Leader & Preacher: Mark Reid

Sorry, reports are on video only

Hello and welcome to our annual Celebration Service for 2020. This would normally be our official AGM as well but as it's a recorded service we had the AGM last Tuesday with the Church Meeting, leaving all the rest of our AGM stuff for this morning. See this as AGM part 2. We are going to review the past year in the first part of the service and then in the second I shall take us through what next year seems to bring, or at least the challenges and opportunities we can see at the moment. And we're going to glorify God for what He's done and what He's going to do.

So let's start by exalting our great God together with the words of Psalm 100. As is customary, I'll say the white words and we all say the yellow italics.

PSALM 100

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

Worship the LORD with gladness;

Come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Let's pray

Father

We thank You for bringing us through the last 12 months of what has been an exceptionally unusual and often difficult year. It's been a year of learning new things and having to stop areas of ministry we have been involved with for many years. We pray that today we'll be able to see how you have been moving amongst us through all the changes and difficulties. In Christ we have so much to rejoice about because Your love and mercy reaches us in all situations of life. We are the sheep of Your pasture, Your people. Help us to affirm that as we sing Your praises and give testimony to Your works.

We ask this in Jesus' name,

Amen.

READING: Psalm 139:1-18

LOOKING FORWARD – CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This is the part in the service where we look forward to all the exciting things we are looking forward to over the next few months and the coming year. And it's at this point we are at a place where in our generation we haven't been before. We can't say for certain just how things are going to be over the next few months because of the Covid pandemic. All we can say with the news about a vaccine this week, that we are at the beginning of the end, but there are still months ahead of doing things differently.

Planning as a church has always fallen into two categories, the regular week to week or seasonal activities that come around on a regular basis and then special activities and services which we usually plan with a few months or longer of notice. The church year gives us a comfortable regularity, and very uncomfortable now it's gone.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, all that has been swept away and we are having to arrange things in a way we have never done so before, we find that we can't plan much beyond a couple of months and there are some activities we can't or don't have the people resources to run, so they have to stay closed. Sadly this has been the case for seven months now and are likely to be the case into the spring. As we know, there seems now to be light at the tunnel with the possibility of a successful vaccine – that's an answer to prayer in itself!

We're not the only church in this situation. What can we learn and take forward with us? I think Psalm 139 helps us because it grounds us back with the One whose people we are and whose church we are and I'm going to share what the message for us today is under three headings.

God is still here
God's work is still here
God's blessings are still here

God is still here

Let me read again verses 7 to 12

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, 'Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,' even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Wherever we are, whatever we are doing, God is there. He holds our hands and guides us and won't let go. He stops darkness overcoming us. This is our God!

So whatever darkness there seems through lockdown, the loss of the familiar because of Covid, and the fear and uncertainty it has brought, that isn't of God. After all, He isn't responsible for the bug – we are. It's human sinfulness: greed, mismanagement of the Earth, failing to help one another and the rest which has brought this on.

As a people, as a church the Spirit is still there, He still leads. All we need to do is hold His hand and trust Him.

God's work is still here

Let's read on in Verses 13 to 16

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the

depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

I would normally make a completely different set of points from these amazing verses. We have a God who has a will and way for us now as we read earlier, but He's a God whose purposes for us started from our beginning and goes to the end of our lives.

One of the things Covid has done is rock us out of our complacency. Is the sum total of our faith what we had? If it was, then we *would* feel bereft. Yet the sum total of our spiritual life never was in any of that – it was always in Christ. So, what do we do to ground ourselves again?

The answer: turn to the only One who makes sense of any of it – the Holy Spirit. And what do we find? He knew what was going to happen and He has purposes for us wherever we find ourselves in life – if we would only allow Him to take us by the hand and lead us through darkness to walk in His light. Now is the time to trust, before the opportunity to slip back into complacency presents itself a few months hence.

What did we do as a church when what we knew was taken away? We did two things – we sought God, and worked with all the gifts and opportunities we had to produce a pattern of worship, service and mission that matched our capabilities and remarkably, plugged us into where society is right now in terms of how people communicate and express themselves. God has used our own human calamity to drag the church kicking and screaming into the 21st century!

I saw this quote on Twitter this week. It read something like this: *It is Christ who builds the church, not us. The pandemic is a reminder that we are reliant on the Spirit, not on ourselves or our traditions.*

As we look at the opportunities that will present to us in the coming months, let's use the same approach, seeking to let the Spirit take us by the hand and lead us, and look to how He wants us to use our abilities and capabilities to rebuild our fellowship in a new way, that may look a little like what we had before, but harking to some of the values and ways we learnt over the last 6 months. Let's not go back to the 20th century – it wasn't that good anyway!

God's blessings are still here

Which brings us to the beginning of the reading – verses 1 to 6

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

There is one sense in which God knows us by virtue of being human beings, but we know Him specially as His people through our personal faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. These are the words of a man who wasn't just know of God, but who knew God. It's a song of a man who knew He was loved of God and blessed of God.

The church is just as close to God as the day it closed its doors, either the first or second time. Without physical fellowship, we sometimes didn't feel that did we? And it was a pleasure when we could even though we all looked as though we were in a bank robbers convention. God didn't love us any less and hasn't desired to use us less, or bless us less because we couldn't do things as we wanted. Now we've had to do things as He has given us opportunity do so. Have we grown through that? We've had every opportunity to! To do something different. To do less and spend more time in His presence. To serve in those simple ways that probably made a huge impact for someone – that phone call, the shopping trip, time spent in the park or whatever. It doesn't need services and events and church activities to be blessed and be a blessing. We've still got a few months more of this. Don't sit on your hands waiting for the old stuff to come back, particularly as it might not. Use the opportunities God gives you, however small to be a blessing and be blessed through it. Grow through the difference.

And that's where I'll stop. There are a whole load of things we are going to do in the next couple of months – differently – but first let's pray together.

Father

We thank you for the past few months as we have been forced to do things in new ways, different ways. We lift before you all those in the fellowship that found the loss of the familiar and the loss of personal fellowship difficult, particularly those with mental health issues, those isolated by ill-health and those without access to the internet. Give them the patience we pray as we continue to be disrupted by limited ability to meet in physical activities. Be close to them in a special way and bring to them the contacts and friendships that will build them up. Please give them hope as we see light at the end of the tunnel. Thank you for the answered prayer, that an effective vaccine had now been developed that exceeds expectation.

For those of us who found it easier to adapt, please help us to see which of the things we have learnt that are new or different should be adapted and used as things return to something nearer to what we. Help us as a church to see where we were complacent in the past and relied on tradition and regularity rather than allows ourselves to be led by Your Spirit, to walk hand in hand with you. The world needs Jesus, we need Jesus – help us to be formed into a church fit for ministry in the 21st century; in the post coronavirus world.

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen

FORTHCOMING EVENTS (list below)

Prayer

Father

As we lift this programme up before you, we pray that in its difference this year that Your Spirit may move in our hearts through it, to reveal new things, different things about You and what it meant for Your dear Son to become a human being, to be the Light that shines into the darkness of humanity.

Save us Lord from beings so comfortable that we fail to see You. May Your Spirit lead us through the present darkness, that we may be and act like the people of the light, that men and women may see Your truth in us and be drawn to Jesus and find forgiveness faith and hop ein Him.

We as this in Jesus precious name.

Amen.

For all that God can do within us,
For all that God can do without us,

Thanks be to God.

For all in whom Christ lived before us,
For all in whom Christ lives beside us,

Thanks be to God.

For all the Spirit wants to bring us,
For where the Spirit wants to send us,

Thanks be to God.

Listen...Christ has promised to be with us in the world as in our worship.

Amen, we go to meet Him

Forthcoming Events 2020-21

Leadership Team Meetings 2021

5th Jan, 2nd Feb, 2nd Mar, 3rd Apr, 4th May, 1st Jun,
6th July, 3rd Aug, 7th Sep, 5th Oct, 2nd Nov, 7th Dec

Church Meetings 2021

12th Jan, 9th Mar, 11th May, 13th Jul, 14th Sep,
9th Nov (Date of AGM 21st)

Prayer Meetings

5th December 2020, 2nd Jan, 6th Feb, 6th Mar, 3rd Apr, 1st May, 5th June, 3rd July, 7th Aug, 4th Sep, 2nd
Oct, 6th Nov, 4th Dec

Advent Course

Mondays 23rd Nov to 21st Dec (5 Sessions) 7-30pm on Zoom

Christmas Services 2020

At church and online

Sunday 13th December

10-30am Nativity Service

Sunday 20th December

10-30am Carol Service

Christmas Day

10-30am Christmas Celebration (online only)

30th December

10-30am A Second Helping of Christmas (with J John)

2021

CTF Pilgrimage 23rd January

CTF Unity Service (online) 24th January

Lent Course – watch this space

Mothering Sunday, Easter – watch this space