

Service Transcript

17th July 2022

Welcome, Notices, Birthday Box

Introductory Declaration

Gracious God, we are your church.

May your church be filled with your vision, and clear in our message.

***May your church be a light in the darkness,
and show love in hard places.***

May your church be bold in mission, and motivated by change.

Gracious God, we are your church.

May we be all these things and more.

Amen.

Prayer

Father, as we gather together as you Church this morning, we thank you that we gather as a people loved by you, and whom You have graciously made us part of the body of Christ through faith in Him. We thank You that Your own dear Son was prepared to come amongst the human race and be part of it in order to both bring the presence and power of God amongst us and die for us on the cross of Calvary.

We recognise that although we worship as church now, that later today and for most of next week we will be scattered throughout our local community in our families, jobs, neighbourhood and town. May we be the Church in all the places in which we live and move, bringing Christ into each of them.

May You encourage us this morning as we worship, and may the praises of our mouths and hearts truly reflect our desire to thank You, praise You and service You. May Your Spirit move amongst us as we worship.

We ask this in Jesus' name

Amen.

Introduction to **Frontline Sunday 2: wherever we are.**

Our services is based on LICC's Frontline Sundays series.

GATHERED AND SCATTERED

Last week we started a series of Frontline Sundays, where I suggested that as the Church, a body of people, that we usually associate church with what we are doing right now, but in reality, most of the week we are scattered throughout our community. Irrespective of whether we are gathered or scattered, we are still part of the body of Christ, and we are called to worship, to follow Jesus, to serve Him and to be His witnesses wherever we are. Unless we are hermits (and if we are, what are we doing here?) we will meet others constantly and they won't all be Christians – quite the reverse.

We called these situations frontlines, not because we are at war with these people, but like frontline services, we are here to bring them the presence of Jesus by our actions and words. Here's the definition again.

DEFINITION

Frontlines are the everyday places where we live, work, study, or play and where we're likely to connect with people who aren't Christians.

This week we are going to explore what it means to bring Jesus into our frontline situations and what difference that may make. Here's a video.

Video – Wherever we are

Our frontline places are places where God is, not just because He is everywhere anyway, but we take His presence with us because of the Holy Spirit within us and we are going to explore that more later.

Before we do that, let's remind of who Jesus is and what He brings into the lives of those who will accept Him and follow Him.

1669 You're the word of God the Father

1757 Everyone needs compassion

Prayers

Town Pastors/Festival Pastors

- Please pray for a safe and spiritually productive time for the Festival Pastors at Latitude on 21st to 24th July
- Pray that more Town Pastors and Base Pray-ers may be raised up to allow them to patrol on more than one Saturday a month.
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Felixstowe Carnival

- Pray for Fun and Faith which has family activities and a prayer tent next weekend. Pray that they may have the necessary finances to run it most effectively.

Advertise Pop-Up shops Prayer Meeting

National & International

- Pray for wisdom for our national leaders and parliamentarians in this time of political crisis.
- Continue to pray for an end to the conflict between Ukraine and Russia
- Pray for the people of Ukraine as they grieve for their country, for loved ones lost and for the loss of their livelihoods. Pray that God will comfort them and sustain them.
- Pray for those fleeing Ukraine, that their paths will be clear. Pray that they will find warm welcomes and safe refuge wherever they go. Pray for Ukrainian families now arriving in Felixstowe.
- Tearfund are reporting of a potential tragedy unfolding in East Africa because of crop failure due to drought. Pray that emergency assistance plans will be put in place.

MRBC

- Continue to pray for Walton Parish Nursing: for our Parish Nurses, for the Volunteers, and the activities: Exercise Classes, No Labels, Fizzability. Pray for the clients too.

- Pray that we will know the Lord's presence and guidance as we seek a new Pastor.
- Pray for those experiencing poor health from Covid, Long Covid and other issues. Pray too for those still shielding.
- Do pray for those with health problems during the heatwave this week.

1790 God in my living

Reading

Genesis 28:10-17

10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Harran. 11 When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12 He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 There above it stood the Lord, and he said: "I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." 17 He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Talk

WHERE DO YOU MEET GOD? Church, and particularly the Sunday service has for most denominations been the focus of our meeting together, our worship and our expectation that God's presence will be with us.

In just about every organised global religious tradition is the assumption that we construct buildings and there encounter the spiritual. There are special religious names for them: churches, chapels, temples, mosques, synagogues. Organised Christianity has been no different from other religions. We have church buildings – our holy places where we focus our meeting of God, our fellowship, our service, our mission. And that has been the case right down almost 2000 years. Whereas it's also true that the Israelites also had their most holy place in the Tabernacle and the Temple, where the presence of God was, it's also the teaching of both Testaments that God does not live in places made with hands. Here's what Peter says in Acts 7 quoting Isaiah 66.

48 "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

49 "Heaven is my throne,

and the earth is my footstool.

What kind of house will you build for me?

says the Lord.

Or where will my resting place be?

50 Has not my hand made all these things?

Peter speaks forth a truth he knew, all the Jews of that day knew and certainly what we as Baptists affirm, that God does not reside in buildings, but that He is present both in heaven and on earth. Baptist places of worship as Meeting Houses. We recognise that the church is people and built places where the people could meet and called them what they were. They were not consecrated or especially holy. (Actually, the law forbade Baptists to call our buildings churches right up until the middle of the 19th century. That was probably a good thing as the church in the NT is never a building.) When Baptists from Stoke in Ipswich started a work here in 1802, the temporary structure they met in was known as the Baptist Meeting House. When this permanent building was constructed in 1812, they then called it Walton Chapel (and it retained that name until about 1909 when it was renamed to Walton Baptist Church).

Sadly, like the other denominations, we also succumb to the temptation to equate our buildings with holy places. In one church I was part of, we even called the worship area, the sanctuary.

SCREEN God met Jacob in an ordinary place

Jacob's early life experience of God was part of a blessed family, who were strong and influential. The moved from place to place, usually predictable places where altars had been set up to worship God. His experience of worship had always been blessed around those places.

As we probably know, he was a devious man; he cheated his brother out of his birthright and blessing and had to run. Jacob, the "dodgy geezer" found himself spending the night by himself in a lonely place where he had this amazing "Jacob's ladder" vision. He hadn't been his expectation to meet God there and his reaction was VERSE *"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it." He was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."*

MEETING GOD IN ORDINARY PLACES

Yet in scripture God had encounters with the great and good on both Testaments in ordinary places, not in religious ones. Often they were unexpected places – some very ordinary and others more spectacular:

God met Moses in a burning bush; Elijah in a whisper at the doorway to a cave. Jesus met Zacchaeus up a tree; the woman at the well, about her daily tasks; Peter at his workplace, a beach; Mary Magdalene looked for him in a tomb but found him standing behind her. Most of the encounters we read about in the life of Jesus occur in ordinary, everyday places.

No place excludes divine visits. You have heard many testimonies of places where people have encountered God and followed Jesus: prisons; schools; homes; workplaces; squash courts; pubs; fields etc. Where did you put your faith in Jesus?

We often talk about the when but not the where of our encounters with God. Where? Sometimes it is at a church service or meeting and there's nothing wrong with that. But so,so many people I know discovered Jesus and followed Him in ordinary places. God transforms the ordinary place into a holy place to bring life and hope to human beings. All of us who came to know Christ in ordinary places or who have had experiences of God there are a testimony to that.

In truth, if we took a minute to think about it, most of us were brought up with the teaching that we seek to meet God each day in personal prayer and Bible reading and have an expectation of meeting with God – but sometimes that just doesn't happen in practice.

For most travellers to the the place Jacob spent the night, it was probably just a stopping-off place. Somewhere handy to spend the night safely. But for Jacob this very ordinary place became extraordinary. It was for him a touching point between heaven and earth. Jacob renames the place 'Bethel' which means 'the house of God'.

FRONTLINE DEFINITION SLIDE

Frontline Sundays are here to remind us that God calls us to ordinary places to encounter Him and where others can encounter Him as they encounter us. This is what we mean by frontlines – the ordinary places that are the touching places between God and his world, where men and women may experience something of Him through being with us.

In the video we saw earlier, ordinary places became 'holy' places: for the plumber, it was his customer's house; for the grandma, the front room; for the businesswoman, the office; for the football coach, it was the pitch. When we go to our ordinary places 'in the name of Jesus', they become the touching points between heaven and earth.

So never treat the world away from church buildings as an alien space – it is where God calls us to be witnesses, to reflect His love, to be Jesus in that situation. They are holy places because it's where something of heaven touches earth. We don't often see them like that do we? But we carry the presence of God with us. This is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first letter.

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit - as we are in our frontline places, we know God is there because His presence goes with us.

PRESENCE, PRESSURE, PURPOSE

Rather than making us afraid to speak of Jesus or even just identify ourselves as Christians; it should embolden us as we are part of God's purposes. It also reminds us that as our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, our actions and words should match both as a witness, but as also as worship to the One who is within us, recognising that a holy God has chosen to dwell with us and in us.

Now I have to say, many people feel uncomfortable that I am encouraging them to climb above a parapet and be the presence of God in situations where they are perhaps the only Christian. It may put us under pressure. How do we deal with it?

However inadequate we may feel as we live as people of God scattered in our families, neighbourhoods, workplaces and community, we are reminded that God wants us to be there. Let's go back to our story. If you think inadequate, remember Jacob. He wasn't the model man of God. He was a failure on the run from an angry brother who had vowed to kill him. Yet God is gracious and met him in this dream and assures Jacob that he hasn't finished with him yet: *I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.*"(Genesis 28:15). God want us and calls us to be scattered in our community to carry His presence to men and women who don't know Jesus, whatever our background and situation is. He has a purpose for each of us.

The question then, is the same as last week WHAT ARE MY FRONTLINES? To what holy places has God called me to? To whom am I taking His presence so that heaven touches earth.

JACOB “OWNED” THE PLACE WHERE HE REALISED GOD’S PRESENCE WAS.

Let’s be a people who don’t find out kind of by accident that we are in places that God wants us to be. Let’s seek His guidance and discernment that we may know where our frontlines are. Where are the “holy places” He needs us to be in to bring His presence to those who don’t know Jesus – yet? Jacob realised where he was and marked the place with a stone and made sure he returned there at a later date.

BACK OF CARD

This week we have another freebie for you. It’s to help us identify our frontlines, where the presence of God is. It helps us to mark the spot as it were. It also recognises that the whole idea may put us under pressure, but it also takes us into the realism zone of praying through the situation to show us where God is present in our frontlines and to know His purposes are, that we may then pray realistically for how God is going to move in that situation. God wants to use us to bring Jesus to them that they may believe and follow Him.

TITLE

That is the privilege and joy God wants to give to each of us. He want us to embrace that, to see the lives of people we know to be rescued, changed and be given meaning. Let’s discover how these places are transformed because God is with us.

That can start when we recognise that many of our frontlines are situations where our presence and actions can make difference and this old 60’s song many of us sang at school recognises that.

1604 When I needed a neighbour

PRAYER

Lord of all creation, thank you that
our everyday, ordinary places matter to
you and we make a difference there.

We offer to you the places where
we live, work, study, and play.

May we serve you and bear witness
to you wherever we are this week.

And may we know your presence
with us in these places.

Amen.

Blessing 2465 Now may the peace of the Lord

FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

Read Genesis 28:10-17

1. When God met Jacob, God promised to build a new community that would be a means of blessing to the whole world, through Jacob (v.13–15). It's like God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 (discussed in Frontline Sunday 1). God's promise is still with us. If we see ourselves as people who inherit this blessing, how might it change our perspective on our everyday lives?
2. Look at all the assurances that God gives Jacob in these verses (v13–15). How would they have changed Jacob's understanding of his own life? Take a look at Matthew 28:20 (which sounds very similar). What difference can that make for our lives?
3. Have you ever experienced God's presence in an ordinary and everyday place? What happened?
4. Jacob marked the spot by setting up a stone pillar and pouring oil on it. How could you mark a place in your everyday life to remind you that 'God-encounters' can happen there too?

(For Small Group Leaders) There are more activities listed in the Small Group Booklet.