

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit
SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 25th August 2024

Prepared by Pat Fry and Lisa Ball

Theme: Choosing our pilgrim way

This week's readings are about choices in difficult circumstance, leading us to think about the challenge to find God's way whatever our circumstances.

We will look at the stories of two famous Christians whose anniversaries have occurred this July: the hymnwriter Isaac Watts who was born in July 1674, and the athlete Eric Liddel who won his Olympic gold medal a hundred years ago; and then Lisa will share her thoughts on being a pilgrim at home.

Focus your thoughts by saying the Lord's Prayer, in whatever form or language is appropriate to you, knowing that as you do this you are not alone, for you are joining with Christians throughout the world.

And now with a hymn of praise by Isaac Watts:

StF75: From all that dwell below the skies

<https://youtu.be/ISd4LJ3bJL8>

1 From all that dwell below the skies

let the Creator's praise arise:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Let the Redeemer's name be sung,

through every land, by every tongue:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

2 Eternal are your mercies, Lord;

eternal truth attends your word:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Your praise shall sound from shore to shore,

till suns shall rise and set no more:

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Isaac Watts (1674-1748)

Prayer

Lord God, as we come to you in the bright dawn of a new day, you warm us with your love: we worship you.

Lord God, as we turn to you in the heat of the day, whether we are happily busy, overworked, struggling with pain, or frustrated and bored, we can know you there beside us; we praise you.

As we draw close to you in the quiet times of our lives, you are near to us in the stillness; we praise you for the peace we find in you.

As we come to you at the ending of the day, your light still shines in the darkness, and we rest in you. Amen.

Catherine James Methodist Prayer Handbook altd.

Our first reading comes from the book of Exodus. The Hebrew people had been set free from slavery in Egypt, and led across the desert by Moses, called by God to this task, and still hailed as one of their greatest leaders. But Moses died just before they reached the promised land. Once they are settled in their new land, a very fertile area, their life changes. Instead of a hand to mouth existence travelling across a wilderness, relying on divine provision for daily food and drink, now they must live a settled life as farmers, growing crops to provide food for their families, and having to fight battles with other tribes. A very different life, where they will be tempted to follow the fertility gods of the local area. Joshua challenges them to stay faithful to the God who has provided for their journey.

Bible Reading Joshua 24: 1-2a, 14-18

Our Gospel reading contains a similar challenge, and words from Peter that express the heart of Christian conviction. It comes at the end of John 6, the longest chapter in John's gospel which the lectionary has been exploring for the past few weeks. Some of the teaching in it was completely new and quite bewildering to people at the time, with the result that many of the crowd of initial

followers turned away. They had hopes of Jesus becoming a revolutionary leader, calling them to arms against the Roman oppressors. His words recorded in this chapter were so very different from their expectations.

Gospel Reading John 6: 60-69

Ponder the last two verses

“Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words that give eternal life. And now we know that you are the Holy One who has come from God”

Prayer of confession

Gracious God, we confess that there are times when we are tempted to go a different way; times when it is hard to hold on to faith; times when we are worn down by life, and lose our awareness of your promises; times when we wonder if we should go with the flow of modern life in a consumer society. We ask for your forgiveness and your help to hold on to what we know deep down to be the truth: that you have the words of eternal life. Amen

Hymn StF164 Your words to me are life and health

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ZY_HQmsbQU

- 1 Your words to me are life and health;
they fortify my soul,
enable, guide, and teach my heart
to reach its perfect goal.
- 2 Your words to me are light and truth;
from day to day they show
their wisdom, passing earthly lore,
as in their truth I grow.
- 3 Your words to me are full of joy,
of beauty, peace, and grace;

from them I learn your blessed will,
through them I see your face.

- 4 Your words are perfected in One,
yourself, the living Word;
within my heart your image print
in clearest lines, O Lord.

George Currie Martin (1865-1937)

Two stories of people who made the choice to live out their Christian faith in difficult circumstances

Isaac Watts came from a family who had to face difficult choices. When he was born, his father was in prison in Southampton for attending Congregational worship outside of the official state church, seen then as a criminal offence. He grew up loving writing verse, which his father frowned upon initially. Later his father encouraged him to write hymns based on the psalms but with a New Testament angle to them, in place of the dreary chanting of psalms current at the time.

Young Isaac was clever enough to go to university, but as a nonconformist was not allowed to.

In spite of poor health, he served as a congregational minister in Stoke Newington near London for many years, and wrote some of the best loved hymns in English including Joy to the World and When I survey the wondrous cross.

Eric Liddell was born in China, the son of a Congregational missionary, but educated in Scotland, studying science at Edinburgh university, where he excelled at rugby and athletics. Chosen to represent his country at the 1924 Olympics in the 100 metre sprint, he surprised everyone by refusing to compete in that event as the heats were to be held on Sunday, the Lord's Day. Instead he trained for the 400 metres, not his best event, and then won gold.

What is less well known is that he went on to serve as a missionary in China, first teaching

science in a prestigious school where he argued strongly for making more places available to boys from a poor background, and later as an ordained minister. When the Japanese invaded he sent his family to safety in Canada, but remained serving a poor Chinese community and was taken prisoner. In the prison camp he had a reputation for supporting and encouraging younger internees. He died there in 1945 not long before the defeat of Japan.

Prayer for others

Gracious God, as we read these stories of people who followed the pilgrim path to serve you through serving others, in their very different ways, we are reminded that you call us to respond to the needs of others, however we can. So we bring our prayers for people who are going through difficult times:

For people imprisoned or persecuted by harsh regimes and unjust governments;

For refugees from war, famine or natural disaster;

For those in our own country struggling to provide for their families;

For people we know personally struggling with illness, disability, overwork or bereavement.

We pray that they may find help and encouragement.

Show us where we have a part to play, by a thoughtful word, or a listening ear.

In Jesus name, Amen

Bible Reading: Psalm 84

Reflection: Being a pilgrim

“Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
Who have set their hearts on pilgrimage”

Many years ago, I wrote the words of Psalm 84 verse 5 in the front of my Bible. I could not have imagined how I might come to contemplate these words and reflect upon them with you as I am doing now. The Psalmist says that those who have set their hearts on pilgrimage whose strength is in

God are blessed. May we also hope to get close to God by pilgrimage? I believe so, but I think it is the intention of the heart of the pilgrim that matters and that is what actually makes ‘the journey’ a pilgrimage.

And where are we hoping to travel to? I suggest that it’s not a place but a presence, the Presence of God (the Holy Trinity) which we seek. and do we need to leave our homes to do this?

Some of us are unable to make long journeys for health reasons. We may be able to only travel with or without assistance to another city, town, village or county. For some of us to visit another room takes effort where we can rest in a chair with a different view. Some of us are able to sit up in bed or an armchair at times throughout the day with or without assistance. But we may travel in our minds, through reading, listening to music, looking at pictures or photographs or through contemplation. Our way of thinking and being is affected and changed by the stimulation of our minds, which brings me to my definition of a pilgrim: a pilgrim is someone who wishes to be made more aware of the presence of God and who is willing to be changed by this awareness.

This definition applies to one who is ‘travelling’ in many senses of the word. Perhaps, like me, you were able to travel long distances in the past to visit places of beauty, history and sacred significance but now are not able to do so.

However, I know that I am still a pilgrim. I am travelling still in my heart and my mind and always hoping that the Presence of God will be revealed to me and all who seek God in the beauty of companionship, nature, music, art and literature and in prayer and daily contemplation.

Prayer

Dear God,

Beloved home of our hearts

We wish to be pilgrims.

Show us how to journey each day
Closer in our hearts to you
Help us to notice and pay attention to the way your
eternal love reaches out to us and beckons us on
our journey.

Give us courage and patience with ourselves as we
learn to journey each day being more aware of
your Presence.

May our companions be hope, curiosity and joy
and may your Holy Spirit comfort us when we grow
tired or hopeless and encourage us along the
pilgrimage of our lives. In Jesus name,
Amen.

Hymn StF370 Breath on me breath of God

<https://youtu.be/NG7i2SDekE?si=btYc4uVt0WoOaCJS>

1 Breathe on me, Breath of God;
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love,
and do what thou wouldst do.

2 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will,
to do and to endure.

3 Breathe on me, Breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine.

4 Breathe on me, Breath of God;
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity.

Edwin Hatch (1835-1889)

Prayer and Blessing

Lord of all,
As you walked this earth sharing love , grace and
mercy, we pray that we will place our footsteps in
yours and walk where you lead as we live out your
life in our daily living. For Jesus sake, Amen

URC:Walking the Way

Finish by saying The Grace aloud, holding in mind
the people who are closest to you.

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