

20th September 2020 10 am Applying the Gospel to Ourselves

Service led by Kim Matthews, Report on "Quiet Space" by Rosie Lee,
Talk by Roger Homes, "What Christ's forgiveness means to me" by Charlie Palmer,
Intercessions led by Jennifer Matthews.

Notices.....	1
Confession.....	1
Absolution.....	2
Hymn: Before the Throne.....	2
Introduction to the service.....	2
Talk.....	3
What Happens at Quiet Space.....	4
Talk continued.....	5
What God's Forgiveness through Christ Means to Me.....	8
Hymn: Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone).....	8
Intercessions.....	8
Blessing.....	10

Notices

[Kim Matthews:]

Good morning everybody, and welcome to St John's this morning. I'll just start with a few little reminder notices.

Well, first of all, the great news that Angie Purdom had a successful operation earlier this week and we continue to pray for her and ask God's blessing on her, Pete, and the rest of the family.

On to more mundane things, just a reminder of the notice I gave last week that if you would like to join the electoral roll, then please let Kevin Broadbent, our electoral roll officer, know if you're not already on it.

There are vacancies on the PCC, the church council. So please do let us know if you feel called to serve in that way.

And then later today at 12:30 at the church the youth are meeting for a picnic lunch (please take their own lunch) and I hope you have a great time.

So let's turn to God.

Grace, mercy and peace from our Lord Jesus Christ, and from God our Father, be with us all.

This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Confession

And let's remind ourselves that we're coming again into the presence of God, using David's words from Psalm 51. Let's think about the things that we've done in the last few days or in the last week which have not been pleasing to Him. And there'll be a short silence in the middle for you have to have time to reflect itself on that. So from Psalm 51 [NIVUK 2011]:

¹ Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

² Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.

³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.

⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

Absolution

⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place.

⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity.

¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Hymn: Before the Throne

And then as we come to worship God, from Psalm 95:

⁶ Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;

⁷ for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Today let us hear His voice

and let us sing together *Before the Throne of God Above*.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>1. Before the throne of God above,
I have a strong, a perfect plea,
a great High Priest whose Name is Love,
who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands,
my name is written on His heart.
I know that while in heaven He stands,
no tongue can bid me thence depart,
no tongue can bid me thence depart.</p> | <p>2. When Satan tempts me to despair
and tells me of the guilt within,
upward I look and see Him there,
who made an end to all my sin.
Because the sinless Saviour died,
my sinful soul is counted free;
for God, the just, is satisfied
to look on Him and pardon me,
to look on Him and pardon me.</p> |
| <p>3. Behold Him there, the risen Lamb,
my perfect, spotless righteousness,
the great unchangeable I AM,
the King of glory and of grace!
One with Himself I cannot die.
My soul is purchased by His blood!
My life is hid with Christ on high,
with Christ, my Saviour and my God,
with Christ, my Saviour and my God.</p> | |

Introduction to the service

[Kim:]

If you were with us last week, you will have heard Andrew speak about the narrow way, about Jesus' claim to be the only way to save. It's the extremely exclusive claim of Jesus. But although the way is narrow, there is no entrance fee.

Imagine you go to the theatre: the easy way in is through the front doors; we have to pay to get in that way. But the hardest way to find our way in is the stage door. But if you have a pass to get to the stage door, it's free. And it's as if we've been given a free pass, not to the theatre, but to life with God. And that is grace, and that's the topic of today's service.

Roger, in a minute, is going to bring us a message about 'hearing and applying the Gospel to ourselves', which is the next in our series on the Gospel. And in case you need a reminder, 'Gospel' simply means 'Good News', Good News that we can have a relationship with God through Jesus. And Andrew also showed us this [leaflet] last week, which he's prepared for us, just very short, and each little item is just a short paragraph. And I find this really nice: over the last few days I've been using one a day to meditate on the message of the Cross, and the *Message of the Cross* is really a summary of the Gospel of the Good News of how we can have life with God through Jesus.

So before I hand over to Roger, let's just spend some time in prayer and starting with the Lord's Prayer.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.**

Now, Lord, by Your Holy Spirit, we ask that You would open our ears to hear the message You have for us. Still our minds that we might focus on You and open our hearts that we might receive what You have for us this morning.

Talk

And now I'm going to hand over to Roger, with help from Rosie and Heather, to bring this morning's message to us.

[Roger Homes:]

Good morning everybody. Today we're looking at hearing and applying the Gospel to ourselves. And this is part of a series that we've been doing recently on looking at the Gospel. I'm going to read in a minute our first reading, which is from Hebrews chapter 9 verses 11 to 15. And after that I've asked Rosie to give a brief testimony about 'Quiet Space'. Quiet Space is where we've opened up the church building on a Wednesday and a Sunday for people to come in for private prayer, and it will be good to hear about what God's been doing through that. So first of all, a reading from Hebrews 9, and then we'll hear from Rosie. Starting at verse 11.

¹¹ When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, he went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation. ¹² He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. ¹³ The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴ How much more, then, will the blood of

Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

¹⁵ For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.

What Happens at Quiet Space

[Rosie Lee:]

Good morning. My name is Rosie, and I'm a member of St John's Church. And I'm just going to talk to you about Quiet Time and Space with God. We opened our church doors for private prayers on Wednesday the 22nd of July, and that still continues. So the doors are open on a Wednesday from 10am to 2pm and on a Sunday from 11am to 3pm. The value and power of being alone with God is priceless – it's priceless for me – just me and God and no-one else, and time to be with God alone; no sermons, no distractions, just time to have a heart-to-heart with God, to meditate, to reflect, to be at peace with God. It's personal.

I've been on prayer duty since it opened and there's been a couple of occasions where there have been some really true heart-to-hearts with people coming through our door. And I'm sure Andy Powell won't mind me saying, because we were together on a couple of prayer duties, and we can testify there were people coming in to us, people who were in need, people who are sad, people who are hurting, people who just wanted to have some real time with God in a church building and give thanks and praise. Amen! People who wouldn't normally come through our church door. T

There was one visit where someone came in with his dog. And he was allowed in to pray, and he talked to us for a little while. He said he wanted to come and speak to 'that Man'. And he was in there for quite a while. And he went over and he reflected. And it was a true blessing because when he came out he just didn't want to leave, he talked about how he felt to us both. He talked about how he was touched. He gave thanks. He was appreciative of our church door being open. He was someone who wouldn't normally come to church or walk through a church door. So, amen for that!

There was also someone who came in and this lady said, "My calendar always used to be full. Lots of things on there. But now my calendar is empty." Boy, oh boy, and she wanted to come to the church to reflect, to have a one-to-one with God. Amen for that. No time is ever wasted when we spend time with God. Matthew 6:6 says,

But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

Jesus spent many a time in private prayer with God. He often went to lonely places and prayed. It tells us this for example in Mark chapter 1 verse 35 and also Luke chapter 5 verse 16.

I turn my thoughts on friends and family, our church and our community and reach out to you.

Time alone With God is priceless. Go on, try it. And finally, in Matthew 11:28-30 it's saying,

²⁸ 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

May God be with you all, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Talk continued

[Roger:]

Thank you, Rosie, it's always good to hear testimony about what God's doing.

So my first point then on 'hearing and applying the Gospel to ourselves' concerns Christ's eternal sacrifice. Many of you will be familiar with the Jewish sacrificial system, which is where animals were sacrificed to atone or pay the price for the sin of the people. And what would happen is that the High Priest would go into the Holy of Holies, which is like a special place in the Temple once a year to offer sacrifices. And this was known as the Day of Atonement. The fact that it was a regular occurrence every year showed it was only a temporary solution. But Jesus' perfect sacrifice was once and for all, offers eternal redemption or freedom or forgiveness for us. And you will remember, many of you, that there's a picture of the Temple curtain being torn in two from top to bottom, as a sign that the barrier between us and God has been got rid of. Interestingly, Jesus offered Himself willingly as a sacrifice, unlike the animals that were in the Old Testament. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says,

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We can know God's forgiveness for our past sins, or wrongdoings, and we can know the freedom that results from that. Heather now is going to bring a second reading to us from Galatians chapter 6 verses 12 to 15.

[Heather:]

¹² Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

¹³ Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.

[Roger:]

Thank you, Heather. So for my second point I want to look at the issue of circumcision, which was mentioned there in Galatians 6, and early Gentile Christians were encouraged in some cases to become circumcised to follow the Jewish custom. And Paul is at pains to say in verse 15 that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, only a new creation. You might recall that Paul actually opposed Peter on this particular issue in Galatians 2:11-16. And so they were saying to the new Gentile believers "Well, believe in Christ is fine, but you also need to do this other thing as well," as though somehow by being circumcised, that made them more holy. Mercifully for us men we don't have to go through circumcision. But I think perhaps there are some modern equivalents that we need to be careful of, that we don't fall into the same trap. You know we all like some kind of affirmation, don't we, or recognition, and yet we're told in Scripture only to seek the affirmation of God and not of man. Social media is full of boasts. I know in my own running club people post, you know, good times

that they've done in particular races, whether they be virtual or actual, or whether they've done particularly long races. Sometimes we get a bit upset, we don't get many 'likes' perhaps for a post that we put onto Facebook, something like that. And we can sometimes be tempted to 'bigger' ourselves up, sometimes at the expense of others, to make comparisons, even subconsciously. I just wonder whether you've been put down publicly? It hurts, doesn't it, when that happens. We've got to be careful not to do the same thing to others. You know actually sometimes it might be tempting. We need to learn to see people as God sees them. And this calls for humility on our part.

One of my favourite passages in Scripture is the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector¹, in which, if you remember, the Pharisee said or prayed out, "I thank You that I'm not like that sinner over there. I fast, I give a tenth of my money to God." And yet the tax collector was so ashamed that he wouldn't even cast his eyes up to heaven. And Jesus said it was the second one, who was a tax collector, that went back home right before God.

In distinct relationships where we serve, you know, they must come at a cost to ourselves, helping those that perhaps can't repay, maybe the poor or the needy. I guess parents have to do this regularly. Part of being a parent, I think, is about putting your kids interests before yourselves, making sacrifices to help them. And I'm told that there's three phases of being a parent. The first phase is the nappy phase, the second phase is the taxi phase, and the third phase, which can go on for quite a long time, is 'can I have some money' phase. So those of you who are parents, maybe you can work out which phase you're in at the moment. When we give not as a parent, but generally, what is our motivation? Is it to glorify God and help others or is it to make ourselves feel better? Often we make comparisons between ourselves and others, in terms of the life that we lead, attendance at meetings and things like that. In John 21 verses 20-22, Peter looked at John and he said to Jesus, "What about him?" And Jesus replies, "Don't you worry about him, you just follow Me." It's like He was saying, to turn that around, "don't you worry about anyone else; you just get on with your own life and let Me worry about that other person." And I wonder if Jesus is saying something similar to us, "Don't concern yourself about other people, just concentrate on your own relationship with God, and let God sort out the others."

A final point I want to make is that the Cross is offensive to people. And some people find the Cross offensive because it means that those people who have worked hard all their lives, who have lived moral lives, are as much in need of salvation as sinners, or people they perceive to be sinners. It seems somehow unfair that the thief on the cross should be allowed to go to salvation. It goes against our sense of fairness, of justice. People outside the church often perceive those inside it as being judgemental.

A story is told of a beggar that came to church. And he sat at the front of the church cross-legged, and people started to move away from him because he hadn't washed in days and he was dirty and he was smelly. And then the vicar came down from the pulpit, and he sat at the front of the church, next to the beggar. Interestingly, we're all equal before God: the vicar and the beggar. The Bible says that our righteousness is like filthy rags, that we should not boast in ourselves, but only in the Lord, that we should seek the applause of God and not of man. Jeremiah 9 verses 23 to 24 says,

²³ This is what the LORD says:

'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches,

²⁴ but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me,

1 [Luke 18:9-14](#)

that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the LORD.

When God looks at us, He sees not our sin, but He sees the perfection of Christ. Notice that it's all God. It's got nothing to do with us, our salvation has got nothing to do with us. And sometimes we can be tempted to think that maybe just a very, very small part of our salvation depends our own performance. That is not scriptural. What it's saying there is that it's all God and not even any small part of it is ourselves.

Finally, then, by way of conclusion, I've got a series of questions that I'd like to ask you, for you to reflect upon. And I'd like to close your eyes for this. And then once I've finished reading out these questions, we're just going to go into time of quiet. And then I'm going to finish off with a word of prayer. So, these are the questions I'd like you and myself to consider:

- Do we trust in God's grace alone?
- Is there a part of us that thinks somehow we need to earn our salvation? If so, we need to repent of this.
- God has forgiven us. Have we forgiven ourselves?
- Do we really believe God has forgiven us?
- Have we forgiven others?
- Do we make comparisons with others, 'bigging' ourselves up in comparison with them?
- Is there still a small part of us that would like to trust in our own good living, and good deeds, rather than Christ's work on the cross?

2 Corinthians 5 verse 17 says,

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!

So I'm going to pause there, giving you a moment to think and pray, and I'll finish off with a word of prayer.

[pause]

Lord, I want to thank You that Jesus' death on the Cross has opened the way for us to have a direct relationship with You. Thank You for His one perfect sacrifice for us.

I pray that we wouldn't be tempted to try to earn our salvation. Thank You that it's all You, and none of it is us. Forgive us when we make comparisons with our brothers and sisters, comparing our lives with theirs, usually favouring ourselves at their expense.

Thank You for the Cross. Thank You for what it represents: Jesus taking our guilt and our shame, as One who was without sin, becoming sin for us.

Help us to see others, Lord, as You see them.

I pray this now in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen

[Kim:]

Thank you very much, Roger.

To repeat 2 Corinthians 5:17 [NIVUK 2011]

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!

It is because of what Jesus has done that we can be forgiven.

What God's Forgiveness through Christ Means to Me

Let's hear what Charlie Palmer has to say – he's sharing a few thoughts with us on what it is to be forgiven.

[Charlie Palmer:]

What does God's forgiveness through Christ mean to me? Let's talk past, present and future.

- Because I'm forgiven, I can let go of past demeanours, embarrassments and mistakes.
- Because I'm forgiven, I can enjoy the present, without having to worry about messing up.
- Because I'm forgiven, I can look forward to the future without any anxiety.

Of course I can do these things but they don't always happen; there are always nagging doubts: "I'm not good enough." "I don't deserve such generosity." "Others are so much better Christians than me."

Here's an idea. When the doubts come, I'm going to say "Hello! I remember you. Would you mind waiting outside a minute, I'm busy being forgiven."

Hymn: Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)

1. Amazing grace, How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me.
I once was lost, but now I'm found,
Was blind, but now I see.

2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

Chorus:

My chains are gone
I've been set free
My God, my Saviour has ransomed me
And like a flood His mercy rains
Unending love, Amazing grace

3. The Lord has promised good to me
His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be,
As long as life endures.

Chorus

4. The Earth shall soon dissolve like snow
The Sun forbear to shine
But God, Who called me here below
Will be forever mine.

Chorus

Intercessions

[Jennifer Matthews:]

In our intercessions today, I will use the phrase, "Lord, in Your mercy." Please respond with "hear our prayer." So let us pray together.

O God our refuge and our strength, our very present help in times of trouble,² have mercy upon our brothers and sisters around the world who live with the reality of anti-Christian violence. We pray for the countless thousands who have been injured or bereaved who have lost their jobs and their homes because of their faithfulness to You. Comfort them with the reality of Your presence. Protect them like a mighty fortress and make the escalating violence cease.

2 Psalm 46:1

May these Christian victims of violence show Your character, Jesus, in their lives. May they bring peace, love, joy, harmony and forgiveness into their community and show those around them the reality of Your presence and power.

In silence now, pray for persecuted Christian communities in our world.

In particular, we bring Your children in Nepal into Your presence, Father God. We pray for Your protection over them, Your provision of work and community for them, and that You will stop the tide of attacks by Hindu extremists. We especially ask You to keep Christian women and girls safe, as they are so often the very most vulnerable. May You protect them just as a mother hen keeps her chicks safe under her wings.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen in holy fear built an ark to save his family. ³

Father God, we pray for our government and our Prime Minister, that they will all act and speak in truth and in wisdom. As we face the new challenges of this COVID pandemic, may our leaders seek to do good for all of our communities. For those politicians and leaders who grew up in a Christian family or heard the Gospel message in the past, may they take time to reflect on the claims of Christ and be moved to pray about the issues that concern them. We pray for our local government, as they work for our area, and then implement measures introduced nationally.

In silence now we bring to You our leaders.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

Jesus said, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' ⁴

Father God, we pray for the COVID testing arrangements, that those people who need a test may have a test quickly and locally. As more people are identified as having COVID infection, and others are asked to self-isolate with track and trace, may they and we act with responsibility, following rules and regulations, however inconvenient or difficult it'll seem. May we all behave in a way that we protect those around us, and so show our love for our neighbours. In silence now we bring before You, Lord, all those we know with COVID or self-isolating at the moment.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

May You be strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power for all patience and long-suffering with joy. ⁵

Lord God, we pray Your protection on the carers in our community. Far too often they have been overlooked, poorly paid and not given sufficient time for their important visits to people's homes. Please make a way that they will receive all the resources that they need, so they can look after their clients efficiently and kindly. We also remember those who are who are unpaid carers, juggling different responsibilities at home and at work.

³ Hebrews 11:7

⁴ Matthew 19:19

⁵ Colossians 1:11 [NKJV]

Please enable them to access the resources that they need. May they find support and respite. Please give them patience and fortitude as they faithfully continue daily routines and grant them the extra strength to manage in times of added pressure.

In silence now we bring to You the carers that we know of in our community.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying His hands on each one, He healed them. ⁶

Lord Jesus our Healer, we bring to You those that we know who are ill or sick. May You bring healing and relief from pain.

We give thanks for our NHS: for the doctors and nurses that bring healing and all the other specialists and hospitals who help in so many different ways: radiographers, physiotherapists, phlebotomists, to name but just a few. We thank You for the care that Angie Purdom is receiving. Thank You for the long operation that she received this Thursday. Heal her and restore her to full health. May she know Your presence with her as she recovers. Surround her with Your love and peace and protect her family too.

In silence now bring to Jesus others that you know, who need to feel His healing touch, whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. ⁷

Lord Jesus, You wept. We pray for all those who are weeping and grieving. May they know Your compassion, that You grieve and suffer with them. Angela Cannadine was a much loved teacher, at Kenilworth School in the technology department. She passed away last weekend following a short illness. We give thanks for her, for the love, kindness and dedication that she gave to her students. Comfort those who mourn. Please help the students that she taught in her tutor group, as they come to terms with her passing. May they support each other as they share their thoughts and memories of her. Be with all of Angela's families and friends. Draw them close to You. In their grief, may they know they are not alone, that You are there beside them.

And in silence now, remember any of those you know who are grieving.

Lord, in Your mercy,

All hear our prayer.

As we enter a new week, may we know that You go ahead of us, Your love surrounds us, and You are there to guide us. Draw us all closer to You in all that we do.

We offer these prayers.

Amen

⁶ Luke 4:40

⁷ Matthew 5:4

Blessing

[Kim:]

Thank you, Jenny.

I'm going to draw our service to a close in a moment. If you want to continue in worship, my suggestion is that you use the song *Only By Grace* which you can find on YouTube and I think Michelle's put the link⁸ in the chat function, so that you can access it directly. And unfortunately that's not one of the songs that we can use live-streamed, but it's very appropriate to this service as we continue to think about God's grace for us. In the meantime, I hope you all have a great week ahead, that you know His grace, and to use the words from 2 Peter 3:18,

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever! Amen.

Goodbye .

[Transcribed by Hamish Blair with help from <https://otter.ai>]

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Before the Throne – Author: Charitie Lees De Chenez, 1841-1923 (written 1863)

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<https://www.emw.org.uk/2020/05/before-the-throne-of-god-above/>

8 One example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hv72Q23Iip0>