

## 6<sup>th</sup> September 2020 10 am The Heart of the Father for the World

Service led by Lindsey Attwood, personal reflection by Roger Homes,  
Talk by Val Whiteman, intercessions by Jane Garsed

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### Notices

[Lindsey Attwood:]

Welcome to St John's, [...] <sup>1</sup> welcome to all of you. And so this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. So, great!

So as normal for St John's we have various notices to share...

- ◆ So we have this evening at 6pm our Healing and Refreshing service, which will be live on YouTube.
- ◆ And, as normal, we have a Bible study at 12pm on Wednesday again - that's a really fun thing to listen into - we have a great time with that; it's a really good thing to do. You can also catch up on that later on YouTube if you can't do it at the time.
- ◆ This week, well in fact tomorrow at 2:30, for many of you who know Mark Barnard, he sadly died earlier last week, and [his funeral] will be on tomorrow but if you would like to watch that, you can get a link from Denise and it will be on Zoom, so you can actually see that if you want to.
- ◆ And there's a really lovely thing for this Christmas actually, there's some information coming from Denise, passing information on from Kenilworth Lions to be potentially part of a virtual choir, and be planning for Christmas. So for any singers out there, if you really, really love singing and you've really missed it (for many of us, we have, because we can't sing in church), watch this space. Hopefully that will be for you.
- ◆ I've got another lovely thing to do as well, so we've got again, the banns of marriage for Luke and Ruth. And then, again, this is them choosing to do this. So I publish the banns of marriage between Luke Coomber and Ruth Perkins, and this is for the third time of asking, and if any one of you know any reason in law why they may not marry each other, you are to declare it.

So Father God, I want to thank you again for Luke and Ruth. Thank you for the fact that they contribute so much to this church. And I pray, Lord, for a real blessing on them as they are doing their marriage preparations, and for a real blessing on them as they get married later in the year. Thank you Lord.

We've also now got a short video, about three minutes long, and it's by the Balfours, as many of you know the Balfours are mission partners that we support and they're in Guatemala, and we're going to just catch up now for about three minute video from them.

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1 Apologies for technical glitch at start; and greetings to and from Val Whiteman

## **Video from Mark and Rosalie Balfour, CMS**

[Rosalie:]

Hello to all of you at St John's Kenilworth. For those of you that don't know us we are Mark and Rosalie Balfour. We are mission partners with the Church Mission Society, or CMS, and we live in Guatemala, and are seconded to Street Kids Direct, and we're mission links with you, which is fantastic. Thank you.

[Mark:]

So we've got 3 minutes to do this, giving updates to Andrew, and we're going to do the very best, but as you can see, we're not professionals at this. So it's three minutes. Okay, our role with Street Kids Direct is predominantly pastoral, so Street Kids Direct work with organisations in Guatemala and the neighbouring country of Honduras, they work with kids and young people who are at risk of moving on to the streets, and our role is predominantly to care for those doing that kind of work, which is often a gap in-between agencies. We also work with other projects engaged in urban work, and it would be fair to say that during this time our pastoral role has been growing and changing, and we love doing what we do.

[Rosalie:]

Yes, so life in lockdown here has actually been a lot stricter than in the UK. We're just beginning to have some relaxation on that, although since March we've been having to wear masks outside, even if travelling alone in the car. There is no public transport, so people can't get to work. And obviously there still are so many places closed. So there's really no help from the government. So many people are hungry and actually quite desperate at this time.

[Mark:]

COVID cases are continuing to rise, or at least certainly not go away, and the public hospitals are completely overwhelmed with cases. Street Kids Direct has been working to take food and other necessary items to families who are in the programme, and also to offer them mental, emotional and spiritual support during this time. As you can imagine there's a lot of anxiety, and a lot of confusion and a lot of anger as well. In October we moved into a house with a large garden, principally to offer a space for people to come for retreat and time out from the work, so that they could receive hospitality, could take time out with Jesus, and we'd be here to pray with them, listen to them, talk with them if that's what they wanted as well. And we even had a wedding here back in February of a missionary friend of ours, who works with the homeless in urban context. He was marrying a Guatemalan girl, and it was just lovely to host their wedding.

[Rosalie:]

Mark took it too!

[Mark:]

Yes, that was good. But little did we know that a couple of weeks after that, that we would go into lockdown. So during this time, pastoral work has predominantly been online. But we have just started to receive people again into the house, just single ones and twos, or by households, staying well within the rules of the government here, but it's been good to see people face to face for the last two or three weeks.

[Rosalie:]

Yes, we just want to say thank you for so many of you that are praying for us - it really does make a huge difference to us. And we would just say that if you are praying for us, just pray that we will keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, that we'll keep Him at the centre of everything.

[Mark:]

Thank you again for letting us be part of your service this morning and bless you loads, and we look forward to seeing you, when we are able to come back to the UK and visit you again - that'll be an amazing thing to do. Thank you. Bye.

## **Introduction to the service**

[Lindsey:]

Thank you to Mark and Rosalie, and that's really great to hear from them and they're really good friends of ours, so it's lovely to see them on screen.

Now today is actually all about the Father-heart of God. We've been doing a lot about the Gospel at the minute, but it's really important that we know who is God and what He is like, and Val is going to be talking to us later. But first I wondered, how do you see God? So do you see Him as maybe a creator, or artist? Often friends of mine see God through space and the world, and they look at the stars and planets and are filled with awe about who God is, that's how they often see God. Or maybe you're someone who's quite nervous of God in a way, you see Him as a lawgiver – a bit like a policeman, or He's waiting to book you when you do something wrong and that's actually being quite hard. Or maybe you see God as your provider. The Bible actually calls God Jehovah-Jireh, which actually means 'The LORD Will Provide'. Maybe you've experienced the generous provision of God. Or maybe you see Him as a rescuer – you could have been in a difficult situation and needed help. Maybe there are times when literally you've had to call out to God, when you found no-one else to talk to. Or maybe you see Him as a Father who cares. Jesus actually refers to Him as His Father, 'Abba Father', which means 'Daddy God'. But maybe you're watching and thinking, "I had a good dad," or maybe you've had a bad experience, maybe your understanding of father is a difficult one, and that might be something Val will address later.

## **What the Cross Means to Me**

So now we're going to listen to a short video by Roger Homes, he's going to talk a little bit about what the Cross means to him as well, especially with the Gospel [theme] the last couple of weeks. And then we're going to lead straight into a song.

[Roger Homes:]

Morning everyone. The aspect of the Cross that I would like to focus on is about assuring that God cares. I think this is very applicable in the world of suffering. We've recently had an explosion in Beirut, with the loss of life and lots of people injured. We've had effects of the pandemic both at home and abroad, in terms of health and the economy. And also the refugee crisis is ongoing. And I guess in those circumstances people may be tempted to wonder whether God cares, whether God understands. I think the Cross shows that in fact He does. I just wanted to read a little bit from *Exploring Christianity*, which says finally he was betrayed – Jesus – deserted by His friends, suffered the worst kind of flogging, and was nailed publicly to a Cross, he's described in the Bible as a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. If Jesus is God, as the New Testament declares, and Christians have always believed, then God knows all about suffering.

## **Song: The Power of Your Love**

1. Lord, I come to You

Let my heart be changed, renewed  
Flowing from the grace  
That I've found in You  
Lord, I've come to know  
The weaknesses I see in me  
Will be stripped away  
By the power of Your love

*Chorus:*

Hold me close  
Let Your love surround me  
Bring me near  
Draw me to Your side  
And as I wait, I'll rise up like the eagle  
And I will soar with You  
Your Spirit leads me on  
In the power of Your love

2. Lord, unveil my eyes  
Let me see You face to face  
The knowledge of Your love  
As You live in me  
Lord, renew my mind  
As Your will unfolds in my life  
In living every day  
By the power of Your love

*Chorus x 2*

## **Readings**

[Lindsey:]

So the reading today is taken from a famous passage which is **John 3:16**.

<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

And the second reading is taken from **2 Peter 3:9**.

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

## **Talk**

Father God, I really thank You for Val, and I just pray this morning that You would bless her she comes to speak to us. And I ask, Lord, that Your words would be through what she says. So just bless her as she comes to speak, Lord, in Your name. Amen.

[Val Whiteman:]

Amen. Thank you, Lindsey. It's such a privilege to be able to talk to you. I'm so looking forward to when we all go back into church, when we actually see one another. You realise what a gift it is to be able to be rooted in the community of the church, just by seeing people, so it would be wonderful to be back. But even if we're not, or as we're not, it's good to think about who God is.

Just take a step back for a minute and think about how we feel personally about the God we love. Lindsey's already talked to us about the kind of view we might have about God: the lawgiver, the provider, the creator-artist, the Father, the rescuer. And these are all really, really good things aren't they? They are aspects of God that are reflected in us as His creation. Sometimes though, we end up with a God who is smaller than what you might call the real God. And that's inevitable, because as human beings we can't always grasp the fullness of the God we worship.

The verse we've just been given comes from the story of Nicodemus: you remember, that famous story when Nicodemus, a respected teacher of the law, a rabbi, a well-trained man at the centre of things, sneaks to Jesus by night because he doesn't want it known that he needs to go and talk to an untrained rabbi from Galilee. It wouldn't be good: there would be a lot of loss of face. So he goes at night. And the story is so familiar to us, sometimes we kind-of miss the importance of it.

Jesus, then not exactly goes on the attack but He certainly challenges Nicodemus right from the start. "You don't understand," He says, and Nicodemus says, "No, I don't. How can people be born again for the second time?" he says. Things that we, as good Protestant people, have been trained from our youth-time upwards.

So, let's look back at what God has said during the whole of the Old Testament. Lindsey has shown, as I say, these definitions of God, that right from the beginning, God contacts Israel. He isn't a God who is created by Israel, not like the neighbouring gods, the gods of neighbouring countries. God comes into contact with Israel, and He says, "I will be your God." Every time Israel turns away, God is there, pursuing them. Even if, like the prodigal son, their behaviour condemns them to servitude in a foreign country to exile, God is there, He challenges their view of Him, time and time and time again. And they break the covenant time and time and time again, as we know. But God, right from the beginning, says that God's love is wider than just Israel, His chosen people. Everyone is supposed to be blessed through Israel, the whole world. In Genesis 12, God says to Abraham,

<sup>2</sup> 'I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you;  
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

<sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

And this is the important bit:

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'

Well, they had to wait for a while before that happened, but Nicodemus has come to meet the man through whom that's come to pass. Now Nicodemus is really well trained. He is a theological student beyond all theological students, and you'd think he'd understand. But before we think how silly he is, let's go back to *our* concepts of God.

When we come to Christ, first of all, we come bringing our own ideas about who God is, according to our own experiences with fathers, for instance, we build our own God. And that isn't wrong, because we're bringing to God what we have, which is what we're supposed to do. We give Him who we are. However, if we don't listen and study and experience, we get stuck in our own views, a bit like Nicodemus did. And we control God and not vice versa. In this passage from John 3, Jesus says the Spirit is like the wind. He's unexpected, moving in ways we can't imagine. And yet, time and time and time again, throughout the history of the church and throughout Israel's history, we've tried to box the Spirit in. We put God into the church. And we use Him to control people's behaviour, for instance. Think about how the Victorians did. If you remember *All Things Bright and Beautiful*, that children's hymn and the verse we don't sing any more,

The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate.  
God made them high and lowly,  
And ordered their estate.

Well, how convenient if you're rich and need servants, and how totally, utterly and absolutely opposed to the Gospel teaching! Remember, Paul said in Galatians [3:28], in Him ...

<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

When I was growing up, there was a book which is called *Your God is Too Small*<sup>2</sup>. And that, I think, that says it all really: we inevitably create ourselves a manageable God who isn't going to upset us too much. We create one who will control undesirable elements in society, and who will make us feel better about ourselves, if we're not careful. And that's absolutely awful. As I said, we have to start where we are. But where we end up depends on how much we let God be God. And in a minute we'll think about how we might do that.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34486.Your\\_God\\_is\\_Too\\_Small](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34486.Your_God_is_Too_Small) by J.B. Phillips, first published 1952

John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." To hear some Christians, you'd think John said, "God so hated the world", because they become so judgemental about people outside the church. Well, I'm really sorry, but we are loved as much, not more, but as much as God loves everyone. We are loved so much by God that He gave everything for us - He gave Himself. Nowhere in the world has there been an episode, an incident, a terrible happening that God has not been present in, and endured in the Cross, and we need to remember that. In response, we bring everything to Him. And so if we listen to Him, we grow in wisdom and humility. And the offer to love God is an open one. The whole world is saved, not just people like us, and we cannot judge. That means that Paul says "The whole creation is groaning until its fulfilment," he says that in Romans [8:22],

And God's desire is for everyone to come to Him<sup>3</sup>, not just the Chosen Few. Lindsey read to us that passage from 2 Peter [ESV]:

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

He doesn't want anybody to be destroyed. He wants everyone to respond, to repent. Don't you think that's absolutely wonderful? And we are part of that story, because we as Christians who love what you might call the real God, the God who is 'I am', are His servants. And we become Christ in the world, which is a huge responsibility, as well as a great privilege, to share the love that God has for us with everybody. It's just an amazing thing: there can be nothing more exciting, nothing better to do. And incidentally, I find it interesting, if you look up **1** John 3:16 [the first letter from John; NIVUK], this is what you get:

<sup>16</sup> This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Now, John and the writer of 1 John couldn't have known the coincidence, because the Bible didn't get chapters and verses until much later, the 16th century for verses. So, that verse which links so nicely with John 3:16 is what you might call a God-incident. "This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ laid His life down for us, and we are called on to do the same for our brothers and sisters." And you will remember from scripture that 'our brothers and sisters' means basically the entire human race, not just the people we fancy liking.

We learn what the love of God is by living in trust with Him. So how do we do it? Well, we meet together during the week and we explore our different ideas of God. We read the Bible, we pray, especially we pray, and more especially, we listen to what God is saying to us. If you haven't done this recently then maybe start thinking about it. And if you're if you feel you're stuck with a 'less than God' God, then spend some time in the coming week, asking God to show you where you are with Him. Are you principally seeing Him as a judge, eager to send you down for punishment for every minor mistake you make? Is that your view of your fellow Christians? Or is He a doctor who pops along with a sticking plaster when you need it? Or a fireman you only call on in emergencies? Or is He like a spaceman abandoning Earth to float away somewhere out of reach? Challenge yourself: what sort of a God do you think you really worship, and ask God by listening to Him, to tell you the sort of God He actually is. The main way of finding out who God is, is to look at Jesus in the Gospel. Remember, God says He is 'I am'. He doesn't have a name invented by humans. So if we want to meet with the living God, we have to pray to give up our preconceptions and to let the Spirit blow where He wants. We have to get to know Jesus better, so that we will know the Father-heart of God in Christ. It's a lot more exciting than limiting yourself with a God who suits you. But it's a lot scarier too.

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3 See also 1 Timothy 2:1-4

I want to end what I've said, and I know there's a lot more that I could say about the loving Father-heart of God, because it's just endless and infinite and wonderful, but I'd like to pray for all of us, with the words that Paul uses to the Ephesian church, and he's writing this right at the end of his life, when he thinks he's going to be killed imminently. So he says, [Ephesians 3:14-19; NIVUK]

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Amen.

### **Prayerful Response**

[Lindsey:]

Thank you, Val, for that. That was really, really good: so helpful. As always, when one speaks, it's always good to actually have a sort of response and just have a thought or a moment to think through what has been said. You see Val has been trying to say about what God is like, and actually, she mentions the talk with Nicodemus, and the idea of being born again. I know for many people the idea of being born again has many connotations with various types of Christians, but actually what it's saying is, you need to have a different way of seeing things: you can't just operate out of the flesh, you need the Spirit of God to help you see God. Val's so great at talking about what God is like, how much He loves us, and He wants us to enter into a trust relationship. So I just want a couple of minutes before we move on to intercessions by Jane, just to be still. If you're at home with your family or whatever, even if you're child, I just want you to just be still for a minute, close your eyes even, and just allow God to be close to you.

So Jesus we do pray that You do draw near to us, even when we're in our homes; we're not together in our building but You are with us and You are the one that unites all of us. I pray that we would see and understand that Your desire is to bless and bless and bless and bless, that You want to. You're so generous that You gave us Your Son. This is the type of God You are; this is the Father that Jesus prayed to.

Jesus, I pray that You would open our hearts and our eyes to see who You are: to really drink and see who You are. And I just pray, Lord Jesus, that we would, even those of us who struggle with faith or who struggled with things in the past or who are still struggling with what God is like, I just pray that You would allow Him to touch your heart, to show You what He's like, so that You can hold His hand, trusting Him, trusting He wants to bless and that through You He wants to bless others as well. His heart's desire is for all to see what He's like.

Holy Spirit, just please open our hearts and our eyes, that we would be willing to trust You, that You are good, that You are good and Your desire is to bless.

I pray that this week we would all receive that and dwell on that, and eat on that. Feed us Lord with what You're like,  
In Jesus' Name.

Amen.

## **Intercessions**

We're just going to have some intercessions now, that Jane is going to share with us.

[Jane Garsed:]

Let us pray.

Father, thank You for Your gift of salvation through Your Son Jesus Christ. Thank You, that You are patient with us as we journey towards knowing You better. Father, You call us to acknowledge and repent of our sins, and in the silence now would You bring to our minds those things we've done that have displeased You or hurt others, or offended, in some way, the name of Jesus.

Proverbs 28:13 says, "Whoever confesses and renounces their sins finds mercy." Thank You, Father, that You are merciful to us.

Thank You that Your Word says that You care about those things that concern us too, because You are a loving Father. And we bring before You now our community of Kenilworth. Thank You for friendships and neighbours. And as we think of our own streets now, we bless our neighbours, in Jesus' name. Thank You for friendships that have provided support at this time. Thank You for the groups that have been set up to come alongside those in need. We bless the work of their hands. And going forward, we pray for opportunities to grow relationships, so that Your love will be made known to everyone.

We ask Your blessing to rest upon our shops and businesses in the town. Lord God, in these hard times, would You be at the centre of those who care for our town? We pray for our councillors, that You would guide their decisions.

Lord, would You bless our schools as they adjust to this term. We pray for good relationships to be developed between pupils and staff. We pray that there would be a sense of working together with families and the community for the greater good.

We pray for the Christian communities in the town, and we bless them. Would You put a new song in our hearts and help us to look forward to the new possibilities that lie ahead? And we think of our own community in church at this time and we lift particularly to You, Father God, those who are grieving, and those who are sick. Would You grant them peace? Would You bless them? Would You bless their families, and those who are caring for them? In Jesus' name we ask.

We pray at this time for our nation. We ask that You would lead and guide our government. Would You guide them in the decisions that they make? And we pray that Your plans and purposes will be fulfilled in our nation. We pray for those in opposition too, that they might sharpen the effectiveness of the government.

And finally, Lord, we lift the whole world to You and ask that You would bring healing to those nations that are torn apart by division and injustice. We pray for those countries led by corrupt leaders and governments, and we ask that by the power of Your Holy Spirit at work, You would bring justice, freedom to those who are oppressed. We pray for peace across our nations.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of Your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.



[Lindsey:]

Thank you, Jane, for the prayers and I would quite like to just add another prayer before we leave, for Angie Purdom and a prayer for her and her family.

Lord, bless Angie and her family at this time while she's still in hospital.

And we also pray for Mark's family, the funeral tomorrow, Lord, I pray for blessing on all his family tomorrow and that You're close to everyone there. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

I want to thank you this morning for joining us again. I apologise for the beginning when I was obviously speaking and you couldn't hear me - I don't know what happened either. Either I forgot to unmute, or I did and it didn't quite work, so apologies for that and thank you for still staying with us.

### **Blessing**

I want to end our service with a psalm, a part of the psalm actually. We normally end with a blessing prayer and a psalm you might use in worship at the beginning, but I wanted us to go out with a bit of a bump and a sort of reminder that this week, really even when you don't feel like it, praise God in your day. And it's a way of actually telling yourself to rejoice in who He is, even when things seem difficult. So, a blessing this week, I want to end on Psalm 34 verses 1 to 10. [NIVUK 1984]

<sup>1</sup> I will extol the LORD at all times;  
his praise will always be on my lips.

<sup>2</sup> My soul will boast in the LORD;  
let the afflicted hear and rejoice.

<sup>3</sup> Glorify the LORD with me:  
let us exalt his name together.

<sup>4</sup> I sought the LORD, and he answered me;  
he delivered me from all my fears.

<sup>5</sup> Those who look to him are radiant;  
their faces are never covered with shame.

<sup>6</sup> This poor man called, and the LORD heard him;  
he saved him out of all his troubles.

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him,  
and he delivers them.

<sup>8</sup> Taste and see that the LORD is good;  
blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

<sup>9</sup> Fear the LORD, you his saints,  
for those who fear him lack nothing.

<sup>10</sup> The lions may grow weak and hungry,  
but those who seek the LORD lack no good thing.

My prayer is this week that you continue to seek God, and know His goodness and know He is a Father, and He loves you.

Amen.

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

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