**Westfield URC 10.30am 17th January 2021**

Whether you are a member, friend or visitor, welcome. It is good to be together to share in worship this morning

**Call to worship** : Gracious God we greet you this morning, we meet you as our voices rise in praise, we listen and respond to you through word and hymn and prayer...Be with us on our journey and may our worship be wholly acceptable to you.

**Hymn No. 560 MP: Praise my soul the King of heaven**

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;

to His feet thy tribute bring;

ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven

who like thee His praise should sing?

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise the everlasting King!

Praise Him for His grace and favour

to our fathers in distress;

praise Him still the same for ever,

slow to chide, and swift to bless:

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like He tends and spares us;

well our feeble frame He knows;

in His hands He gently bears us,

rescues us from all our foes.

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Widely as His mercy flows

Angels, help us to adore Him;

ye behold Him face to face;

sun and moon, bow down before Him;

dwellers all in time and space:

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise Him! Praise Him!

Praise with us the God of grace!

Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847) CCLI 150801

**Family Prayers & Lord’s Prayer**

Dear God,

How can we proclaim, unless we have first listened ?

Lord, we need to hear your word, spoken for today.

We need to look for your acts, carried out in the present.

We need to be open to your Spirit, changing our ways.

You come to move us on, to prod us into following.

To invite us on a journey, to share with us a vision of your Kingdom.

Help us to discover you in new ways, to know you through other people.

To follow you on new paths, to share you in all situations.

Thankyou Lord that you are with us, not just today, but every day.

Not for one part of our life but in every part.

Not for the church alone but for everyone in this world.

Help us to be more and more committed to you day by day,

through Jesus Christ, your son. Amen.

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Notices, Mission Prayer and Prayer of Dedication for the offering**

Loving God we thank you for all your gifts to us.. bless and use these gifts of money and of ourselves.. enable both to be used to further your kingdom here on earth. Amen

**Hymn No. 1008 MP: The Lord’s my shepherd**

The Lord’s my shepherd,

I’ll not want.

He makes me lie in pastures green.

He leads me by the still, still waters,

His goodness restores my soul

*And I will trust in You alone,*

*and I will trust in You alone,*

*for Your endless mercy follows me,*

*Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,

and He anoints my head with oil,

and my cup, it overflows with joy,

I feast on His pure delights.

*And I will trust....*

And though I walk the darkest path,

I will not fear the evil one,

for You are with me,

and Your rod and staff

are the comfort I need to know.

*And I will trust....*

Psalm 23 adapted Stuart Townend © 1996 Thankyou Music CCLI 150801

**Bible Reading NT**: John 1 v 43-51

**Bible Reading OT**: 1 Samuel 3 v 1-10

**Hymn No 253 MP: Hushed was the evening hymn**

Hushed was the evening hymn,

the temple-courts were dark;

the lamp was burning dim

before the sacred ark,

when suddenly a voice divine rang

through the silence of the shrine.

The old man, meek and mild,

the priest of Israel, slept;

his watch the temple child,

the little Samuel, kept:

and what from Eli's sense was scaled

the Lord to Hannah's son revealed.

O give me Samuel's ear,

the open ear, O Lord,

alive and quick to hear

each whisper of Your word;

like him to answer to Your call,

and to obey You first of all.

O give me Samuel's heart,

a lowly heart, that waits

to serve and play the parts

You show us at Your gates,

by day and night, a heart that still

moves at the breathing of Your will.

O give me Samuel's mind,

a sweet, unmurmuring faith,

obedient and resigned

to You in life and death,

that I may read with childlike eyes

truths that are hidden from the wise.

J. D. BURNS (1823-64) © 1986 Horrobin/Leavers CCLI `150801

**Sermon: Called to respond**

The intention of God when he created mankind was that we would live in a good relationship with him as our creator and, building on that, we would live in good relationships with one another. To have some sort of order, for us to be able to live together in community there have to be some sort of rules or guidelines on how we should behave towards one another. So, God gave us through Moses the basics of how to live together. We know from looking at our world that the majority of people live within the laws of our society

developed from the first ten which God gave to Moses but there is a small minority who do not. Like the people who have not considered others during the pandemic – got too close – not worn a mask etc.

In the time of our Old Testament reading some people also took no notice of the rules put there to help people respect and care about each other. Samuel’s mother promised to dedicate him to God and did so but any commitment anyone makes to worship and to serve God can not be because of the promises of faithful parents, it must be a personal step of faith. The young boy, Samuel, continued to serve God under Eli but with the continuing disobedience of Eli’s sons and of many of the people there were very few signs recognised as from God in those days. Not that God was not there, he was speaking but hardly anyone was listening. One night as Samuel lay in bed there in the sanctuary where the sacred Arc of the Covenant was kept he heard a voice calling to him.

Thinking it was Eli, who was by this time old and nearly blind, Samuel got up and went to him. Eli had not called him so told him to go back to bed. God spoke to Samuel three times and each time he went to Eli to see what he wanted.

After he had gone to Eli the third time Eli realised it was God who was speaking

so he sent Samuel back to bed with the instructions to answer with the words in v 10 “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening”. What a shock this young boy must have got. There was no great revelation about either the future of Israel or the work that Samuel would have to do for God but God went on to tell Samuel

about the things that would go wrong for Eli’s family because of the sinfulness and terrible disobedience of the sons and because Eli did not make them stop what they were doing.

The next morning, as we would expect, Eli excitedly asked Samuel what had God said. Perhaps it was a test of Samuel’s honesty, we do to know, but the young boy had to tell his ageing and nearly blind friend about the punishment to come for him and his family and Eli, having served God for so long could only reply “He is the Lord, he will do whatever seems best to him.” This appearance of God to Samuel was the first for a long time but became the first of many and all the people came to recognise that Samuel was a prophet of God and when he spoke, all Israel listened.

While Samuel was the nations leader God blessed all they did and as he grew old he appointed his sons as Judges to follow him. This is a picture of a nation turning back to God and finding again those things which held them together

as community and nation. But, again we have the selfishness of a few causing difficulties for the many. The sons of Samuel did not follow their father’s guidance or example but used the opportunity to make money for themselves.

That is when the Israelites began to call for a king. They wanted stability, to know who to turn to with their problems instead of having to wait until the next Judge showed up. They thought they wanted a proper king like everybody else,

but they did not take into account the fact that their true king was God himself

and it was he who cared for them unconditionally. They could see their neighbouring nations from a distance and it looked a good way to appoint a king

rather than keep having problems with the people that God chose. What the people in Samuel’s time could not see were the problems which would be caused by having a king interested only in gaining more and more power

even though Samuel warned them. This is what he told them would happen;

He will take your sons for his soldiers. He will take your other sons to plough his fields and to make his weapons and chariots for him. He will take your daughters to make perfumes and to work for him as cooks and bakers. He will take your things for himself, your good fields, vineyards and olive groves. He will take a tenth of all that you have for his court officials. He will take your servants, your cattle and your donkeys to work for him. He will take a tenth of your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. “Then”, said Samuel,

“you will complain bitterly but God will allow it because that is what you said you wanted.” But the people would not listen. They thought they knew better than God and kept asking for a king but within the reign of three kings all Samuel said came true and there was civil war.

We may wonder Why God let that happen? He knows what the future holds

but he has given us a free will to lead our own lives and to make our own decisions. He doesn’t always like or approve of the decisions we make but what we find is that despite all we do which goes against what he would wish he still invites us say we are sorry and try again. Only he can see beyond the barriers of time to what tomorrow holds, and the next day, and the next. Only he seems to be able to keep loving us and bring to fruition the wonderful plans he has for us

despite us. Only he can take the mistakes and the difficult times even the hard experiences of bereavement and loss we have and use them to build stronger characters, to deepen our faith and as we draw closer to him we are drawn closer to one another and feel the stability and security that belonging to God’s community can bring.

John understands what it takes for people to come to faith. We need to be drawn into the story to listen to what Jesus said and did to realise he lived and died and was raised from the dead for us as individuals. It takes time, it demands a testing of our experience with others a listening through the church fellowship we come to belong to. Eventually we become part of the story and we can truly say “I believe” not usually at the beginning but usually part way along our journey of faith. This John reveals in today’s reading. Andrew goes to fetch his brother he asks him to come and see who he has found. Andrew does not say let me tell you about Christ he does not hand him a document to read or invite him to a meeting to hear the Truth all valid ways of sharing but perhaps more often we should say to those who are searching, those we meet day by day, come and see, come and experience, come and be part of the community of Jesus. The invitation is not to have to believe at the beginning of the journey. It rather encourages a community of Christ’s followers to share together and help each other to a personal faith.

God has not given up on society. However much he has been tested over the years so when God speaks to us I pray we will be ready to answer “Speak your servant is listening” as Samuel did and to give his open invitation to those outside our fellowship as soon as we are safely able as Philip said to Nathanael

“Come and see”. Amen

**Prayers of Intercession**

Lord, we know we are called to be the Body of Christ;

make us worthy of that calling,

fervent in all our prayer and worship,

loving, faithful and honest in our lives,

so that the whole Church displays what God is like.

***Draw us closer: closer to the heart of God.***

We pray for the grace and wisdom to care

for this world we have been given as our home;

for perception in the difficult decisions,

and commitment to justice and peace.

***Draw us closer: closer to the heart of God.***

We pray for the homes of this church

& all the other Wyke churches

& the whole of the Wyke community,

Their hopes and struggles,

pleasures and sorrows are already known to you.

May each household be blessed as we pray,

and may your love fill each life.

***Draw us closer: closer to the heart of God.***

We pray for all who do not yet know you,

and all whose hearts are poisoned with hate

or weighed down with despair.

May your light scatter their darkness

and bring them hope and healing.

***Draw us closer: closer to the heart of God.***

We pray for those who have recently been bereaved

Strengthen those who grieve

comfort those who miss someone’s physical presence,

help each one to know the hope of eternal life with you.

***Draw us closer: closer to the heart of God.***

We give you thanks for all that points us towards your unconditional love, and draws us closer to you.

accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen.

**Hymn No. 501 MP: O Jesus I have promised**

O Jesus, I have promised

to serve Thee to the end;

be Thou for ever near me,

my Master and my Friend.

I shall not fear the battle

if Thou art by my side,

nor wander from the pathway

if Thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel Thee near me;

the world is ever near;

I see the sights that dazzle,

the tempting sounds I hear;

my foes are ever near me,

around me and within;

but, Jesus, draw Thou nearer,

and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear Thee speaking

in accents clear and still,

above the storms of passion,

the murmurs of self-will;

O speak to reassure me,

to hasten or control;

O speak, and make me listen,

Thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, Thou hast promised,

to all who follow Thee,

that where Thou art in glory

there shall Thy servant be;

and, Jesus, I have promised

to serve Thee to the end;

O give m grace to follow

my Master and my friend!

O let me see Thy footmarks,

and in them plant mine own;

my hope to follow duly

is in Thy strength alone

O guide me, call me, draw me,

uphold me to the end;

and then in heaven receive me,

my Saviour and my Friend!

J. E. B0DE (1816-74) CCLI 150801

**Blessing**: May the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon us and upon all our work and worship done in his name. May he give us light to guide us, courage to support us and love to unite us, now and for evermore. **Amen**