**18th April 2021** **Sermon: Roger Sammons** **Rest of service: Kath**

Lord, I don’t know what today will bring but I do know that you are with me and that this is a time to stop – to be – to listen to you.

**MP 48 Be still and know**

Be still and know that I am God,

Be still and know that I am God,

Be still and know that I am God.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.

I am the Lord that healeth thee.

In Thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

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In Thee, O Lord, I put my trust.

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**Opening Reflection**

Take time to think; it is the source of power.
Take time to read; it is the foundation of wisdom.
Take time to play; it is the secret of staying young.
Take time to be quiet; it is the opportunity to see God.
Take time to be aware; it is the opportunity to help others.
Take time to love and be loved; it is God’s greatest gift.
Take time to laugh; it is the music of the soul.
Take time to be friendly; it is the road to happiness.
Take time to dream; it is what the future is made of.
Take time to pray; it is the greatest power on earth.

*Author: Unknown*

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Mission Prayer**

**OT Reading** Psalm 46

**NT Reading** Luke 24 36-48

**MP 50 Be still for the presence of the Lord**

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,

the Holy One, is here;

come bow before Him now

with reverence and fear:

in Him no sin is found

we stand on holy ground.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,

the Holy One, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord

is shining all around

He burns with holy fire,

with splendour He is crowned :

how awesome is the sight -

our radiant King of light!

Be still, for the glory of the Lord

is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord

is moving in this place:

He comes to cleanse and heal,

to minister His grace -

no work too hard for Him.

In faith receive from Him.

Be still, for the power of the Lord

is moving in this place.

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**Psalm 46 v 10.**

**‘Be still and know that I am God.’**

I want to ask each of you a personal question. How are your ‘Etres’? ‘What is this dear fellow on about?’ you may well be asking yourself. ‘Should he even be allowed out by himself, going up to people and asking them questions which sound so deeply personal? Does he have a PhD in ‘Etres’, whatever they are?’

To explain what I am going on about (and I expect that many of you will be able to draw a comparison), I have to take you back with me to a certain morning in September 1958 at South West Ham Technical School. Along with a growing collection of text books which we had to cover in brown paper, my satchel contained an English-French & French-English Dictionary which I had been required to purchase during the summer holidays, along with a tinned ‘Oxford’ geometry set.

Having set foot in France only once in my life, I must say that the County Borough Of West Ham Education Department’s expectations of advanced prowess on the part of ‘yours truly’ in the French language were totally unrealistic. By default, and mainly due to David, my late brother-in-law who was a reader of ‘The Daily Mirror’, we found ourselves in possession of coupons for a day trip by ‘SeaCat’ from Folkestone to Boulogne. Mary and I paid for passports – no one even asked to see them. I added ‘haw-haw-haw’ to every sentence which I spoke and just received strange looks from everyone. In short, France wasn’t ready for me! One thing from that day, which I remain very proud of was that I saved my wife’s life at lunchtime. At the hypermarket at Auchon, three miles outside of Boulogne, I spotted the word ‘cheval’ in connection with the beefburger which she was certain she was about to order. When I whispered the word ‘horse’ into her ear, the loud exclamation of ‘Never!’ could be heard the other side of Europe. Indeed, I shouldn’t be surprised if her tray is still deeply embedded in the ceiling at Auchon! All credit for my life-saving action that day must go to Mr Sid Braham who during my first year in secondary education, led my form through the rudimentary steps of the French language, despite the distraction of a very beautiful French Assistant who, behind her back, was known as ‘Fi-Fi’. There should have been a law against the way in which she sprawled herself across the desks of eleven and twelve-year-old boys from the East End of London!

For our first lesson, we were not taught the bonjours, bonsoirs and other cordialities often associated with the romantic aspect of the lingo but, in unison, we had to read aloud what Mr Braham had written on the blackboard; namely the verb, ‘Etre’ – ‘To be’.

Je suis I am

Tu es Thou art or you are (singular)

Il est He is

Elle est She is

Nous sommes We are

Vous etes You are (plural)

Ils sont They are (male)

Elles sont They are (female)

This was followed by various signs or icons which represented French punctuation marks, e.g. the cedilla. Mr Sid Braham soon got the nickname ‘Cedilla Sid’.

So, our initiation into the French language, which in my case was eventually dropped in favour of technical subjects, began with a verb, ‘Etre’ which simply meant ‘To be’. A rather dull verb compared with so many exciting verbs which have a more ‘swashbuckling’ sound about them. Why such a flat sounding verb to introduce us to French? It seems that most kids at that time had a very similar introduction and ‘Etre’ was the gateway to French in much the same way that the Carter Bar is the Gateway to Scotland. None of the more active verbs or ‘doing words’ can be experienced unless we have learnt ‘to be’ first. It’s like the theory has to come before the practice. We have to learn about the ‘practice’ (noun) before we can ‘practice’ (verb) it.

Over recent weeks, I have considered this more and more. And I do see the point, indeed, the importance, of learning how ‘to be’ in our life before learning how ‘to do’ just about everything else eventually required of us. Learning ‘to be’ is central to our character building. We need to know who we are before we can be of any practical use. We need to know our gifts and abilities before we can put them into action. We need to know when it is wiser to listen than to speak or wiser to think than to act. Learning this lesson has implications as to how we please God rather than how to be people pleasers. There are so many occasions when we simply cannot do both.

To me, there seems to be a close analogy between learning French and living the Christian life, although I didn’t think so when I went to school and more than sixty years later, I have learnt that, frequently, God simply wants me ‘to be’ rather than ‘to do’. Furthermore, there have been many times when I have ‘done’ rather than ‘been’ at the cost of repenting and asking Jesus to ‘reset’ my life.

So what, then, is it that God wants me to be? Well, the classic answer to that is to ‘Be still’. It’s an instruction to be found several times in Scripture. It’s not just about keeping one’s body still. It’s about stilling the heart, the mind and the soul. ‘Be still and know that I am God.’ Hymn and song writers have taken up the theme, such is its importance in not only seeking but also in finding close communion with God. Jesus often went to a quiet place to meet with His Father, probably demonstrating to us the best example of ‘being’. But that ‘being’ was important to Jesus because he would be listening to His Father, receiving guidance, wisdom, power and strength – in worldly parlance, he was being ‘clued up’ and equipped for the mission which lay ahead of him. The ‘doing’ part came soon afterwards, whenever, he went into action.

You see, unless we go ahead in the power of the Spirit and in God’s will, Isaiah Ch 64 v 6 condemns our actions as being like filthy rags – ‘All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.’ If we disobey orders then we deserve to be court martialled, not rewarded. The danger of forging on ahead as we endeavour to serve God is that we might revel in self-glorification and wrongly claim the kudos for what we have done.

When we sing Isaac Watts’ wonderful hymn, ‘When I survey the wondrous cross’, we need to especially take to heart the verse which reads:

‘Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,

Save in the death of Christ my God.

All the vain things that charm me most,

I sacrifice them to His blood.’

Will you join me in making sure we have ‘Etre’ in place? When Jesus was just twelve years old and the family were returning home from Jerusalem, they suddenly realised that they had left Jesus behind and had to go back for him. May we never be guilty of leaving Jesus behind. He was being briefed as to what ‘His Father’s Business’ was all about. There is always a danger that we might put our business first and simply assume that Jesus is with us.

**Rog Sammons**

**Hymn MP 755 When I survey the wondrous cross**

When I survey the wondrous Cross,

on which the Prince of glory died,

my richest gain I count but loss,

and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,

save in the death of Christ my God:

all the vain things that charm me most,

I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,

sorrow and love flow mingled down:

did e'er such love and sorrow meet,

or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,

that were an offering far too small;

love so amazing, so divine,

demands my soul, my life, my all.

ISAAC WATTS (1674-1748) CCLI 150801

**Prayers of intercession**

Lord,

We thank you for this time with you

Time set aside to pause, reflect, seek and learn.

Help us to make time for you every day to come

Thankyou for time with others

Ordinary and special moments with friends and family,

With neighbours and strangers along the way

As we make time for them

Help us to share you with them as well

Thankyou for the time you give us

To reach out to the needs of your world

To give time to pray for charities and those in need in different countries

To pray for your guidance in how to use our resources and gifts to help

To uphold others in prayer who are in dangerous or needy situations

Thankyou that there is time for everything

Within your timing

Help us not to chase or resent our time

But help us to see our present life as your perfect timing

We place our days in your hands, trusting you in all things

Through your Son, who always took time to be with you before doing anything, our perfect role model.

Amen

**Hymn MP 59 Blessed Assurance**

Blessed Assurance, Jesus is mine:

O what a foretaste of glory divine!

Heir of salvation, purchase of God;

born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.

This is my story, this is my song,

praising my Saviour all the day long;

this is my story, this is my song,

praising my Saviour all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,

visions of rapture burst on my sight;

angels descending, bring from above

echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

*This is my story....*

Perfect submission, all is at rest,

I in my Saviour am happy and blest;

watching and waiting, looking above,

filled with His goodness, lost in His love

*This is my story....*

Frances van Alstyne (1820-1913) CCLI 150801

**Blessing**

Gracious God, take this worship, this day and the days to come.

Take our lives, help us each new day to firstly to be still, listen to you and then use us as your witnesses now and always Amen.