**15th August 2021 Back to normal? Mick Murphy**

**Psalm 95: 1-7**

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.

Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.

For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of he earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him.

The sea is his, for he made it, and is hands formed the dry land.

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

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

**Song: Is He Worthy? (youtube: Hymns Live by Shane and Shane)**

Do you feel the world is broken? (We do) Do you feel the shadows deepen? (We do)

But do you know that all the dark won't stop the light from getting through? (We do)

Do you wish that you could see it all made new? (We do)

Is all creation groaning? (It is) Is a new creation coming? (It is)

Is the glory of the Lord to be the light within our midst? (It is)

Is it good that we remind ourselves of this? (It is)

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?

Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?

The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave

He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave

Is He worthy? Is He worthy? Of all blessing and honour and glory.

Is He worthy of this?

He is.

Does the Father truly love us? (He does)

Does the Spirit move among us? (He does)

And does Jesus, our Messiah, hold forever those He loves? (He does)

Does our God intend to dwell again with us? (He does)

Is anyone worthy? Is anyone whole?

Is anyone able to break the seal and open the scroll?

The Lion of Judah who conquered the grave

He is David's root and the Lamb who died to ransom the slave

From every people and tribe, every nation and tongue,

He has made us a kingdom and priests to God to reign with the Son

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?

Of all blessing and honour and glory.

Is He worthy? Is He worthy? Is He worthy of this:

He is!

It's been a while since Elaine and I were here on a Sunday morning - sixteen months or so - it's hard to remember what we did in the time between then and now. We shared online fellowship with the Christian Community Church, with Church on the Way in Idle, with St. Mark's Anglican Church in Harrogate and even St. Mary's in Wyke. And we read the Sunday morning services from Westfield and had the blessing of the Sunday evening services from Neil. As good as those things were, they weren't the same as coming to meet together face to face. It is so good to see you all again.

Let's pray and thank God for His blessings upon this morning.

*Amazing God, how can we thank You enough for your grace and mercy to us. Thank You that even through the times when we couldn't meet with our brothers and sisters in church, we know that we met with You often, that we could hear Your voice and that You heard our voices calling to You. It's a new day! A time to listen to You. A time to worship You.*

*Father, we bring all our failures to you in Jesus' name. We try so hard and so often to change but our problems are too big to handle. Today, we give up and throw ourselves totally on your love and mercy. Cleanse us and change us from the inside out. Teach us how to imitate you - to have your heart of kindness and mercy. Teach us to walk in the Spirit every day so we can know your power and victory. We rest in your mercy and faithfulness. All honour and glory to You. Amen*

**The Lord's Prayer**

**Notices, Mission Prayer, Dedication of Offering**

**Hymn MP 1072 In Christ Alone**

In Christ alone my hope is found,

He is my light, my strength, my song;

this cornerstone, this solid ground,

firm through the fiercest drought and storm.

What heights of love, what depths of peace,

when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!

My comforter, my all in all,

here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone - who took on flesh,

fullness of God in helpless Babe!

This gift of love and righteousness,

scorned by the ones he came to save

till on that cross as Jesus died,

the wrath of God was satisfied,

for every sin on Him was laid;

here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground his body lay

light of the world by darkness slain,

then, bursting forth in glorious day,

up from the grave He rose again!

And as he stands in victory

sin's curse has lost its grip on me,

for I am His and He is mine -

bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,

this is the power of Christ in me;

from life's first cry to final breath,

Jesus commands my destiny.

No power of hell, no scheme of man

can ever pluck me from His hand;

till he returns or calls me home,

here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

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*Lord, help us to have a listening heart that is soft and teachable. Save us from being so filled with our own needs and desires that we can't hear you. Give us the grace to listen and obey what you say to us.*

**Sermon**

A phrase I've heard from a lot of people during these past few strange months has been "I'll be glad when things get back to normal". But what is "normal"?

For a lot of people it could be something personal: I'll be glad when I can safely go out again - hug my friends, children, grandchildren, go shopping, catch a bus, etc.

Maybe we've missed "doing church": I'll be glad when we can have a cuppa and a chat after the service, sing out loud without a face covering, sit close to each other. But "normal" means different things to different people.

After Jesus' death, the Pharisees and the chief priests would have felt glad that they'd got rid of Jesus. "Things could get back to normal." They'd put an end to all the talk of Jesus being the Messiah - or had they?

For the disciples - after Pentecost things would never be normal again.

The rough hands that had stretched out to bring the fishing nets in would be laid on the sick and the sick would be healed.

These unschooled men would lovingly tell the lost that they could know Jesus as their Saviour and never be normal again.

So what was normal for these followers of Jesus?

Acts 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

That's quite a list! How do we measure up to the normal that the followers of Jesus lived out?

Are we devoted to Bible teaching?

Are we devoted to the Christians in the other churches in Wyke?

Are we devoted to breaking bread?

Are we devoted to prayer?

How does the church today measure up?

I think during lockdown a lot of people showed their love for their brothers and sisters in Christ: sending cards, keeping in touch, doing shopping and generally showing Jesus' love and care for one other.

There have been those who looked after the church buildings during lockdown, who cleaned and took every precaution to ensure that everything was safe for us when the churches re-opened. I pray this love and compassion for each other will continue.

I think that as church we deserve a pat on the back. I would ask though - did this love and compassion and practical help make any difference to the people who walked passed the churches during lockdown? And now that the churches are re-opening, will they notice?

One thing we came to realise recently - well, there have been quite a few things - but one of those is that Jesus came to save the lost. You're probably thinking that you knew that already but did you know that He came to die for and save ***all the lost?***

Because of all the wicked and horrible things we hear on the news, it's hard to stop judging people by what they say or do and remember that God has love for everyone, including the unsaved***,*** that is as deep and massive as the love He has for each one of us here today.

Like the hymn says: The vilest offender who truly believes, that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

1 Timothy 2 verses 1-6 says:

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone - for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants ALL men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for ALL men.

A lot of people have been really afraid during the pandemic; afraid of losing their jobs, afraid of what's going to happen to them when the money stops coming in, afraid of who to turn to when they're ill (you couldn't even get a face-to-face doctor's appointment). And most of all, a fear of catching Coronavirus.

While it's good that some things are getting back to normal, my prayer is that "going back to normal" won't happen in the church here in Wyke. We've had months to think about where we stand in Christ and to seek God's will, both as individuals and as part of the church in this village. We have had a God-given opportunity to demonstrate that everyone

is valuable and precious to Christ, whether Christian or not, and whatever denomination - whether it's Westfield URC, Lower Wyke Moravians, Wyke Methodists, St. Mary's Church or Wyke Christian Community Church. We need each other and we need to hear and know God among us.

We need God's Holy Spirit. We need the courage to witness to our unsaved families, our unsaved neighbours, our unsaved friends, the unsaved who serve us in the shops and the unsaved we talk to in the street.

We don't live in fear of COVID. The One who calls us beloved and precious is the same One who has a plan for us, 'a plan to prosper and not to harm us'. We know the love of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ. It's a perfect love - a love that drives out fear. We know this with a certain and sure knowledge. We need to tell others because we're told to love them as Christ does. Please, please, please... when our churches fully re-open let us refuse to get things back to normal. Let us show real love and compassion to the people of this village. If we don't give them the opportunity to know Jesus and be saved, they have a very different and terrible future to us. Like our Father, let our desire be the same as His - to see all men saved and come into a knowledge of the truth - His truth. The only truth.

Elaine and I were disappointed that the church in this country didn't hold a national day of prayer during the pandemic like they did during the second world war. Oh, we prayed with lots of organisations as they held individual days of prayer - the Church of England suggested daily topics to pray for each day one week - we prayed for schools, the police, nurses and doctors who were almost overwhelmed in the hospitals, etc. We prayed along with quite a number of churches who each had their own ideas of where the prayer was needed the most. We prayed along with the Christian Institute and other organisations. All very worthwhile but what a witness it would have been for people to know that a God-fearing, Christ-believing church still exists in this country.

We're living in dark times, some horrible things are happening. But we must never see the dark things that are going on in the world as "normal" or see those things as inevitable. We can get comfortable and feel safe and secure in our churches and in our relationship with Jesus - and I'm not saying that's a bad thing but don't try to adjust your eyes to the dark and don't fall asleep in the light.

May God bless His church during the coming weeks and months and may we, with God's Holy Spirit help make a difference. May we see His kingdom come not only here in this village but in the world.

*God, please forgive us for selfish living that gives little thought to the needs of those around us. Melt our hearts and break us in the deepest part of our being. Flood us with your love so we can see and feel about others as you do. Save us from ourselves and thrust us into he fields that are ripe for harvest. We ask this is the name of Jesus, who gave himself for us. Amen*

**Hymn MP 1075 Jesus, All for Jesus**

Jesus, all for Jesus;

all I am and have and ever hope to be.

Jesus, all for Jesus;

all I am and have and ever hope to be.

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans

I surrender these into Your hands.

All of my ambitions, hopes and plans

I surrender these into Your hands,

*For it's only in Your will that I am free,*

*for it's only in Your will that I am free.*

Jesus, all for Jesus;

all I am and have and ever hope to be.

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**Prayers of Intercession**

**Shine come in to share**

**Hymn MP 1095 O My Soul, Arise And Bless Your Maker**

O my soul, arise and bless your Maker,

for He is your Master and your friend.

Slow to wrath but rich in tender mercy;

worship the Saviour Jesus.

King of grace, His love is overwhelming;

Bread of life, He's all I'll ever need,

For His blood has purchased me for ever:

bought at the cross of Jesus.

*And I will sing for all my days*

*of heaven's love come down.*

*Each breath I take will speak His praise*

*until He calls me home.*

When I wake, I know that He is with me;

when I'm weak, I know that He is strong

Though I fall, His arm is there to lean on;

safe on the rock of Jesus.

Stir in me the songs that You are singing;

fill my gaze with things as yet unseen.

Give me faith to move in works of power,

making me more like Jesus.

*And I will sing for all my days*

*of heaven's love come down.*

*Each breath I take will speak His praise*

*until He calls me home.*

Then one day I'll see him as he sees me,

face to face, the Lover and the loved;

no more words, the longing will be over:

there with my precious Jesus.

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**Closing Prayer:**

*Father God, lead us step by step every day of our lives. Give us a humble childlike heart that will listen for and then obey your voice. We want to experience your power so that spiritual walls will be broken down in Jesus' name. Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered! We ask this is the beautiful and precious Name of Jesus. Amen*