

Sunday 23rd of August 2020

Sermon by Kemi Ogundipe, Prayers by Betty Friend

Isaiah Chapter 48:16-22 and Ephesians Chapter 4:1-6

Good morning, a warm welcome to our online worship. I am Kemi. Thank God that we can connect through technology to worship, but it is not real. I am missing the real church worship and cannot wait to worship physically.

We will begin the service with a short prayer, there are two readings, Isaiah and Ephesians and the theme of today's sermon is "No thirst in the deserts". I will read the two passages, preach then finish with a short prayer.

The intercessions were written by Betty but Sue will read.

Let us pray.

Heavenly father, our provider, our maker, and our protector. Through your goodness, we are alive and healthy enough to gather and worship you. We praise you for all that you have given us and thank you in Jesus's name.

Lord, we commit all our good deeds to you and ask that everything we do, be done for your glory forever and ever. Amen.

Sue will read the intercessions.

Father we place into your hands the things we cannot do.

Father we place into your hands the things we're going through.

Father we place into your hands the way that we would go, for we know we can always trust you.

Let us pray.

Almighty God we thank you for your many blessings and bring our cares and concerns to You confident that you hear and answer our prayers. We know that we make mistakes and do things which you do not like, say and think things which are unkind and do not do things which we ought. We know, however, that when we come to you and confess our sins you will forgive us when we truly repent.

We thank you for the wonders of your creation and are sorry that we have not cared for it as we should. Help us to do better so that everything can thrive.

We pray for the people of the world who are suffering as a result of violence, lack of food, clean water, shelter and coronavirus. For those grieving the loss of loved ones through disaster, pandemic or other causes. We pray for missionaries and aid workers, thinking especially of the Day family in Thailand and Jenny at present in Scotland. We ask your

protection and comfort for our brothers and sisters facing persecution, or in prison for proclaiming their faith in you. We pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our government both nationally and locally that as they debate new laws and negotiate a trade deal post the Brexit transition you will give them wisdom and integrity that their decisions will be in accordance with your will.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

We thank you for our community of Penge, for all who have kept vital services running. As more businesses open, please let people take care to follow the guidelines for wearing masks and socially distancing. We pray for the provision of employment for those who have lost their jobs and businesses. There are many families struggling to provide school uniforms and fares to get their children to school. We thank you for the work of CAP and for the provision for the food bank.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

Lord we thank you that we are able to communicate with so many of our church family through zoom and social media and ask that You keep those who are not able to join virtually close to you. Bless and protect our church family of St John's and please continue your healing of Val, Lorraine and Anthony. Let us take a moment to lift to God all those known to us who are in need of His healing touch. Thank you for all those who are keeping the necessary work of the church going - Steve and Ian our church wardens, Sue our administrator, Andrew our treasurer, the PCC, the gardening squad and those hosting our private prayer openings. We pray for Jeonghee and Joon as they prepare to move to Edinburgh, we thank You for bringing them to us even for a short time, and we know that you have plans for them, and that they will now be a blessing to whichever church you call them to. We thank you for the blessing of a daughter to Alex and Andrew and ask your blessing on this new baby.

Lord in your mercy - **Hear our prayer.**

We are excited about the person you are preparing to be our new vicar. We ask too that you will guide the scientists looking for a vaccine against Covid-19, so that we may be able to gather together to sing your praises. Finally, Lord we pray that You will have Your hand of protection on our families, and our St John's family today and every day.

Now together we say the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**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 for ever.
Amen.

The first reading is from the book of Isaiah Chapter 48 verses 16-22

¹⁶ *"Come near me and listen to me:*

*"From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret;
at the time it happens, I am there".*

*And now the sovereign Lord has sent me,
with his Spirit.*

¹⁷*This is what the Lord says -
your redeemer, the Holy one of Israel:
I am the Lord your God,
who teaches you what is best for you,
who directs you in the way you should go.*

¹⁸*If only you had paid attention to my commands,
your peace would have been like a river,
your righteousness like the waves of the sea.*

¹⁹*Your descendants would have been like the sand,
your children like its numberless grains;
their names would never be cut off
nor destroy from before me."*

²⁰*Leave Babylon,
flee from the Babylonians!
Announce this with shouts of joy
and proclaim it.
Send it out of the ends of the Earth;
say the Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob."*

²¹*They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts;
he made water flow for them from the rock;
he split the rock
and water gushed out.*

²² *"There is no peace "says the Lord for the wicked".*

The second reading is from the book of Ephesians Chapter 4:1-6

¹ As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

This is the word of the Lord - **thanks be to God.**

The world is in our hands, we live in it and choose to do whatever we feel like. No doubt some of us are obedient and some are not, all because we are not perfect. If there are laws, rules, and regulations there are consequences that go alongside them to be followed. The law guides us to do what is right but despite this sometimes we do not adhere to it. We take things for granted and are disobedient. Perhaps we may think it does not apply to us, or deliberately choose not to be a law-abiding citizen.

How do we live obediently according to the bible as stated in our church core values in St Johns and surrounding area?

Israel, descendants of Jacob in the line of Judah, had been disobedient, stubborn, and rebellious at heart by nature since the leadership of Moses and Jacob during their journey to the promised land of Canaan. Despite all they had seen of God's work, loved by him they struggle with sin.

The first verse of the reading testifies Israel lived in a close compacted city of Jerusalem with God's temple where different tribe worshipped together and felt confident, lavished with the goodness of God and dependent on their heritage, their city and their temple, but this was false security. They chose to do all things their own way forgetting God's commandments given to Moses. There was no holiness in their lives and no sincerity in their religion in this present civilised world, some nations similarly are in the ways of Israel. As human beings, born imperfect, we find ourselves in the same situation as Israel, disobedient by nature.

The current coronavirus pandemic lockdown has been very tough on everyone but as it has been eased some of us are not taking the recommended precautions to not spread the virus. We must truly be a law abiding citizen, depend personally with all our hearts and mind on Christ, though we were born imperfect, God's grace is sufficient to carry us through. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 12:9 *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness therefore, I will boast more gladly about my weakness, so that Christ's power may rest on me"*. When we are lacking in strength, he empowers us to do his work. It is encouraging that in our weakness, God makes us strong to do his calling in whatever way we serve, whether academically or vocationally. When we serve in his strength, it shall be well with us. Israel never profoundly changed, their evil continued, God used the Babylonian empire under King Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and take captives to Babylon for

70 years because they failed to observe his law and disregarded his warnings through the prophets.

Do you feel secure because you go to Church or live in a Christian Country? Heritage, buildings, or nations cannot give us a relationship with God but knowing that Christ loves us will always be our Joy.

In Verses 16 to 18, Isaiah called Israel to listen to God's voice, and for us the holy Spirit qualifies us for service, and those may speak boldly to whom God sends his Spirit. The Spirit was sent and made them share of God's holiness, and also by his grace he leads them in the way of duty, and by his divine intervention he leads them in the way of deliverance so God did not afflict them. There was nothing in Israel's actions, attitude or accomplishments to compel God to love and save them. For God's sake, to show who he was and what he can do, he saved them, God does not save us because we are good but because he loves us and his forgiving nature we received through his death and resurrection.

Our sermon theme today is "no thirst in the deserts" - there was not for Israel.

In Verses 20-22, God called them to journey through the deserts back to Jerusalem, as they had done with Moses. For us in our parish, those whom God designs to bring home he will take care of, making sure that we will not want for our journey. We have been without a minister over the past 10 months but God has been faithful to us in every way to lead us through in his mercy, power and strength to collaborate and team up together to keep the life of the Parish going despite our multi-cultural diversity, challenges and difficulties coronavirus brought to us. Thanks be to God we were able to do it in his strength and with his help we will continue as in Philippians 4:13 *"I can do everything through him who gives me strength"*.

In the reading from Ephesians we hear that God's love is total.

God's family includes all who have believed in him in the past, present and those who will believe in future. We are all family because we have the same father, he is the source of all creation, the rightful owner of everything, God promises his love and power to his family (3:16-21). If we want to receive God's blessings, it is important that we stay in contact with believers in the body of Christ, the believers Paul mentioned here are not church goers, but he refers to everyone that lives in the whole wide world, because those who isolate themselves from God's family and try to go it alone cut themselves off from God's power.

Our society and world reveal discrimination, favouritism, institutionalised racism, prejudice, tribalism, and all sorts of hate crime. These may be due to lack of security, insecurity coupled with superiority and inferiority complexes to one another.

Those who have been victims would be able to share their story and the pain they felt during the ordeal. According to a song in our hymn book In Christ there is no East or West, in him no South and North but one strong fellowship of love throughout the Earth. God loves us immeasurably; he gave us his only begotten son to take away our sins. We saw the protest was supported globally out of love; Paul addresses Churches in Ephesians, and he

received reports of problems. We can learn a great deal by observing how he dealt with the people of Ephesus. In the reading he addressed them with humility and wisdom.

God has chosen us to be Christ's representatives in the light of this truth, he encouraged and challenged us to live a life worthy of the calling we have received. This is the awesome privilege of being called Christ's very own, it includes being humble, gentle, patient, understanding and peaceful amongst ourselves. We are being watched by people around us, can they see Christ like in you? How well are we behaving ourselves amongst our families, friends, and colleagues? God calls us to be community of love and faith, sharing rather than divisive, our vision is to care for one another, involved in serving as one community, and to build a loving community as it says in our parish core values. No one is ever going to be perfect so we must accept and love others in spite of their faults. When we see faults in ourselves, we should be patient and gentle rather than focusing on one's weakness or looking for faults. Pray we can do more, spend time together and see if we can learn to like one another, to build unity is one of the Holy Spirit's important roles; he leads but we have to be willing to be led and to do our parts to keep the peace. We can only do that by focusing on God not ourselves.

Everyone belongs to one body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) Each of us has God's given abilities that strengthen the body, the whole body. Your ability may seem small or large, but it is yours to use in God's service so ask God to use your unique gifts to contribute to the strength and health of the body of your group. We could live obediently by applying the following core values of our parish, by building deeper sense of belonging, living in intimate relationship with the father, by praying without ceasing, depending totally on the Holy Spirit, that is, wanting the Holy Spirit to lead us in whatever we do and Submitting radically to God words by reading our bible every day and trusting in God's words.

We are called by Paul not to concentrate on what divides us, we should remember what unites us - one lord, one faith, one baptism, one God, one Father of all.

Let us pray

Dear heavenly Father, throughout our lives, we sin and ask for forgiveness once a week or month. Deliver us from the spirit of disobedience, thank you for the Spirit of forgiveness shed by the blood of your son Jesus Christ. We pray that in our communities and surrounding areas, all will be welcome and accepted, regardless of nationality, colour, gender or status, and that we will seek always to serve you and our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ in one another. Amen.