

19th July Zoom Service: Lockdown Sharing Service

Welcome:

Welcome to our Zoom service this morning. It is good to come together again.

It is good to find reassurance from the God who is steadfast and eternal as we face the everchanging circumstances of daily life

We can find it scary and threatening as lockdown eases and people prepare to return to work or shopping or simply going out. We can become anxious and fearful.

This morning's service we are looking at lessons from lockdown. I will not be preaching a sermon but there will be opportunity to share something of our own experiences and what God has been teaching us through these times.

Let's begin with a prayer

Prayer:

Father God, you are faithful and unchanging. Help us to hold tight to you.

Lord Jesus, you are our rock and security in times of trouble. Help us to keep our hearts and minds focused on you.

And, lord, when we, like Peter, take our eyes off you and see the waves and begin to sink.

Reach out and take us by the hand and bring us safely to the boat.

Holy Spirit, be with us this morning, may we know your reassurance and encouragement as we seek to follow you.

Lord God, three in one, surround us with your love be our light and shield in all that we do.

For you are the God who was and is and is to come. You know the beginning from the end, and we put our trust in you

Amen

Reading: Psalm 27

The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear?

The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?

² *When the wicked advance against me to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.*

³ *Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*

⁴ *One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*

⁵ *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.*

⁶ *Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.*

⁷ *Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.*

⁸ *My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.*

- ⁹ Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper. Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Saviour.
- ¹⁰ Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.
- ¹¹ Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.
- ¹² Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.
- ¹³ I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.
- ¹⁴ Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

Worship: video – “I will trust my saviour Jesus”

<http://www.cityalight.com/i-will-trust-my-saviour-jesus/>

Open Prayer.

- Birthdays: Jenny H
- Week 3: The Leadership and Worship Team (to coincide with the leaders meeting on the 3rd Tuesday of each Month)
- Any other things for Prayer

Reading 2: Genesis 32:22-30. Jacob Wrestles with God

That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

Thoughts

I came across this passage in some reflections on mental health by Joshua Eckstein

- It is on the Church of England website under mental health resources
- And is well worth a look

It reminded me that a few weeks ago,

- we thought about the wonderful experience Moses had
- When God revealed himself to him on the mountain

How he was held safe in a cleft in the rock as God passed by

- This morning I wanted to think briefly about another encounter with God
- A much more difficult one

Jacob is on a journey back to his homeland

- He has been estranged from his brother and is fearful of the reunion
- With good reason as he had cheated Esau of his inheritance.
- In the middle of the night he lies awake wrestling with a man
- A man who will not say his name.
- We might conclude he is wrestling with his demons
- But Jacob begins to realise it is God he is wrestling with

At that point he holds on to God and refuses to let him go until he is blessed.

- And God duly blesses him by changing his name
- He is no longer Jacob, meaning 'the deceiver'
- Now he will be known as Israel
- Meaning 'The one who has struggled with God'

Sometimes our meetings with God are amazing, like Moses,

- But if we are honest there are also times when they feel like a struggle.
- When we wrestle with our doubts and fears
- Like Jacob this can often be when we are alone in the night
- All our fears and negative thoughts come flooding in

Yet, even in the midst of our struggles we can meet God

- And like Jacob cling to Him and refuse to let Him go
- And he can bless us in our pain and anguish
- And change us to become the man or woman he means us to be.
- To have struggled with God and prevailed is something God will honour

So, if you are struggling and God seems to be against you

- He is still wanting to bless you
- There are things you can do
 1. Remember God is there in the darkness even if we don't see him
 2. Try to hold on to Jesus and refuse to let him go
 3. Know that morning always follows the night
 4. Thank God for all the good things and people he has blessed us with
 5. Reciting a simple prayer, bible verses or a worship song can be helpful. (e.g. the Lords Prayer or 23rd Psalm)
 6. If it is safe to do so, some people find lighting a candle can help to be a prayer without words and reminder that Jesus is a light in the darkness
 7. If the struggle is hard, ask for help from others.

Psalms 139:7-10

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*

⁹ *If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*

¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"*

¹² *even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*

Sharing:

Jenny B: Slowing Down in Lockdown

Link to YouTube track 'Breathe' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnjeMwxFuBA>

My whole work life is appointment-based and to an extent, so is my church life. I meticulously plan to be in a certain place at a certain time and it annoys me if that timing is incorrect because of my fault. That has the knock-on effect of pretty much everything I do being scheduled in.

When we got locked down, everything just suddenly stopped.

There were no work appointments to get to, no church meetings to attend; it didn't matter what I did and didn't get done one day because there were loads more free days stretching ahead of me. My **mind** was forced to slow down. Being something I was unaccustomed to, I went into (nuclear) meltdown. It was actually the lack of routine and productivity I was reacting to and I had to deal with that separately, but through conversations with other people, the fact was highlighted that life had simply slowed down.

I could sit in the garden – something I very rarely do – and hear birds singing because there was so little traffic. I could walk to the shop (if absolutely necessary!) because I wasn't in a tearing hurry to get anywhere afterwards, so there was no need to drive. I could go out for a walk – just because. I could play mindless games on my tablet without feeling guilty that I should be doing something more useful!

Bob Gass wrote:

"Learn to pay attention to your body's signals and emotional responses to the demands you place on yourself. When you're tired to the point of distraction, you need to slow down and rest. Yes, there are seasons that require extra time and energy, but even in the midst of these seasons you need to find a way to take care of yourself. If you constantly ignore your body's aches and pains, work 24/7, live on ready meals, and run on caffeine and adrenalin, you'll get sick and be forced to slow down. Knowing your 'speed limit' allows you to know when it's time to stop, refuel, and replenish, to restore your energy and your soul! No matter how bad you've got, there's help. Your body has the ability to restore itself. God will work with you and in you to bring you back to wholeness if you follow His guidelines for good health."

When the Government announced that hairdressers could go back to work, this was very quickly turned by the media into a compulsion that hairdressers will restart on 4th July and along with it, the unwelcome feeling of returning to life in the fast lane. However, I am very much appreciating my decision to book appointments on every other day to give me time to rest my aching bones and wash all my capes on the in-between days, and I'm also recognising that life doesn't have to move at a million miles an hour again. Just because someone sends me an email, I don't have to reply immediately. If someone leaves a message on the answerphone about work on a Sunday afternoon, I don't even consider returning the call until Monday morning. My appointments are taking longer because of the extra safety measures that have had to be put in place but I'm (trying) not (to be) beating myself up about it.

Hopefully, a valuable lesson from lockdown that I can continue to build upon is to SLOW DOWN!

Debs:

Katie recently sent me a card, with this poem:

W. H. DAVIES - Leisure

*What is this life if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare?—*

*No time to stand beneath the boughs,
And stare as long as sheep and cows:*

*No time to see, when woods we pass,
Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass:*

*No time to see, in broad daylight,
Streams full of stars, like skies at night:*

*No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
And watch her feet, how they can dance:*

*No time to wait till her mouth can
Enrich that smile her eyes began?*

*A poor life this if, full of care,
We have no time to stand and stare.*

Working from home has been hard but has given a great opportunity to look at God's creation. Work have provided a desk, which is in my conservatory and, when it's not too hot for me to work out there, I can watch the wildlife. I've seen chiff chaffs and goldfinches and foxes that have nearly come up to the back door. Rather than having to wait for a lift from the sixth floor, I can simply wheel myself to the back door.

Am I seeing more of God's wonderful creation because it's quite or because I'm taking time to look? I hope this does not change.

Jenny H:

When I downsized 4 years ago, I felt sure God had chosen the house but not the garden! It had the horrible leylandii trees which had blighted my previous garden, so I lost no time having them removed. I didn't really need a big garden as I am the last person to enjoy looking after it, but a friendly local horticulturist delivered some beautiful trees and I soon had a delightful plot. I also had a conservatory!

I was given a bird box and was soon watching sparrows visiting whilst I sat on an exercise bike in the conservatory. Last week there were a whole 'quarrel' of baby sparrows frantically flapping their wings. They looked so cute!

Lockdown had given me the time, quiet and patience to enjoy my new neighbours.

- Psalm 84 v 3. Sparrows find safety and security in their nests.
- Matthew 10 v 29 - 31. We are more precious than sparrows, but God watches over them too.

Maybe God did choose my garden after all.

Cathy: The words of this hymn have spoken to her

*I cannot tell why He, whom angels worship, should set His love upon the sons of men,
Or why, as Shepherd, He should seek the wand'ers, to bring them back,
they know not how or when.*

*But this I know, that He was born of Mary, when Bethl'hem's manger was His only home,
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured,
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is come.*

*I cannot tell how silently He suffered, As with His peace He graced this place of tears,
Or how His heart upon the Cross was broken, The crown of pain to three and thirty years.
But this I know, He heals the broken-hearted, And stays our sin, and calms our lurking fear,
And lifts the burden from the heavy laden, For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is here.*

*I cannot tell how He will win the nations, How He will claim His earthly heritage,
How satisfy the needs and aspirations of east and west, of sinner and of sage.
But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory, and He shall reap the harvest He has sown,
And some glad day His sun shall shine in splendour
When He the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known.*

*I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship, when, at His bidding, every storm is stilled,
Or who can say how great the jubilation when all the hearts of men with love are filled.
But this I know, the skies will thrill with rapture, and myriad, myriad human voices sing,
And earth to heaven, and heaven to earth, will answer:
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is King.*

Optional extras if time allows

Stuart Davidson: our SEBA regional minister has shared this
I am very grateful for having these following extracts brought to my attention:

"I have now had four weeks in prison, and whereas I had no difficulty from the outset in accepting my lot consciously, I am now getting used to it in a natural, unconscious sort of way. That is a relief, but it raises problems of its own for I have no desire to get used to this sort of life, and it would not be right to, either." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Letters from Prison, May 6th 1943

"They have tried to do everything possible here to give me a pleasant Christmas, but I was glad to be alone again. I often wonder how I shall adapt myself to company again after this."
Ditto Dec 25th 1943

Whilst most our church members have not been in a prison, I suspect that they, and maybe we, shall find a connection in the words of Bonhoeffer. Coming out of lockdown is already proving hard for many. Some can't wait to meet again. Some are finding the real world, with encounters with real people, scary and exhausting. Some want to stay in their 'cell'. Pastoring will be demanding at both ends of this scale and take a lot of patience and understanding

Ümit Bulut: CofE mental health resources

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

"Don't worry!" Easy to say, and hard to do. If only we had a "worry switch", so that we could simply turn off our worries! I wonder if that would help, though? If I am worried about my friend who is ill, I worry because I am concerned. What kind of person would I be if I didn't worry, if I wasn't concerned?

Paul's teaching to the Philippian Christians was probably based on what he had heard of Jesus's teaching (Matthew 5:25-34), so it came on good authority. Paul wrote from bitter experience and knew how hard it can be to find peace. He wrote of the anxiety that he felt in his daily concern for the churches for which he was responsible (2 Corinthians 11:28). Like Jesus, who knew distress and agitation in Gethsemane, Paul did not sail through life on a perpetual wave of joy and peace. Despite this, many Christians reading this passage have felt condemned.

St Paul can appear to be telling them that they do not have enough faith. In fact, anxiety and worry are good indicators of what we care about. In this sense, they are very much like prayer. The essential difference is that Jesus and Paul turned their worries into prayer by bringing them into the presence of God and enfolding them in *His* peace.

The problems begin when we think we can find our own peace, outside of this context. It is impossible to get through life without worrying unless we care for nothing and no-one. It is what we worry about, and what we do with our anxiety, that matters in God's kingdom.

"Have a Go" habit: Meditation

Choose a meditation phrase for this week from a Psalm of your choice...something good and true e.g. Psalm 18:1 "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer...". Write it down and keep it with you...as the background on your phone maybe.

Make it your constant 'go to' thought whenever you catch yourself worrying...Chew it over, breathe it in, walk it out.

Worship: video – "Ancient of Days"

<http://www.cityalight.com/ancient-of-days/>

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus,

We want to say, with David that *"You are our hiding place; you will protect us from trouble and surround us with songs of deliverance."* (Psalm 32:7)

We want to say that we put our trust in you and are not afraid to follow you

We want to say we receive your peace that is beyond understanding.

That we live in the light of your truth

Lord,

That is what we want to say, but often it simply is not true

Please, make it true in our hearts and minds through your Holy Spirit

Amen

Grace:

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forever more. Amen