

Hove & Portslade United Reformed Churches
Sunday 25th April 2021 (10:30 am)
Created by Revd Simon Franklin

Welcome & Call to worship: [Psalm 30]

I will exalt you, Lord, for you lifted me out of the depths.
Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me.
Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people;
praise his holy name

Hymn Miss Praise 1003

My Jesus, my Saviour

Lord there is none like you
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of Your name
I sing for joy at the work of your hands
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have
In you.

Prayer Time & Lord's Prayer

Old Testament Reading Lamentations 3: 22-33

Because of the LORD's great love, we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him." ²⁵ The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. ²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. ²⁸ Let him sit alone in silence, for the LORD has laid it on him. ²⁹ Let him bury his face in the dust there may yet be hope. ³⁰ Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. ³¹ For no one is cast off by the Lord forever. ³² Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. ³³ For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone

New Testament Reading Mark 5: 21-43

When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake, a large crowd gathered around him while he was by the lake. ²² Then one of the synagogue leaders, named Jairus, came, and when he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet. ²³ He pleaded earnestly with him, "My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live." ²⁴ So Jesus went with him. A large crowd followed and pressed around him. ²⁵ And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. ²⁶ She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. ²⁷ When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, ²⁸ because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." ²⁹ Immediately her

bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. ³⁰ At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" ³¹ "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" ³² But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. ³³ Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. ³⁴ He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." ³⁵ While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue leader. "Your daughter is dead," they said. "Why bother the teacher anymore?" ³⁶ Overhearing what they said, Jesus told him, "Don't be afraid; just believe." ³⁷ He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ When they came to the home of the synagogue leader, Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly. ³⁹ He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." ⁴⁰ But they laughed at him. After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!" (which means "Little girl, I say to you, get up!"). ⁴² Immediately the girl stood up and began to walk around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished. ⁴³ He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this, and told them to give her something to eat.

Hymn] Miss Praise 630

Tell My people I love them

*tell my people I care
when they feel far away from me
tell my people I am there.*

*Tell my people I came and died
to give them liberty
and to abide in me
is to be really free
Tell my people ...*

*Tell my people where'er they go
My comfort they can know
My peace and joy and love
I freely will bestow
Tell my people ...*

Message - Steadfast love

C S Lewis's famous 'Chronicles of Narnia' is a wonderful well-known book. In it a small group of youngsters have a whole variety of adventures. And at one point they get lost and in due course come face to face with a lion and those of you who are familiar with the story will remember that the lion is none other than Aslan the King of Narnia. And Aslan explains that they needn't be frightened at all because he knows all about them. Furthermore, he's been close to them for a long time making sure that they've been safe on their journey. Now I don't know about you but the thought of coming face to face with a lion doesn't do much for me at all, especially one that can talk. But

such is the power of Lewis's writing that we know that they come to love and trust Aslan the lion King. You know for any of us life can be a bit tricky at times – there are times when we feel lost and bewildered. As individuals or communities, we encounter situations that are beyond our own resourcefulness. And sometimes there isn't always an obvious course to pursue in order to restore our equilibrium and enable us to face the future with any sort of confidence.

In Mark's Gospel we heard of two people whose lives were beset by problems: the woman who had been haemorrhaging for twelve years and Jairus, a leader of the Jewish synagogue, who was facing any parent's worst nightmare, that of watching the decline of a much-loved child, and not being able to prevent it.

For the woman, her problem was more than any physical weakness, she was regarded by those around her as unclean and she would have been treated as an outcast, isolated in her misery. For Jairus the problem was so serious that he was willing to step out of line with the Jewish authorities, who regarded Jesus as an impostor and plead with him for help.

In both cases Jesus brings healing and transforms the lives of the people concerned. And it's evident from the way the gospel tells the stories that faith, faith in God's power, and faith in Jesus as the one who's able to mediate that power, is the essential factor in bringing about a positive outcome.

But, you know, such faith doesn't always prevent God's faithful people from encountering difficulties in life. And at times it can appear that any amount of prayer coupled with deep faith doesn't always bring an end to our problems, or the problems of those we love. And at times like that perhaps we ask? Where's God now? Why does God seem silent? How long must this endure? Who can we turn to for comfort and for rescue?

That's something that the Old Testament writer of Lamentations knew all too well. The exiles in Babylon had been plucked out of their promised land; the Davidic monarchy had been toppled into the dust; the temple, the dwelling place of God among the people, lay in ruins. None of God's promises seemed valid anymore; nor was there any evidence that God was at work acting to save and restore them again.

Similarly, here in our 21st century people around the whole world are reeling from the effects of the Covid Pandemic or from the 'credit crunch' that makes life so difficult. The news at times is relentless, and no-one is certain whether any of the remedies tried will work.

But what we, and this world, need to learn is what shines through the scriptural poems of lament; the truth that, despite everything, faith in God has not been lost. As the poet declares: *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.*

Now this *Steadfast love* translates from the Hebrew word *hesed*; but no English word or expression can convey the richness of this concept.

It means the fullness of God's commitment towards his chosen people – God's love and mercy, God's righteousness and justice, God's refusal to let go or to lose even a single one, God's persistence towards the covenant relationship through which we become partners with him in accomplishing the divine purposes.

The whole Bible proclaims this truth about God: God is loving and faithful; God consistently fulfils every covenant promise. God doesn't change, nor does his commitment to us his people.

What changes is our response to the covenant and our understanding of what it offers and requires of us and reveals about God.

Too often our knowledge of God is limited by the narrowness of our perspective, by our desire to see ourselves in particular as the focus of God's purposes. We fail to appreciate the bigger picture of God's eternal commitment to all creation, in which our situation is like a speck of dust glimpsed in a blink of an eye. God's steadfast love never ceases towards us, we're never cut off from it – though to our human perspective it may look that way depending on where we are in life.

Yes, it's hard at times to recognise the presence of God if life has become a bit of a struggle.

It isn't easy to see the ways in which God continues to love and sustain us, continues to forgive, and renew us if problems abound.

At such times all we can do, like the poet of Lamentations, is hang on in there and remember the countless stories of God's past faithfulness and wonderful deeds. For faith and hope go together; but neither of them promises that we will fully understand the ways of God in the present or the future.

As followers of Christ, we are called to trust in God's love no matter what comes our way. We are called to live in faith and with hope, just like the woman and Jairus in the Gospel.

To do that we need to keep the big picture in mind and to remember that we express our faith and our hope most clearly through the way we live. Thanks be to God. *Amen...*

Prayer Time

Hymn Miss Praise 244

How good is the God we adore,
Our faithful unchangeable Friend!
His love is as great as His power,
And knows neither measure nor end!

For Christ is the First and the Last,
Whose Spirit shall Guide us safe home,
We'll praise Him for all that is past,
And trust Him for all that's to come

Benediction & Blessing:

May the steadfast love of God surround you today and keep you always in his care. May God bless you with grace, hope and purpose, through Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen