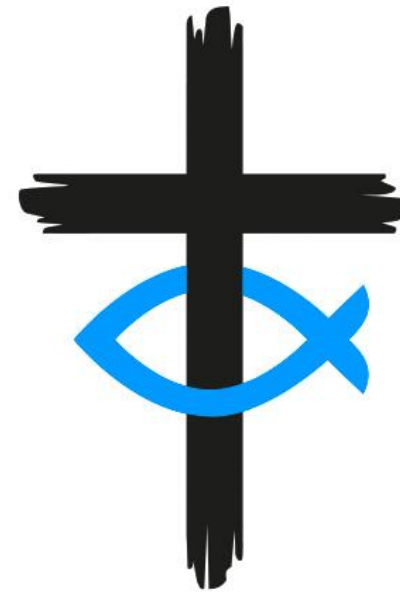


# Daily Devotions from the URC

**Saul, David & Solomon  
David's Reign (1) &  
Possibly New (to you) Advent Hymns**

**1st – 17<sup>th</sup> November 2018**



## Introduction

We look at David becoming king in the aftermath of Saul and Jonathan's death, his rape of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. We also take a break from this long saga and look at some, possibly new, to you Advent hymns. We hope that by looking at these now they may help refresh worship in the Advent season.

Over the time we've been producing the Daily Devotions we have, from time to time, reflected on hymns from the Reformed Tradition, on Advent and Christmas hymns as well as Eastertide material. We thought we'd take a different approach and look at some, possibly, new to you Advent hymns early on and hope they may help in local churches that might be looking for different material this advent. Producing these in November may seem odd but we think the hymns are worth looking at any point of the year and, this way, they may inspire those who plan worship for Advent.

**Andy Braunston**

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the baby dies anyway. Actions have consequences and so David is responsible for one more death much closer to home than the deaths of those thousands he killed in battle.

We note that nowhere in this account is Bathsheba given a voice and we can only imagine .....

But what sort of justice is that in any era? What God sanctions the death of a child for the sins of their parents? Is this the God of Love we are so keen to worship and promote?

How many times on a pastoral visit or just chatting with friends do we hear people say "What have I done to deserve this?" Or "God's really got it in for me for something like this to happen". It seems to be ingrained in us that a vengeful God will bring about the worst in our lives if we don't toe the line. As people Walking the Way of Jesus we need to challenge this gut reaction and give testimony to the transforming power of forgiveness which streams from the love of God and can extend between us too. Lives are changed, new ways of living are found and we are liberated from the paralysis of the mixing of guilt, fear and regret.

As we mourn with those who have suffered the searing, gut wrenching pain of loss of a child we remember It was the birth of a baby in Bethlehem that brought God's love to reality in human form.

Prayer.

We pray alongside parents who mourn for their child.  
 We pray alongside parents who welcome a new arrival.  
 We walk alongside those bowed down by despair  
 and pray that we all discover and rediscover  
 the power of selfless love in Jesus  
 Amen

Dear Lord,  
We pray that you would raise prophetic voices that challenges the abuses and injustices of our world. Challenge us too with what we hide from others but you can see. Give us the courage and the strength to walk a different way. We thank you that change is possible in us and in our world. Amen

[Saturday 17th November The Baby Dies and Solomon is born](#)

The Rev'd Carole Elphick is a Retired Minister and is a member at Muswell Hill.

from 2 Samuel 12: 15 - 24

The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David, and it became very ill. David therefore pleaded with God for the child; David fasted, and went in and lay all night on the ground. The elders of his house stood beside him, urging him to rise from the ground; but he would not, nor did he eat food with them. On the seventh day the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead; for they said, 'While the child was still alive, we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us; how then can we tell him the child is dead? He may do himself some harm.' But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, he perceived that the child was dead; and David said to his servants, 'Is the child dead?' They said, 'He is dead.' Then David rose from the ground, washed, anointed himself, and changed his clothes. He went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped; he then went to his own house; and when he asked, they set food before him and he ate. Then his servants said to him, 'What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while it was alive; but when the child died, you rose and ate food.' He said, 'While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, "Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and the child may live." But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.' Then David consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon.

Reflection

Whoever we are, and wherever we live, this is one of our worst nightmares - the death of a baby. To make things worse - if that were possible - Nathan the prophet has made it clear that this is David's punishment. David is prostrate with grief hoping that God's mind will be changed with enough contrition but

[Thursday 1st November All Saints](#)

The Rev'd Andy Braunston, Minister of Barrhead, Shawlands and Stewarton URCs.

For All the Saints - William Walsham How 1864

For all the saints, who from their labours rest,  
Who Thee by faith before the world confessed,  
Thy Name, O Jesus, be forever blessed. Alleluia, Alleluia!

2. Thou wast their Rock, their Fortress and their Might;  
Thou, Lord, their Captain in the well fought fight;  
Thou, in the darkness drear, their one true Light. Alleluia, Alleluia!

3. For the Apostles' glorious company,  
Who bearing forth the Cross o'er land and sea,  
Shook all the mighty world, we sing to Thee: Alleluia, Alleluia!

4. O may Thy soldiers, faithful, true and bold,  
Fight as the saints who nobly fought of old,  
And win with them the victor's crown of gold. Alleluia, Alleluia!

5. For the Evangelists, by whose blest word,  
Like fourfold streams, the garden of the Lord,  
Is fair and fruitful, be Thy Name adored. Alleluia, Alleluia!

6. For Martyrs, who with rapture kindled eye,  
Saw the bright crown descending from the sky,  
And seeing, grasped it, Thee we glorify. Alleluia, Alleluia!

7. O blest communion, fellowship divine!  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;  
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine. Alleluia, Alleluia!

8. And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,  
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song,  
And hearts are brave, again, and arms are strong.  
Alleluia, Alleluia!

9. The golden evening brightens in the west;

Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest;  
Sweet is the calm of paradise the blessed. Alleluia, Alleluia!

10. But lo! there breaks a yet more glorious day;  
The saints triumphant rise in bright array;  
The King of glory passes on His way. Alleluia, Alleluia!

11. From earth's wide bounds, from ocean's farthest coast,  
Through gates of pearl streams in the countless host,  
Singing to Father, Son and Holy Ghost: Alleluia, Alleluia!

St Matthew 5: 1 - 12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Reflection

Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, follows the exploits of the last active priest in a state, which had outlawed the Church, in Mexico. The priest travels incognito from village to village, saying mass, hearing confessions, baptising babies and praying for those who had died. He is not presented as being at all heroic: a clumsy whisky priest with a daughter from an illicit relationship. However, despite the opportunity he doesn't escape but, in his

depart from your house, for you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife. Thus says the Lord: I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbour, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun. For you did it secretly; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.' David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the Lord.' Nathan said to David, 'Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die.' Then Nathan went to his house.

Reflection

'It's a fair cop, gov!' David may have thought he had got away with his sin and along comes Nathan and all is revealed. Why did David do what he did? As king did he think he could do what he liked and take Bathsheba for himself and cover his deeds by using his authority to send out her husband to a certain death? David built a façade which meant that anyone from the outside would not notice anything untoward. But David knew...and God knew.

It is a story which lays bare some of the abuses that some leaders are guilty of. We can look around the world and see where it is happening today – world leaders who think they can do what they like, perhaps even justifying it to themselves and to others. But who are they fooling? Prophets are needed today as in David's day to challenge abuse and exploitation and bring them into the light.

This passage speaks to us even though we might not be kings or queens. We know we are not the people God want us to be, even although we might hide it from others. Also the way we act has consequences and we shouldn't fool ourselves because we should also remember that others may be hurt in the process. We may not think we have much power and authority but we will be surprised when we stop and think about the extent to how much what we do and say affects other people's lives.

Faced with his sin David repents, which can be found more fully in Psalm 51. God is able to 'put away our sin' as we turn to Christ. Repentance isn't just about saying sorry it is doing an about turn and walking in a different direction...God's direction. It is about a new way of life and living. And God in his grace enables us to make a fresh start.

we have used our power to dominate  
and our weakness to manipulate;  
we have evaded responsibility  
and failed to confront evil;  
we have denied dignity to ourselves  
and to each other  
and have fallen into despair.  
We turn to You O God;  
we renounce evil; we claim Your love;  
we choose to be made whole. Amen.

*(Source: Janet Morley in "All Desires Known")*

Friday 16th November Nathan Condemns David

The Rev'd George Watt is Minister of Reigate Park United Reformed Church

from 2 Samuel 12: 1 - 15

But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord, and the Lord sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, 'There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. He brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his meagre fare, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveller to the rich man, and he was loath to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared that for the guest who had come to him.' Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. He said to Nathan, 'As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity.' Nathan said to David, 'You are the man! Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from the hand of Saul; I gave you your master's house, and your master's wives into your bosom, and gave you the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would have added as much more. Why have you despised the word of the Lord, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and have taken his wife to be your wife, and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now therefore the sword shall never

imperfections, continues to minister to his flock - after all there's no one else. Eventually he is captured, refuses to accept a state pension, renounce his orders and live in safety so, inevitably, he is shot. Awaiting execution it occurs to him that really it wouldn't have been that hard to be a saint and he thinks of today's reading and the list of beatitudes which mark the lives of the saints. The irony is that the priest, who thinks he's a failure, by being executed is a martyr and will be venerated as a saint - though the Church will whitewash his failings.

We believe we are part of the Communion of Saints - fellowship not just with other Christians now but with all those who have gone before and all those yet to come. As How wrote in his great hymn, we are united with saints of old who nobly struggled to live a life of sanctity, with apostles, evangelists and martyrs as well as with the ordinary, everyday saints as much as with the whisky priests. Now the saints rest in "the calm of paradise the blessed" but they wait for "lo there breaks a yet more glorious day" when the saints, and us, will be called back to life by our risen Lord and we, with them will rejoice as the King of Glory passes by.

Until then we sinners wait in our present imperfection seeking to be holy and change the world as a place fit for saints.

Prayer

Remind us, Good Lord,  
that Heaven shall not wait for triumphant hallelujahs,  
when earth has passed and we reach another shore.  
Remind us, Gentle God, that Jesus is Lord in our present imperfection;  
and that his power and love are for now and then for evermore. Amen

*after John Bell and Graham Moule's Heaven Shall Not Wait.*

Friday 2nd November David Made King of All Israel

The Rev'd Bernie Collins, retired minister; member of Avenue St Andrew's URC, Southampton; convenor of URC Mission Committee

2 Samuel 5: 1 -5

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, 'Look, we are your bone and flesh. For some time, while Saul was king over us, it was you who led out Israel and brought it in. The Lord said to you: It is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel.' So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned for forty years. At Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

## Reflection

Anointed by the prophet Samuel when called from tending his father's flocks (1 Sam 16), David proved himself as a leader in battles and in respect for God. So the elders of all the tribes at last recognised that the Lord had said David would shepherd his people and become their ruler. This Lord is God who identified himself as 'I am', when he called Moses from looking after flocks to bring the Israelites out of suffering in Egypt (Exodus 3:13-15).

The duplicitous Jacob in his old age identified God, who had renamed him Israel, as his shepherd throughout his life, and he believed God the Shepherd was enabling his son Joseph and his descendants to survive and be fruitful (Genesis 48:15, 49:22-25).

In the steps of leaders who first asked Samuel for a king, later generations longed for another king like David, but God had much more to give.

"A ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel" was quoted by Herod's advisers to the Magi, combined with Micah 5:2 locating the birth in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:6). "Son of the Most High ... throne of his ancestor David ... of his kingdom there will be no end," the angel said to Mary (Luke 1:32-33).

Then we hear Jesus identifying himself and his mission: "I am the good shepherd".

- "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd."
- "The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." (John 10:11-18)

calculated, planned. In modern legal terms, it would be described as 'with intent' and 'a significant degree of premeditation'. How the wheel turns!

"Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." (John Dalberg)  
As an absolute monarch, David had absolute power, which he abused for the purpose of his own sexual gratification. The text cleverly juxtaposes David and Uriah. David is the Divinely anointed king over Israel, scheming to have Uriah killed. Uriah is a foreigner, a Hittite, a soldier, whose sense of military honour and high standards shine out. A spanner is thrown into the works of David's scheming!

"The more things change, the more they stay the same." (Jean-Baptiste Karr)

The abuse of power continues to be rife today. Barely does a week go by without more appalling revelations of sexual misconduct... in politics, in sport, in entertainment, in the church...

"There, but for the grace of God go I." (John Bradford)

While we may be thankful that we have not been subject to such extremes of human behaviour, many of us will have been affected by bullying (at school, in the workplace or even at church), or felt stifled by domineering family members; we may even admit moments when we have behaved poorly towards others.

"He can twist her round his little finger!"

In reflecting on abuse of power, we should not omit to consider the abuse of the position of weakness, echoed in this last proverb. Many of us, individually or as a church, will have sometimes felt used.

Sometimes, in our church, we use the following prayer of confession.

## Prayer

O God,  
You have searched us out and known us,  
and all that we are is open to You.  
We confess that we have sinned:

Thursday 15th November David seeks Uriah's death

Walt Johnson, Elder, Wilbraham St Ninian's

from 2 Samuel 11: 6 - 27

So David sent word to Joab, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' And Joab sent Uriah to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the people fared, and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house, and wash your feet.' Uriah went out of the king's house, and there followed him a present from the king. But Uriah slept at the entrance of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and did not go down to his house. When they told David, 'Uriah did not go down to his house', David said to Uriah, 'You have just come from a journey. Why did you not go down to your house?' Uriah said to David, 'The ark and Israel and Judah remain in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field; shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? As you live, and as your soul lives, I will not do such a thing.' Then David said to Uriah, 'Remain here today also, and tomorrow I will send you back.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day. On the next day, David invited him to eat and drink in his presence and made him drunk; and in the evening he went out to lie on his couch with the servants of his lord, but he did not go down to his house. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah. In the letter he wrote, 'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, so that he may be struck down and die.' As Joab was besieging the city, he assigned Uriah to the place where he knew there were valiant warriors. The men of the city came out and fought with Joab; and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite was killed as well...When the wife of Uriah heard that her husband was dead, she made lamentation for him. When the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son.

Reflection

"The shoe is on the other foot now!"

The last Daily Devotion I wrote had David fleeing for his life from the murderous rage of King Saul. In contrast, David's murderous actions against Uriah are cold,

Prayer

Thank you, God, for shepherding us through our lives.

Thank you for your great work of bringing all people into your flock.

Please help us to live the life of Jesus in his mission today.

Saturday 3rd November Having Made Jerusalem His Capital, David brings the Ark there

The Rev'd Peter Moth is a retired minister in the Northern Synod and a member of St Andrew's URC, Kenton, Newcastle upon Tyne.

from 2 Samuel 6

David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand. David and all the people with him set out and went from Baale-judah, to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the cherubim. They carried the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio,[the sons of Abinadab, were driving the new cart with the ark of God; and Ahio went in front of the ark. David and all the house of Israel were dancing before the Lord with all their might, with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals.

When they came to the threshing-floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen shook it. The anger of the Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God struck him there because he reached out his hand to the ark; and he died there beside the ark of God. David was angry because the Lord had burst forth with an outburst upon Uzzah; so that place is called Perez-uzzah to this day...

...So David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of the Lord had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before the Lord with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet. As the ark of the Lord came into the city of David, Michal daughter of Saul looked out of the window, and saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord; and she despised him in her heart.

...David returned to bless his household. But Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, 'How the king of Israel honoured himself today, uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!' David said to Michal, 'It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord, that I have danced before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honour.' And Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death.

### Reflection

David was a pretty boy. When Samuel picked him out to succeed Saul as King he was the Cinderella of the family – left on the hillside to keep the sheep while his elders and betters met the prophet in Jesse's house at Bethlehem. He became Prince Charming – red-haired, beautiful eyes and handsome (1 Samuel 16). He ruled for 40 years through good times and bad, always a charmer, especially with other men's wives. Senior Citizens like me saw the movie: "David and Bathsheba" (Gregory Peck and Susan Hayward 1951). David was chosen to do God's work not because he was a saint but because he knew in his heart that he was God's servant before he could be Israel's king, whether he liked it or not, We are chosen too.

### Reflection

David "danced before the Lord" with all his people - the cymbals, tambourines, and harps joined in. You don't get that in "Strictly". David danced before the Lord, not the Ark. The Ark was only the symbol of God's presence, accompanying Israel on their wanderings and battles. Their neighbours and enemies had special places where the gods lived: sacred shrines and special stones. But Israel's God was everywhere and anywhere. The Ark was their reassurance; it was powerful (see "Raiders of the Lost Ark") but not the reality, David knew that, and that was why he danced wearing nothing more than a linen ephod, not like a king, but like a priest, a servant of God, much to his straight-laced wife's disgust, David knew it was better to dance for joy in your boxers than pretend to be what you are not. Reflect on this moment in the great story of our deliverance, from the house of Jesse in Bethlehem and on to Jerusalem to find the King of Kings dancing to his cross so that we might be the

the rite of purification after her period. David learns that Bathsheba is the wife of Uriah the Hittite, who will soon feature in the story and we will find that crime is heaped upon crime, tragedy upon tragedy. For now, David sends messengers to fetch Bathsheba, she cannot argue or defend herself for David is the King and so she lies with the King.

The story finishes with Bathsheba telling the King that she is pregnant. It seemed as though the King could have what he wants, do whatever he likes, but with those words David ceases to be in control, his power is nullified.

The story of David and Bathsheba marks a turning point in this cycle of stories, the struggle for succession begins. Walter Brueggemann comments that it marks 'an abrupt transition from life under blessing to life under curse'

For us let us reflect upon contemporary stories. Stories of those who find themselves the victims of power, abused and taken advantage of, women and men, young and old alike. Let us think on how we can create a society where people cease to be a victim of violence and rape by those abusing their power.

### Prayer

Gracious God,  
we think of you as powerful and mighty,  
yet you came as one of us, in Jesus,  
who came among us like a slave,  
power overturned.

May those of us with power and authority,  
learn to let go of such things,  
and not misuse our positions.

May those of us who have been victims of power,  
overcome hurt and pain,  
learn to trust again,  
and know that you are with us.  
In Christ's name Amen



## Prayer

Gracious God,  
You have blessed us with life  
You have given us the gift of your son, Jesus  
You have promised us a place in your Kingdom  
Forgive us for the times we have missed your hand at work  
For the times when negativity has clouded our view  
Help us, loving God, to see you at work in the world around us  
May our hearts respond with thanksgiving and praise  
In Jesus' name, Amen.

### Wednesday 14th November David and Bathsheba

The Rev'd Dr David Whiting, Minister, Sunderland and Boldon URC Partnership

#### 2 Samuel 11: 1 - 5

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. It happened, late one afternoon, when David rose from his couch and was walking about on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; the woman was very beautiful. David sent someone to inquire about the woman. It was reported, 'This is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.' So David sent messengers to fetch her, and she came to him, and he lay with her. (Now she was purifying herself after her period.) Then she returned to her house. The woman conceived; and she sent and told David, 'I am pregnant.'

#### Reflection

This is quite an appalling story, although perhaps not so very different to equally appalling stories of our own time. It is about a powerful man misusing his power to take advantage of, and rape, a woman who is in a vulnerable position.

Spring, says the reading, is the time where Kings go into battle. Well David breaks with tradition and sends Joab and his officers to make battle. So David is where he shouldn't be and, like a peeping Tom, he watches Bathsheba bathe. She was doing what she should be doing under the law taking a bath as part of

forgiven and redeemed people of God ("The Greatest Story Ever Told" Technicolour 1965).

## Prayer

Seven whole days, not one in seven,  
I will praise Thee,  
In my heart, though not in heaven,  
I can raise Thee;  
Small it is in this poor sort to enrol Thee,  
E'en eternity's too short to extol Thee

*George Herbert*

### Sunday 4th November PSALM 71 1-10

The Rev'd Ron Reid is a retired minister in the Mersey Synod serving as Link Minister at Rock Chapel, Farndon. He is a member at Upton-by-Chester URC

In you, O LORD, I've taken refuge;  
protect me ever from disgrace.  
Rescue and save me in your justice;  
turn to me as I seek your face.

Be my strong rock  
and my sure refuge  
to which I always may resort;  
Give the command  
to help and save me,  
because you are my rock and fort.

From wicked hands,  
my God, O save me,  
from cruel hands of violence.  
For, Sov'reign LORD,  
you've been my refuge  
and since my youth my confidence.

#### Reflection

The New Oxford Annotated Bible (NRSV) describes this Psalm as "an aged worshipper's prayer for deliverance from personal enemies". As someone who

is rapidly approaching the validity of the description “aged worshipper” (although maybe not as a “cause of wonder”!) perhaps I can resonate with the pleas for God not to “desert me or leave me when my strength is gone”, recognising that God is, has been and always will be “my strong rock and my sure refuge to which I may always resort”. Of course, there have been times in my life when the surety of that strength and refuge have seemed to be elusive.

The word “refuge” gives me pause however. What do we mean by it? Is it somewhere to hide away, to escape from the world and those in it? Proverbs 18:10 uses a slightly different metaphor, describing the name of the Lord as “a strong tower, the righteous run into it and they are safe”. A worship song by Clinton Utterbach often sung with gusto in some Christian gatherings uses these words as part of the refrain.

Towers are often found as strong defensive points in castles: places of refuge, keeping the enemy at bay. Almost by definition, there are no points of contact between those inside and out, except for missiles hurled back and forth.

Sadly, that is how some outside the Church can perceive those within – a “holy huddle”, hurling out condemnations of those whose lifestyles they do not approve of, and surrounded by walls impenetrable to those who do not conform.

We need the refuge of God not as a defence against the world, but as a place of quiet retreat, a storehouse from which to draw provisions which enable us to demonstrate the love of God for the world in the world, never brought down.

#### Prayer

God, our refuge and our strength our help in times of need  
help us to use your strength not as defence but as confidence.

The needs of the world around us are manifest and at times seem to be insurmountable.

But with your gifts of courage, faith and cheerfulness we can break out of our restraints of defensiveness, inspiring wonder. This we pray.

that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, confirm it for ever; do as you have promised. Thus your name will be magnified for ever in the saying, “The Lord of hosts is God over Israel”; and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, “I will build you a house”; therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant; now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue for ever before you; for you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed for ever.’

#### Reflection

As human beings we often have the tendency to give negative dimensions of our experience most attention and significance. Psychologists call this tendency “negativity bias” and studies suggest we may be hardwired to respond in this way. Anecdotally, the annual appraisal at work is often used as an illustrative example; regardless of how many positive pieces of feedback the worker is given, the negative piece of feedback will dominate the worker’s memory of the review. Sound familiar?

David has just received the Biblical equivalent of an appraisal from God via the prophet Nathan. He’s received lots of good feedback and assurances of long-term security, but God has vetoed David’s project proposal to build God a temple. Completely absent in David’s response is any hint of “negativity bias”. Rather than focusing on what God has overruled, David is clearly conscious of all that God has done for him and chooses gratitude as his prevailing response.

Was David not subject to negativity bias like other human beings? I’m sure he was. But David, for all his faults was a person devoted to God and to right worship. He had a deep sense of God’s positive action in his life and in response David’s prayer is one of thanksgiving, praise and petition. Its tone is one of intimacy and closeness.

I know in own my life, there are times when I struggle to see what God is doing and offering thanksgiving is way down my prayer priorities. But next time I’m struggling to see God’s positive action, I’ll come back to David’s prayer and ask myself whether negativity bias could be clouding my vision of God’s good work.

manages to build a 'house' for God, God still promises to build a 'house' for David. And this, in the fullness of time, brings us round to Jesus, in whom the two kinds of 'house' will meet. For he was called a new David, a kingly presence in Israel, an heir of the promise. And in his flesh, God dwelt among us.

#### Prayer

God who dwelt in Jesus,  
abide with us.  
God who builds the church,  
strengthen your people to serve.  
God whose plans are sure,  
reach out in mercy to your world.  
God whose work spans the years,  
help us to be faithful in our day.  
God of the wide spaces and wild places,  
broaden our vision of your greatness.  
Through Jesus Christ, your presence and power. Amen.

#### Tuesday 13th November David's Prayer

Jonnie Hill, Ordinand at Northern College and member of Levenshulme Inspire.

#### 2 Samuel 7: 18- 29

Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, 'Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord God; you have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come. May this be instruction for the people, O Lord God! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have wrought all this greatness, so that your servant may know it. Therefore you are great, O Lord God; for there is no one like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. Who is like your people, like Israel? Is there another nation on earth whose God went to redeem it as a people, and to make a name for himself, doing great and awesome things for them, by driving out before his people nations and their gods? And you established your people Israel for yourself to be your people for ever; and you, O Lord, became their God. And now, O Lord God, as for the word

#### Monday 5th November: Hills of the North Rejoice

The Rev'd Dr John McNeil Scott is Principal of the Scottish United Reformed & Congregational College

*Hills of the North Rejoice (English Praise version, 1975) Tune Little Conard (possibly not new but absent from Rejoice and Sing)*

Hills of the North, rejoice, river and mountain-spring, hark to the advent voice; valley and lowland, sing. Christ comes in righteousness and love, he brings salvation from above.	your seers have longed to know their Lord; to you he comes, the final word.
2 Isles of the Southern seas, sing to the listening earth, carry on every breeze hope of a world's new birth: In Christ shall all be made anew, his word is sure, his promise true.	4 Shores of the utmost West, lands of the setting sun, welcome the heavenly guest in whom the dawn has come: he brings a never-ending light who triumphed o'er our darkest night.
3 Lands of the East, arise, he is your brightest morn, greet him with joyous eyes, praise shall his path adorn:	5 Shout, as you journey home, songs be in every mouth, lo, from the North they come, from East and West and South: in Jesus all shall find their rest, in him the universe be blest.

#### Isaiah 43: 5-6

Do not fear, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;  
I will say to the north, 'Give them up',  
and to the south, 'Do not withhold';  
bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—  
Reflection

The hymn by Charles Edward Oakley and the writings of the Psalmist both place their respective readers (perhaps I should say "singers") squarely in the

crosshairs of a compass centre-point. Every direction is invoked to participate in an encircling carnival. Oakley invokes North, South, East and West to see, and to rejoice. The moment is this one. Now is the time. The writer's tense is the present moment, but in the sense of what is seen on the horizon.

It seems to me that the Psalm is doing something connected but different. The Psalmist's moment is yet to come, the aspect is promise. He speaks of what will be in future tense. In its way, though, the Psalm is more specific. It's action more concrete. Real justice for real sons and daughters, real flesh and blood.

Peter Rollins wrote once that the great stumbling block of Christianity - or one of them - was its insistence on a particular instance over speculative general possibility: the claim on our lives of this moment, this saviour, this place and this hope.

It is easy to believe in the possibility of a saviour, of a possible hope, in another moment. But the claim that divinity inhabits a particular life, and that the divine is active in a particular moment makes a response unavoidable. I must judge if it is true and how it is true. I cannot hide in speculation about possibility or metaphysics. A response of heart and hand - and head - is called out from me.

#### Prayer

Put your ear to the ground and identify the noises around you.  
Predominant are anxious, restless footsteps, frightened footsteps in the dark,  
footsteps bitter and rebellious. No sound yet of hope's first footsteps.

Glue your ear to the ground again.  
Hold your breath put out your advance antennae.

The Master is on his way, most likely he will not get here  
when things are going well, but in the bad times  
when the going's unsure and painful.

(From "A Procession of Prayers" compiled by John Carden)

and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them, so that they may live in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and evildoers shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever. In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Reflection: House and home?

'I've started, so I'll finish,' says the host on a TV quiz show. But life is not always so accommodating. Circumstances, obstacles and the limits of time and strength can stop even our best intentions and initiatives from reaching fruition. At least they may not be fulfilled in our lifetime. So it was with King David and his plan to build a temple for the Lord. The project would be beyond him. This was a debt and dependence the Lord did not want. The king's life would end with memories of all that God had done for David (vv.9-11), not with a long record of favours that David had done for God. His son Solomon would be the builder.

There is a tension in this story, which crops up often in Scripture. God does not need bricks and mortar. Temples cannot contain majesty. They might provide a focus, a meeting point, a touching place. Yet they never really hold God. Tent, travel and tabernacle have served adequately in the past (v.6). For you cannot limit, localise or lock up the Lord of heaven. Even the grandest building will always be a bit too small.

Which helps to explain the curious double meaning of 'house'. A 'house' is a place for God to dwell in (vv.5, 6, 7, 13). It is also a heritage, a dynasty, to continue David's royal line in Israel (vv.11, 16). So, although David never

wars,” take some time to reflect on the fourth stanza. What must you and I do to allow the righteous to blossom forth for all time, so that “peace in abundance will remain”?

#### Prayer

Compassionate God,  
we pray for those whose lives have been blighted by war.

On this anniversary Sunday,  
stand close to all who grieve,  
even decades after the loss of loved ones.  
Grant them hope and comfort.

We pray that we may be peacemakers.  
Through our words, our actions and our thoughts,  
may we always show others Jesus, Son of David, Prince of Peace,  
to whom be all glory with you, Father, and the Holy Spirit,  
one God forever. Amen.

#### Monday 12th November God’s Covenant with David

The Rev’d John Proctor, General Secretary of the URC, member of Downing Place URC, Cambridge.

#### 2 Samuel 7: 1 - 17

Now when the king was settled in his house, and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him, the king said to the prophet Nathan, ‘See now, I am living in a house of cedar, but the ark of God stays in a tent.’ Nathan said to the king, ‘Go, do all that you have in mind; for the Lord is with you.’ But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan: Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Wherever I have moved about among all the people of Israel, did I ever speak a word with any of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’ Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David: Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel;

#### Tuesday 6th November Light of the World

The Rev’d Ruth Watson Minister of Patricroft and Worsley Road URCs

#### Light of the World, You Stepped Down into Darkness

© Tim Hughes

Light of the world,  
You step down into darkness  
Opened my eyes let me see  
Beauty that made  
this heart adore you  
hope of a life spent with you

King of all days  
Oh so highly exalted  
Glorious in heaven above  
Humbly you came to the earth  
you created  
All for love's sake became poor

So here I am to worship  
Here I am to bow down  
Here I am to say that you're my God  
You're altogether lovely  
Altogether worthy  
Altogether wonderful to me

So here I am to worship...  
And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross  
And I'll never know how much it cost  
to see my sin upon that cross

So here I am to worship...

#### Reading: St John 8: 12

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.

#### Reflection

November is a month of Remembrance: the Gunpowder plot; Armistice, All Saints and All Souls. I will always remember this song as it was the first hymn at my ordination 5 years ago. What makes it memorable is that the choir from the primary school where I spent time sang and signed it for me. Sign language is very important to me as I have always talked with my hands, so it made it more meaningful when they signed the hymn at my own special service. It inspired me to finally learn to sign so that I could communicate with those without a voice. Sadly the lack of practice after qualifying has made me rusty. Jesus says he is the Light of the World, bringing light to the darkness on our journey. How can we bring that light to others? How do we remember those

who are in need and bring them the hope of Christ? Are we out of practice in our sharing of the Gospel with others? If we do not use our gifts we run the risk of losing them. If we share our gifts then others benefit.

May we shine our light in the darkness so that others can find their way on their journey of faith, so that we can all come to worship the God of beauty; the God of light; the God of love.

#### Prayer

Light of the world, you shared in our darkness, that we may see your light.  
Hope of the world, you shared in our poverty, that we may see your greatness  
King of all days, you shared in our death, that we may see your life  
So here we are to worship, here we bow down, in total awe of your beauty,  
your wonder, your magnificence. Show us how to be the light in our  
community, that all may see and know that You are Love. Amen

#### Wednesday 7th November Praise to the God Who Clears the Way

The Rev'd Martin Knight is Minister of St Paul's URC, South Croydon

#### Praise to the God Who Clears the Way

© The Rev'd Jan Berry

Praise to the God who clears the way  
preparing room and space;  
for power and pride  
will lose their sway  
as peace comes in their place.

Praise to the God  
who comes to judge  
the truth of word and deed,  
who calls our minds  
and wills to change,  
rebuking wealth and greed.

Praise to the God who waits with us  
for hope and joy to reign,  
who shares our suffering  
and our loss, embodied in our pain.

Praise to the God  
who comes to bring  
comfort to all who mourn.  
The whole creation 'Glory' sings  
as Christ the light is born.

The righteous then will blossom forth  
Throughout his everlasting reign;  
Until the moon no longer shines,  
Peace in abundance will remain.

Then Tarshish and the distant shores  
Will send the tribute of their kings;  
Sheba's and Seba's kings will come  
And bring to him their offerings.

From sea to sea he will hold sway  
And from the River to earth's end.  
His enemies will lick the dust,  
And desert tribes the knee will bend.

#### Reflection

Let me come clean from the outset: Metrical Psalms do not feature prominently in my personal spirituality. It was the date of this reflection that drew my attention initially rather than today's text. I wondered how people singing this Psalm might have experienced it a century ago on Armistice Day.

This is a prayer for the king in David's line. One can see how this could easily be taken slightly out of context and applied to our own royal family – was that how it might have been sung at the end of World War I?

The Psalm is "of Solomon." Only this and Psalm 127 have this attribution. Calvin thought that the words were uttered as a death-bed prayer by David, and Solomon later put it into the form of a Psalm. He seems to be in a minority with that particular view. It is certainly about the Davidic dynasty. The Psalm opens with a prayer for the king, and closes with praise for God's rule over all of humankind (read the second half of the Psalm to see that.)

The Psalm then goes on to express a hope for righteousness and justice, showing how the people live with all the benefits of theocratic rule under the Davidic line. David, Solomon and their successors were to be kings for all the people (although careful study of their track records also shows their fallibility.) It includes a prayer for the king's longevity and wide dominion (our National Anthem echoes this: "Send her victorious...long to reign over us...")

Patriotism may be both a good thing and very dangerous. Certainly it was the greatest recruiting sergeant in WWI and in many other wars since. On this Sunday, commemorating the 100th anniversary of the end of "the war to end all

Mary's proclamation of God's action sits in stark contrast to our response: as people, we wander from God; we forget to share our bread; we dwell in our riches.

If we wish to proclaim all that God does for us, we also need to live that proclamation in our lives and in our communities.

Mary: rejoicer; proclaimer; servant.

Mary was open to all that God would do with and through her.

We can find that God's work in our lives turns our world upside down. We hear God speak to us in ways that surprise and with tasks we are uncertain we can fulfil.

In listening for God, we also need to be responsive to the call upon our life to react, to be transformed, and to rejoice in whatever God calls us to do.

Prayer

My soul magnifies –  
my spirit rejoices in you, God my Saviour.  
You call us to be just to the poor and weak.  
You ask much of us.  
Help us to rejoice, proclaim and serve as Mary did,  
and help us to hear you, and to respond. Amen.

[Sunday 11th November](#) [PSALM 72 1-10](#)

The Rev'd Steve Faber, Synod Moderator, West Midlands Synod

Endow the king with justice, LORD,  
The royal son with righteousness.  
Your people, your afflicted ones,  
He'll judge with truth and  
uprightness.

The mountains will bring  
peace to them,  
The hills the fruit of righteousness.

He will defend and save the poor,  
And crush all those  
who them oppress.

As long as sun and moon endure,  
So will he live time without end.  
He'll be like showers on the earth,  
Like rains that on mown fields  
descend.

St Mark 1: 1 - 8

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Reflection

Recuperation has afforded me the time to watch daytime TV, which I can assure you is no particular pleasure! There is, however, a good deal of interest for anyone who enjoys people-watching.

'Britain's worst hoarders' was clearly designed to leave me open-mouthed at the shocking amount of mess that some people can gather and live with. I fear the producers also intended me to laugh at the stupidity of others, but they failed in this case. More than anything I have been left with questions.

Is there some part of each of us that hoards the unnecessary, even if not visibly in our homes in the form of junk-mail, odd bits of wood, or old toasters ("which might be useful one day")? What needless clutter do we store within us or more widely as the world?

Jan Berry's wonderful hymn (vs.1) reminded me that God is not simply hoovering a new path through all the hoarded stuff of our lives, covering the smell with Shake-n-Vac. As in Mark, we are introduced to the idea that God is clearing out, ready for a new way of life to be built in place of the old.

'Making way' for God's realm requires more than piling the clutter into ever taller heaps, it involves the hiring of a skip (or even better a recycling machine!)



As many hoarders will attest, getting rid of all that we have so carefully gathered up can be an arduous and heart-wrenching process, especially when complicated psychological processes have led us to collect it all in the first place.

Over how many years have we stockpiled our 'need' for weapons or accumulated profits ahead of people?  
How much unrecognised guilt and grief is locked in your attic? Clearing these things from our lives requires more than a gentle tickle with a duster!

Thank God that no stone,  
no stack of 1987's Reform or that 'useful' pack of 50 blank cassette tapes,  
no inner pain and damage  
no social ill or global suffering  
is left unturned, as space is prepared for God's new Kingdom.

#### Prayer

Great God, we bring our praise and thanks  
that you fully clear the way  
for the living of your Kingdom  
this Wednesday and every day. Amen

[Thursday 8th November Come and See the Shining Hope](#)  
Verena Walder, Lay Preacher & Elder, Tabernacle URC, Mumbles

Come and See the Shining Hope  
© Christopher Idle / Jubilate Hymns Ltd

Come and see the shining hope that Christ's apostle saw;  
on the earth, confusion but in heaven an open door,  
where the living creatures praise the Lamb for evermore:  
Love has the victory for ever!

Amen, he comes! to bring his own reward!  
Amen, praise God! for justice now restored;  
kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of the Lord:  
Love has the victory for ever!

Reading: St Luke 1: 47 - 55

And Mary said,

'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'

#### Reflection

Mary: rejoicer; proclaimer; servant.

Mary rejoiced in God's presence in her life, as a recipient of a great gift from God, from the very beginning of her experience.

Around the world, we are faced with people who have many reasons not to rejoice in God. Those who are poor and landless, those who do not appear to have great gifts, those who are still waiting for the presence of God to become real.

Although Advent may be a time of waiting, we also need to reconnect with the place of rejoicing that can affirm and strengthen our faith in challenging circumstances.

Mary: rejoicer; proclaimer; servant.

In telling of God's works, Mary proclaimed all that God does and about God's nature: God shows mercy; God shows strength to transform the proud; God has realigned power in unjust systems; God has filled the hungry.



Lord,  
When you came as a powerless baby,  
you reminded us that the weak  
can overturn the certainties of the strong;  
that the poor can teach  
the rich about using our resources;  
that the leper can show  
the healthy how to live in the Kingdom.

As we worry about our failings and insecurities  
help us hear the Prophet's words of comfort  
and with hope in our hearts,  
live out that hope in the world. Amen.

### Saturday 10th November When Out of Poverty Is Born

The Rev'd Dr Matthew Prevett, Minister, St Andrew's URC, Monkseaton, and Northern Synod

When Out of Poverty is Born © The Rev'd Kathy Galloway

When out of poverty is born  
a dream that will not die,  
and landless, weary folk find strength  
to stand with heads held high,  
it's then we learn  
from those who wait  
to greet the promised day,  
'The Lord is coming; don't lose heart.  
Be blest: prepare the way!'

When people wander far from God,  
forget to share their bread,  
they find their wealth  
an empty thing,  
their spirits are not fed.  
For only just and tender love  
the hungry soul will stay.  
And so God's prophets echo still  
'Be blest: prepare the way!'

When God took flesh and came to earth,  
the world turned upside down,  
and in the strength of woman's faith  
the Word of Life was born.  
She knew that God would raise the low,  
it pleased her to obey.  
Rejoice with Mary in the call,  
'Be blest: prepare the way!'

All the gifts you send us, Lord, are faithful, good and true;  
holiness and righteousness are shown in all you do:  
who can see your greatest Gift and fail to worship you?  
Love has the victory for ever!

Power and salvation all belong to God on high!  
So the mighty multitudes of heaven make their cry,  
singing Hallelujah! where the echoes never die:  
Love has the victory for ever

Reading: Revelation 5: 11 - 14

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!' And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the elders fell down and worshipped.

Reflection



A scene like this can be very difficult to imagine in any shape or form and certainly such revelation as was given to John is so different to what we normally see in daily life. However, these inspired words in the hymn give us that glimpse into Heaven as to what our main purpose in that celestial life will hold. Chris Idle's words, and use of rousing, well-known music, somehow grasp the excitement and elation of what the scene will hold for us believers when we enter into our eternal new home with Jesus.

My husband has always found great inspiration from these words in Revelation, but longed for some real visual representation of such so as to focus his worship upon the Lamb on the Throne. In our congregation we are blessed that one of our members is an artist and he approached her to ask if she could somehow put such into a painting for display within the church. She thought and prayed

hard and long, and came up with two pictures of these verses which we are considering today. Therefore, I hope and pray that you will accept these in place of words as they literally paint the picture far more ably than any amount of my words can. Both are now in place within Tabernacle and serve as a focal point upon which we base our worship of the Lamb of God as well as the reigning Lion of the tribe of Judah.

PRAYER

Our awesome, eternal God, King of all ages,  
You alone are the One  
To whom all worship, praise and adoration  
Should be ascribed.

May our gaze be perpetually on you  
And not on passing or temporal images,  
Reminding ourselves that our final home  
Is with you, singing our eternal Hallelujahs  
Knowing that love in the nature and person of Jesus  
Has the victory for ever. AMEN.



Friday 9th November [Comfort, Comfort Now My People](#)  
Gordon Woods, Elder, St. Columba's URC, Oxford

Comfort Comfort Now My People

Comfort, comfort now my people;  
speak of peace - so says your God.  
Comfort those who sit in darkness,  
burdened by a heavy load.  
To Jerusalem proclaim:  
God shall take away your shame.  
Now get ready to recover;  
guilt and suffering are over

Hear the herald's proclamation  
in the desert far and near,  
calling all to true repentance,  
telling that the Lord is near.  
Oh, that warning cry obey!  
For your God prepare a way.  
Let the valleys rise to greet him  
and the hills bow down to meet him

Straighten out what has been crooked; make the roughest places plain.  
Let your hearts be true and humble, live as fits God's holy reign.  
Soon the glory of the Lord shall on earth be shed abroad.  
Human flesh shall surely see it; God is ready to decree it.

Reading: Isaiah 40: 1-5

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'

Reflection

If this hymn doesn't make you want to dance, you may be singing it wrong! This is one of the gems I first met in Common Ground, and you can also find it in Hymns of Glory, Songs of Praise (the rebadged version of the Scottish Church Hymnary 4). Even if your church is a bit shy of singing in parts, a little investment in learning the catchy three-part harmony will help you make the most of this hymn in worship. Settings like this make a powerful contribution to worship - by singing the words ourselves rather than just hearing them we lodge them much more in our consciousness, and by setting them to a memorable tune the effect is even greater. You'll also find these five verses from Isaiah set as the first recitative, aria and chorus of the Messiah, but I suspect most churches would find those rather more challenging to incorporate in worship!

These verses are quoted in Matthew, Mark and Luke's stories of John the Baptist, and if you use the Revised Common Lectionary, they are set as part of the readings for the Second Sunday of Advent in Year B. I am struck by the emphasis on comfort, rather than the heavier emphasis on repentance in stories about John the Baptist (for example, the 'brood of vipers' in Matthew 3:7). They serve as a reminder that our God is a loving and forgiving God, not merely a vengeful God. Yes, we have things to repent of, but let us first remember God's comfort. Is that a message we convey in how we and our churches are? Or are we perceived as judgemental and critical? And even if we avoid making people feel guilty about who they are, do we place an overwhelming burden on people by making them feel that they should be able to sort out the world's problems?