

FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Reading: Psalm 98

Mark 7:24-37

Date: 9 September 2018

Theme: Worship 1

Starting a new series of sermons on the essentials of our church life: Worship, Pastoral Care and Outreach – up, in and out. Two weeks on each.

Worship, of course, is so much more than what we do on a Sunday. It's about giving worth to God, honouring him not only with our lips but with our lives. It's acknowledging him as creator, sustainer, redeemer and live-giver. It's celebrating him with everything we have and everything we are.

Worship is our human response to all God is and has done for us.

We will see this in the psalm 98:

Response to who he is and what he has done

¹ O sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has **done** marvellous things.

His right hand and his holy arm
have **gained** him victory.

He has done marvellous things ... he has gained the victory over sin and death.

What are the marvellous things he has done?

It's really important to celebrate achievement. We know when a project has gone well, when an exam result has come in, when an operation has been successful, when things work out better than we thought they might.

And celebrating God's achievement is on an altogether more grand and massive scale. He is the creator of the world. He holds all things in the palm of his hand. He creates and sustains people. He makes the blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, even the dead to live again. He gives people purpose in life, he gives people hope for the future, he assures us that we not on our own.

He has done marvellous things. And he continues to do marvellous things ...

I mentioned about my Dad's wife Betty, who has had heart surgery five weeks ago. The op has gone well but during it she had a stroke. She didn't wake up for almost a week. We were not sure whether she ever would and if she did what

the situation would be like – what damage there might have been to her cognition, recognition, memory and movement. We prayed for her and for Dad and for all the medical team at Papworth and then at the Specialist Stroke Unit in Norwich Hospital.

The amazing news is that this week she came home. There was no need for the Stroke Rehab which they had said would be necessary. She is being cared for at home by teams coming in four times a day, keeping an eye on her and on Dad ... but she can speak, use the phone, walk, and engage in ways we thought might never again be possible.

He has done marvellous things in what we call salvation history. And he continues to do marvellous things ... today. And in response to these things we worship him and we sing his praise.

So God has done things ... and he makes them known.

²The LORD has **made known** his victory;

he has **revealed** his vindication in the sight of the nations.

We have had some exciting news this week from two friends who used to work for me and with me in my previous parish

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a. Our Youth Worker for four years who has become the new vicar of Stalybridge, on the outskirts of Manchester.

There was a service there on Wednesday evening to celebrate and give thanks for the provision of a new minister and his family. There was real joy in the church and lovely sense of hope for the future ... even when it was discovered that Gary was a Liverpool supporter.

We were delighted when we got the note to say this appointment had been made. It was good news and a simple way of God's revealing his plan and purpose.

b. Another of our former staff members is a member of the Lutheran Church in the US based in Phoenix, Arizona. She has this week passed out on her internship and secured a place as associate minister in her local church. This was posted up on Facebook ... another simple way of God's revealing his plan and purpose.

He has done marvellous things in what we call salvation history. He continues to do marvellous things ... today. And he makes himself known. And in response to these things we worship him and we sing his praise.

And God's work in the world is not nebulous and vague. He chooses to work through people and through communities ...

³He has **remembered** his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth **have seen the victory** of our God.

The nation of Israel is a tiny nation. It is approx. 200 miles from top to bottom. It's the size of Wales or the size of Kent per sq miles. And yet it's through God's relationship with this little nation, these little people that he makes his plans and purpose known in history ... and the nations around get to know of it.

This was always the plan ... that through an individual Abraham and his people Israel God would make himself known in the world. Israel was different from other nations because their ruler was God. But God's plan was never just for Israel. It was always through Israel to the wider world.

And God's relationship with people has always been key. We hear his call, we respond to his gentle invitation and we seek to serve him.

I had been involved with the local church ever since I started singing in the church choir, aged 6. I knew that church family was important, and I enjoyed being part of it

week by week. When I was ill and in hospital it was important that church people were praying for me and that the clergy visited me. All this background made quite an impact. so much so that when I went off to college and heard a visiting preacher in a local church use Jesus' words "Come, follow me!" as an invitation to sign up to the Christian faith personally and as adult ... I took it with both hands and have never looked back.

He has done marvellous things in what we call salvation history. And he continues to do marvellous things ... today. And he makes himself known. And he chooses people and calls them into relationship with him. And in response to these things we worship him and we sing his praise.

How do we do that?

Human response ...

⁴**Make a joyful noise** to the LORD, all the earth;
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

⁵**Sing praises** to the LORD with the lyre,
with the lyre and the sound of melody.

⁶With trumpets and the sound of the horn
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

We do it in many ways ... but one of them is through music, singing and playing to his greater glory. Using the gifts that he gives us to lift his name and worship him.

I am a great fan of "Songs of Praise". I have never been on it, but I love seeing the different people who are interviewed and the churches and communities where worship is filmed. It always looks such good fun.

And, of course, I know that when the telly turns up people pull out all the stops. Choirs, orchestras, brass bands, rock bands and worship bands all get to have a go and work together to make a wonderful sound and a great and inspiring programme.

The thing I notice is that there is such great variety these days. A mixture of styles and ways of singing and playing together which is so much more than the simple one style fits all. There is a richness in variety and a mutual honouring of the others' gifts.

One of the challenges we face as we think about our worship week by week is that we have historic resources of a organ, an organist and a choir ... but we also have in our midst singers and players who also might wish to make a contribution to our worship and our musical life. There will be several people taking part in the Pop-up Café Heritage Weekend Lunch next Sunday, for example.

And over the next few weeks we will be talking together about how we can incorporate these potential new contributions without those who are serving already feeling rejected, threatened or dishonoured.

That's not necessarily going to be easy ... but we need to go there as we take next steps forward. We may not have a lyre, trumpet or horn just yet ... but we do other instruments and voices we would love to hear them played and used for the glory of God.

He has done marvellous things in what we call salvation history. He continues to do marvellous things ... today. And he makes himself known. And he chooses people and calls them into relationship with him. And in response to these things we worship him and we sing his praise in music and singing and the joyful playing of instruments.

All of this is a human response ... the psalmist also suggests that the created order worships too ...

Creation response ...

⁷ Let the **sea** roar, and **all that fills it;**
the **world** and **those who live in it.**

⁸ Let the **floods** clap their hands;
let the **hills** sing together for joy

⁹ at the presence of the LORD,

Of course, this doesn't mean that the sea, the floods and the hills form an orchestra or a choir ... but it does mean that they point us to the majesty and the wonder of our creator God. There is something here about the ways in

which the created order responds to and resonates with the one who brought them into being.

And finally, something about the Context in which this all happens ...

for he is coming

to **judge** the earth.

He will **judge** the world with righteousness,
and the peoples with equity.

There will come a time when God will bring the whole created order together in consummation. It matters how we respond to him. It matters how we live our lives.

The numbers of those identifying as Anglican seem to be going down – so the survey results said this week. We have the challenge of trying our best to buck the trend, turn the tide, encourage new members and make new disciples.

It's important for us to be aware that his judgement, his assessment, of what we have done with what he has given us will be fair but it will be there. There will be judgement and reckoning of and accounting for what we have been given and what we have done with it.

A downward trend is not in his plan and purpose for his people – we have a job to do to make him known and to encourage people to take him seriously. It's a team thing.

I had the privilege this week of spending a few minutes with my daughter, looking round her office and meeting some of her colleagues. They were recruiting for a new member of staff. And they were very excited that they think they had interviewed someone that day who would be a great asset in their team.

Their offices overlook Anfield and there was just a sense that a new team was forming in the office in much the same way as the well-known team was either training or playing on the hallowed turf of the Liverpool Football Ground just across the way.

As in the Beautiful Game, so in the church family, we all get to play. But we must all be players on the pitch not just spectators watching from the stands.

Next week, I will speak more about this ... and look at some very practical ways of bringing our worship to life and making our love for God more tangible and more real.

Let's pray ...