

## FARNHAM PARISH CHURCH

Reading: Psalm 67  
Mark 8:27-38

Date: 16 September 2018

Theme: Worship 2

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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 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.

We saw last week that worship is:

- our human response to all God is and has done for us
- he makes himself known in salvation history and in day to day intervention in our lives
- he chooses to build relationship, working through individual people and communities
- we respond by making a joyful noise to the Lord
- because the context is one of judgement, in that how we live and how worship really matters; one day we will called to account

In the face of national statistics relating to those who come along regular to worship week by week, we said that a downward trend was 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. Worship very often is the church's shop window. And it's a team thing.

Zoe, Anfield, Liverpool's 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.

I said that this 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.

But first ... let's just look at what the psalm has to say about the presence of God, about God's good judgement and guidance, and about his extraordinary generosity.

*May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us,  
<sup>2</sup>that your way may be known upon earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
<sup>3</sup>Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.*

First, there is something about coming into the presence of God in Worship ... I don't know whether we think about it like that when we come to church or gather in a small group or sit down with our bible and a cup of coffee at home? We are

setting time aside to spend it with God, to ask him to meet with us and enjoy his company in a special way. And in these three verses we are asking him to engage with us personally: be gracious, bless and make his face shine on us. In doing this (in Christians' engaging with God) he makes his way and his saving power known. This is about partnership and relationship that God chooses to use you and me to provide evidence of his existence and to put his name out there and his character on the agenda. And in response to him we worship: let the peoples praise you, O God.

Second, there is something about responding to God's good judgement and guidance ...

*<sup>4</sup> Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth.*

*<sup>5</sup> Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you.*

God's judging with equity (or we might say his fairness in all things) and his guiding, are both reasons for the nations to be glad and sing for joy. There's something about knowing God is involved with the day to day and the big picture which just makes our hearts sing and gives us confidence in his love and mercy and grace. It gives us hope and assurance that he is for us and on our case and has our best interests at heart.

Only this week I have been aware of someone who needed to know God was there, needed to have a sense of his hand holding and protecting and leading into a new future ... and

wonderfully and powerfully he has made himself known and his presence felt in a really good and positive way.

And in response to him, we worship: let the peoples praise you O God.

And third, we give him thanks for everything he has given ...

*<sup>6</sup> The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, has blessed us.*

*<sup>7</sup> May God continue to bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth revere him.*

At the Mayor's Service last Sunday afternoon, I was explaining that everything that exists is both evidence of God's goodness and his generosity.

With harvest-time around the corner, we can see this in the fields, in the changing colours of autumn, and we can see it in the shops, on the internet and on our tables at home whenever we sit down to eat.

In response to God's gracious and generous provision we worship him: let the peoples praise you, O God.

So how does this happen? How do we worship God?

I am going to suggest that we at this question in three ways. Individual, small group, congregation ...

### **Individual**

- Bible Reading

- Prayer
- Meditation

#### Bible Reading ...

Find a time. Find a place. Find a rhythm – what time of day?  
Every day or every other day?

Find help from an expert, in Bible Reading notes, a commentary on the particular part of the Bible we are reading, or on the internet?

Write down a note of what we think God is saying.

#### Prayer ...

This can be formal – using the prayer of the C of E in a book or on an app on your phone

It can be informal – you write your own prayers and make them up in your head

At the start and end of the day, before you eat ... look for triggers: a beautiful flower, sunset, conversation, letter, picture, gift.

#### Meditation ...

Being still and focussing on God and his goodness.

Eg. chocolate: smell, taste, eat.

#### **Small Group**

- Study and discussion
- Prayer triplet/meeting

- Meditation
- Quiet Day
- Study and discussion

#### Small group meeting

Weekly or fortnightly or monthly. Looking at a part of the Bible or a book or a theme.

Sharing food together. Sharing life together.

Praying for one another. Doing fun things together.

#### Prayer triplet/meeting

A short regular meeting just to pray ... focussed, deliberate and expectant.

#### Meditation

Being still and focussing on God and his goodness.

Eg. Read scripture slowly, or examine something like a flower, leaf, stone, wooden cross.

#### Quiet Day

Join us in one of our regular QDs to Ascot Priory ... enjoy the 40 acres of grounds, the gentle input and thought-provoking material, the chapel, shared lunch, prayer and silence.

## Congregation

8am, 8.30am, 10am, 11.30am (HC, Words and Music, Morning Service at St F's), 6.30pm

- 8am Old language, silent prayer, space
- 8.30am Monday morning: Start the Week
- 10am We will come back to this
- 11.30am
- HC: Tuesday morning: Mid-week communion, a community in its own right
- Words & Music Wednesday morning: Listening/Reflecting
- St F's Sunday morning: Short 30 mins service non-eucharistic
- 6.30pm Something different every week
- Advent/Lent Early evening, meditation: Preparation for the big festivals

Back to the 10am ...

Direction ... towards building a relationship with God

Characterised by options, by variety – a multi-coloured experience rather than a monochrome one

Critique of Parish Communion Movement/ New Wine – dull and boring, repetitive, lacking in contribution, use of senses, integration of music, silence, the familiar, the new, the unexpected.

The landscape has changed hugely since I was ordained in 1987 ... more visual, more sensory, more pick and mix ... it's called post-modern, but it means you never know what going

to happen next, you have so much choice it's bewildering, and everyone has a view and has no fear in expressing it personally and on social media.

We are in transition from a place where the organist and the choir were the only ways of worship's being led. We are moving towards a greater variety, complexity and richness in the quality of and the style of what is being offered.

The stats are frightening ... the C of E is in decline. And they say that the first sign of madness is doing the same thing over and over again expecting a different result. Churches across the country are having to rethink so many aspects of what they have traditionally done and been about. And that is unsettling, it is unclear, it is uncharted. Or it's exciting and creative and it's full of potential and possibility depending on how you think about these things and look at them.

Sometimes letting go of something is harder than getting used to something new. Meeting on Friday morning with our new computer friend helping us with transition in the office, frighteningly quick but very patient with those of us who are slower. Where are the files? How do I find my e-mail? What do you mean by "look at sharepoint", and "you just do this", and "can't you see it? It's just there!"

Honouring God in a variety of ways, finding holiness in the new as well as the old, hearing God speak in new creative and imaginative ways, rather than only the old and familiar, is what this journey is all about.

Here at St Andrew's we offer a huge variety to suit many and varying needs and desires. Let's be aware of the variety maybe try something we have not done before, be willing to learn, slow to criticise, and quick to encourage. Sustaining and building a church for the next generation is the job of all of us, not just keeping things exactly the same as they were in the 1950s because we like it that way.

I am a great fan of Dragon's Den – a programme for entrepreneurs, inventors and would be business people. The Dragons are multi-millionaires and the punters come into the Den asking for money, willing to give away so much of the equity in their company or business. They have about 3 mins to pitch for an investment from a Dragon.

The experts say that when someone visits a church new for the first time, they give it about 3 mins to see if they would like to invest ... ie come again, give it a go, and maybe become a member. First impressions really count. And what we do and how we do it for a new generation, really matters.

Worship is offering. Worship is sacrifice. Worship is for him, not for us – actually. It's a response and a giving of all we have and all we are, to bring us into his presence, to witness to the world, and to be an act of service to the living God.

Let's pray ...