



Sunday 3rd May 2020

Notes from our Sunday Morning
Pre-recorded Worship

Opening Reflection

Receive today, His grace and peace, and receive joy for yet another week ahead in lockdown. We can be so grateful for so many things; health and well-being, friendships and food, and a roof over our heads. And of course, some of us are going through really tough times as they know of people who are very ill at this moment. We are praying for you and we would like to hear from you, of course, if you're in need of anything (please contact the church office on 01483 455333).

Even though we can't be together, in physical form during this time, in our church building, we are gathering virtually and we do this in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is Spirit so let us worship him in spirit and truth. We're a family, after all. Which reminds me of our vision, to love God, love people and make a difference. And we do this, of course, through building family as we're integrating new people into our community and deepening existing relationships, as we shine brightly by speaking about Jesus and bringing people to faith, and as we live courageously by expressing our calling and gifts and living in counter-cultural ways. In our current sermon series, we continue to learn to build family by deepening our relationship with God and one another. Today our Scripture reading is from the first letter of John, and Mike will talk to us on becoming a holy family.

Song

Alive

Verse 1

I was lost with a broken heart
You picked me up now I'm set apart
From the ash I am born again
Forever safe in the Saviour's hands

Verse 2

You are more than my words could say
I'll follow You Lord for all my days
Fix my eyes follow in Your ways
Forever free in unending grace

Pre-Chorus

'Cause You are You are You are my freedom
We lift You higher lift You higher
Your love Your love Your love never ending
Oh oh oh

Chorus

You are alive in us
Nothing can take Your place
You are all we need
Your love has set us free (oh)

Verse 3

In the midst of the darkest night
Let Your love be the shining light
Breaking chains that were holding me

You sent Your Son down and set me free

Verse 4

Ev'rything of this world will fade
I'm pressing on till I see Your face
I will live that Your will be done
I won't stop till Your kingdom come

Pre-Chorus

You are You are You are my freedom
We lift You higher
You are You are You are my freedom
We lift You higher lift You higher
Your love Your love Your love never ending
Oh oh oh

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Reading: 1 John 1:5- 2:2

Light and Darkness, Sin and Forgiveness

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

Talk by Mike Norris

Well, it's so good to be with you all today and I hope you are doing okay in the circumstances. I want to just start by asking you whether you have ever been on a night walk. There was someone in the church family a while ago who used to walk through the night and I decided to do that when I was up in rural Wales last year. I went off on my own. I thought, this'll be fun. I went for this walk in the pitch black. I have to say, it was absolutely terrifying. I got completely lost and I felt really, really frightened.

Now, why am I telling you that? I'm telling you that because we are continuing our series, Build Family. We're going through the book of 1 John and one of the themes in this reading you've just heard is light and darkness. So we're going to explore that. I want to say as we begin, we are living in dark times. I

think that's fair to say. And I don't know about you, but I'm over it. I'm having a bit of a sense of humour failure with the lockdown and I've spoken to many of you who are experiencing cabin fever, quarantine fatigue, thinking when is this going to end, and there's a sense of frustration rising and that dawning realization that actually things aren't going to return to normal very quickly. Some of you have said, you know, it's getting a bit gnarly now. Home schooling, the working from home, and all we're up against it and it's all getting a bit much.

I don't know about you, I'm kind of hoping that Boris is going to wave his magic wand next week and all will be well, but it's not going to happen, is it? In the absence of a vaccine, I think we're having to adjust to the reality that we're in for a bit of a long haul here. It's not easy. I want to think about that today. I want to also say if you're loving the lockdown, if you are in a really good place, please don't let me depress you. I hope by the end of this you will feel encouraged so that's my plan today.

So in our present circumstances, what can we take from these words from the apostle John? I think he'd say three things. I want to just go through these briefly this morning.

I think the first thing he would say is in the lockdown, in these unsettling times of economic uncertainty, of stress, and anxiety, and real grief, is make sure you come to the light. This is verse one. "This is the message we've heard from him and declare to you. God is light. In him there is no darkness at all."

I remember on the middle of that hill in the middle of nowhere in rural Wales, pitch black, I remember just capturing a little shaft of light and it was the lights of where I was staying. I remember feeling so, so relieved and I headed towards it. John would say come to the light and, as you know, in the Bible, God is portrayed as light. He's not a light or a kind of light. He is actually **THE LIGHT**. John writes a lot about this. He says in his Gospel, "In him was life and that life was the light of men." He records Jesus' words. He would have heard Jesus say these words in John 8, "I am the light of the world. "Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." We looked last week at how, when we come into relationship with Jesus who is the light, extraordinary things happen. We find love, acceptance, forgiveness, healing, restoration, even eternal life. I'm not going to repeat what I said last week because we looked at a bit of that last week, but these things are extraordinary, these things that we experience when we come to faith with Jesus, or in Jesus.

I love what C.S Lewis says. I don't know whether you've heard of C.S Lewis. He was an English professor at Oxford University and he wasn't a Christian and he explored the faith. He did come to faith in Jesus. He described himself as the most reluctant convert in all England and he wrote this in "The Last Battle" about his experience of coming to the light and finding Jesus. He wrote this. Let me read this. "I've come home at last. This is my real country. I belong here. This is the land I've been looking for all my life though I never knew it until now. Come further up, come further in."

So I'm suggesting in these times of darkness, let's come to the light, let's come to Jesus. If you wouldn't describe yourself as a Christian, I would say, first things first, we're delighted you're with us and we would love to support you as you explore spiritual things and, to that end, we're starting this course called Alpha on Monday nights. It's going to start on the 11th of May. It's going to be on Zoom between eight and nine o'clock in the evening and you would be very, very welcome to join us. You can sign up on our website. If you already are a follower of Jesus, you've been a Christian for a while, how do you press into the light? I don't know about you, but I'm finding I'm mixing up all sorts of different things, trying new things to connect with God in these strange circumstances. Some of my old rhythms and routines I've had to throw out of the window. But basically, there's all sorts of ways in which we can come to the light through reading the Bible. The word is a lamp unto our feet and a light

unto our path. There is worship. I've been listening to worship music. I've been singing worship music. There are all sorts of brilliant resources on prayer and, you know, I've mentioned Lectio Divina, there's the Pray As You Go app, 24-7 Prayer, Pete Greig, all that lot, who have put brilliant resources together which we've circulated. Church of England has done great stuff. Tearfund has done great stuff. I know we've circulated those things. But prayer, reading the Bible, getting out in nature, speaking to other people, or listening to podcasts. These are all ways in which we can connect with the light. I want to say it's a really important thing to do to come to the light in these dark times because God will encourage you, he'll comfort you, and you will have that sense of encouragement and the joy of his presence in this time which, I think, is just exactly what we need. And I want to say as a church, we're here for you. If you are struggling, you can contact us. All the details are on the website. You can phone us. You can email us. I do just want to say well done for the way you have been supporting one another. It's been amazing stories of how you've been loving one another, encouraging one another at this time.

I think the second thing John would say is avoid the darkness. This is verse six, "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth." So when we come to faith in Jesus we come into relationship, friendship with Jesus who is the light of the world. Jesus calls us to walk with him in the light, not in the darkness. I love this metaphor of walking. It speaks of living, journeying with God, making progress, covering ground, and doing life together. I have to say, as I reflect on avoiding the darkness, when I was on that hillside in Wales, pitch black, on my own, I was, I remember saying to myself, "I am never, ever doing this again." So we're called to walk in the light, to avoid the darkness, and what's extraordinary is Jesus describes his followers, his friends, his disciples as, or he calls them to be the light of the world. They're to shine like stars and they're to be salt and light. They're to be people who live differently and, actually, who radiate the life and truth of Jesus.

So Jesus speaks in the Sermon on the Mount. I'll just read this from Matthew 5. He says this. "You are the salt of the earth but if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It's no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp, put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand and it gives light to everyone in the house. in the same way, let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

It's really significant that we do seek to be people who walk in the light because that has serious implications for people around us and also for our own lives. This is verse seven, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus his Son purifies us from all sin." So, walking in the light has very, very positive, has a very, very positive impact on those around us, on our own lives. This reference to sin sounds outdated. It's quite hard to explain, but in our world we see the effects of sin everywhere. The richest 1% of the world own half the world's wealth and there's great inequality. The poor countries who get the virus are going to suffer much more than the richer countries who have the infrastructure, medical expertise, and care to provide for people who are affected. We see sin in the terror attacks, dark web, human trafficking, the Harvey Weinstein abuse scandal and the whole #MeToo tragedy. Environmental disasters. Even with the virus itself, I don't know whether you read Ruth Valerio's paper from Tearfund where she suggested that the virus itself isn't a natural disaster, rather it's a disaster of our own making and she writes, "As viruses jump species and the environmental destruction we have wrought makes this more likely to happen as people are brought into closer contact with virus carrying animals." I want to suggest that the virus has actually intensified the darkness because people are under so much more pressure and isolation and, you know, it's a fact that domestic violence has increased, child abuse has increased, addictive behaviour has increased, even criminal gangs taking opportunities with the emergency

services and law enforcement services being focused on the virus and so this is the reality of where we find ourselves, that actually in the stress, in the pressure, we can actually be tempted or, in our brokenness, lapse into walking in darkness. And, you know, we can go for the dopamine hits. We can go for unhealthy things more than normal and, you know, I would just ask you, how are you doing? How are you coping? You know, I'm sure there will be lots of things that you could celebrate, but what's the struggle for you? Where are you feeling defeated? What are the issues you wish that you could actually overcome in the present pressure of the coronavirus? I raise these things not to bring condemnation but actually to encourage us to walk in the light for the simple reason that walking in darkness always leaves us feeling less healthy, less calm, less settled, and less human. I want to encourage you to come to the light, to reach out and ask for help, to press into God and I would say that we are here for you if you need help or if you need prayer or you need some support of whatever kind. Do contact us with all the details being on the website, phone numbers, emails, all that kind of stuff.

The third thing John would say is, and I think this is just that, this is really what I wanted to say today, is thirdly, know yourself to be loved and accepted by God. You know, John writes in verse nine, "If we confess our sins, "he is faithful and just, "will forgive us our sins "and purify us from all unrighteousness."

You know, on that night lost in the darkness on that Welsh hillside, I found myself just reaching out to God, asking God for his presence and his love just to keep me sane and not too feeling overwhelmed. You know, why on earth does John mention sin 27 times in his book? It's actually not to condemn us. He does so because he wants us to find God's love and freedom and restoration and he wants to point us and remind us of the amazing things that God has done in Jesus. The truth is, Jesus comes to rub the darkness out, to rub sin out, and not to rub it in. We see, actually, we'll come to this later on the series, but Jesus on the cross defeats the power of sin, he takes the weight of sin, the punishment of sin on himself on the cross, and gives us, gives creation, a fresh start. Such is his love, such is his desire for us to find healing and restoration. I want to just remind us in the lockdown, in this season of pressure and stress, and dysfunction, and gnarliness, and uncertainty, as we struggle, that God loves us, he delights in us, he's for us, and when we get it wrong he forgives us. You know, we will regularly get it wrong. You know, verse 10. "If we claim we've not sinned, we have made him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives." So, we're going to get it wrong. We're going to make mistakes. We're not going to be at our best on occasions in this lockdown, particularly with all the additional pressure, but you know what, we've got a God who loves us, who delights in us, who's for us, not against us, who forgives us, and is constantly inviting us to come into his light, his loving presence, his grace and truth and kindness.

So, let's wrap this up. We are in a time of testing. We're in unusual times, uncertain times. The pressure is rising. We're feeling increasingly frazzled and frustrated. It looks like the effects on our everyday life of the virus are going to be lasting longer than we probably ever imagined. Well, should we end up depressed and lose hope? No. Let's come to the light, let's come to Jesus, let's avoid the darkness, and let's know in all things, on the good days and the bad days, especially the bad days, the bad moments, that God loves us, he's accepted us, and he delights in us. We're going to get through to the other side of this. I can't wait to see you face-to-face when we do get to the other side and we can always be people of hope because Jesus' light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it.

Reflection and Prayer

Let's just pause here for a minute and pray together and ask the Holy Spirit to help us with these things.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can come to the light because it's like you have switched on the light. We suddenly can see with eyes of faith and understand that you are for us and with us. Lord, we see ourselves in a new light too. Father, you have made us holy and purified us, and given us righteousness and therefore where the tree has been made good, the fruit is good also. So we will see a change and transformation in our personal lives and that's amazing. Father, I thank you also that you help us to avoid darkness, that you help us whenever we're in danger of stumbling, that you lift us up again and help us to stay strong and to stay in tune with you and to hold onto the promises that you've given us. Father, I thank you also that you have spoken over us and this love that you have for us. Father, thank you that we can accept ourselves in that light of being beloved sons and daughters and as we accept ourselves in this new light, we also accept those around us as you see them too as valuable and loved and lovable. Father, I pray that you will help us as we journey on, that you help us understand, you know, what it means to be set apart for you. Help us to really walk in your ways and follow you by denying ourselves and picking up our cross daily and following you. Amen.

Hymn

Holy Holy Holy (Nicaea)

Verse 1

Holy holy holy
Lord God Almighty
Early in the morning
Our song shall rise to Thee
Holy holy holy
Merciful and mighty
God in three persons
Blessed Trinity

Verse 2

Holy holy holy
All the saints adore Thee
Casting down their golden crowns
Around the glassy sea
Cherubim and seraphim
Falling down before Thee
Which wert and art
And evermore shalt be

Verse 3

Holy holy holy
Though the darkness hide Thee
Though the eye of sinful man
Thy glory may not see

Only Thou art holy
There is none beside Thee
Perfect in power
In love and purity

Verse 4

Holy holy holy
Lord God Almighty
All Thy works shall praise Thy name
In earth and sky and sea
Holy holy holy
Merciful and mighty
God in three persons
Blessed Trinity

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Song

King Of Kings

Verse 1

In the darkness we were waiting
Without hope without light
Till from Heaven You came running
There was mercy in Your eyes
To fulfil the law and prophets
To a virgin came the Word
From a throne of endless glory
To a cradle in the dirt

Chorus

Praise the Father
Praise the Son
Praise the Spirit three in one
God of Glory
Majesty
Praise forever to the King of Kings

Verse 2

To reveal the kingdom coming
And to reconcile the lost
To redeem the whole creation
You did not despise the cross
For even in Your suffering
You saw to the other side
Knowing this was our salvation
Jesus for our sake You died

Verse 3

And the morning that You rose
All of heaven held its breath
Till that stone was moved for good
For the Lamb had conquered death
And the dead rose from their tombs
And the angels stood in awe
For the souls of all who'd come
To the Father are restored

Verse 4

And the Church of Christ was born
Then the Spirit lit the flame
Now this Gospel truth of old
Shall not kneel shall not faint
By His blood and in His Name
In His freedom I am free
For the love of Jesus Christ
Who has resurrected me

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Song

What A Beautiful Name

Verse 1

You were the Word at the beginning
One with God the Lord Most High
Your hidden glory in creation
Now revealed in You our Christ

Chorus 1

What a beautiful Name it is
What a beautiful Name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a beautiful Name it is
Nothing compares to this
What a beautiful Name it is
The Name of Jesus

Verse 2

You didn't want heaven without us
So Jesus You brought heaven down
My sin was great Your love was greater
What could separate us now

Chorus 2

What a wonderful Name it is
What a wonderful Name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a wonderful Name it is
Nothing compares to this
What a wonderful Name it is
The Name of Jesus
What a wonderful Name it is
The Name of Jesus

Bridge

Death could not hold You
The veil tore before You
You silence the boast of sin and grave
The heavens are roaring
The praise of Your glory
For You are raised to life again

Bridge

You have no rival
You have no equal
Now and forever God You reign
Yours is the kingdom
Yours is the glory
Yours is the Name above all names

Chorus 3

What a powerful Name it is
What a powerful Name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a powerful Name it is
Nothing can stand against
What a powerful Name it is
The Name of Jesus

Ending

What a powerful Name it is
The Name of Jesus
What a powerful Name it is
The Name of Jesus

Prayers

Lord Jesus, we praise you, light and Saviour of the world. At a time of darkness, we ask that you shine your light into every aspect of the challenges the world faces as we address the implications of the pandemic.

We lift before you, loving Lord, care homes in this country and across the world. Give wisdom and courage to those who manage care homes as they seek to keep residents and staff safe and well. We pray for residents who are frightened or lonely that you will draw close to them and surround them with your peace. In the silence, lift to God those you know who live or work in a care setting.

We pray for leaders in every sector – national and local government, business, education, health, religious, charity – as they plan how to move ahead after lockdown. Give them strength, godly wisdom and hope as they work out what to do next. May they have courage and vision to learn from what we have experienced and may justice, compassion and deep wisdom shape decisions which they make. Take a moment to pray for leaders across the country.

We lift into your light, Lord Jesus, those who suffer particularly at this time. Draw close to those who grieve and comfort them. For those in hospital, be a constant presence. For those suffering abuse at home, give them courage and show them a way out. For those whose mental health has deteriorated, surround them with your love and give them access to the right support. We pray for those who support them – our doctors, nurses and hospital chaplains, clergy, social workers, teachers, community mental health teams – that they will be your hands and your voice as they care. We keep silence as we think of those known to us.

Lord Jesus, as a church community, we are learning in new ways what it means to be a big family. Thank you for all the opportunities we have to worship, pray and meet together and thank you for those who make these opportunities possible. Inspired by your light and love, may we shine brightly in our families, with our immediate neighbours and in our town. Help us to push out the boundaries of our big family that others may be drawn into your light and come to know your love.

Let's close by saying the Lord's Prayer together...

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Family News

If you would like to give to the work of St Saviour's during this time, please visit the giving section on our website (under "Get Involved") or contact the church office.

Let the words of this next song end our time together this morning as we receive God's blessing.

Song

The Blessing

Verse

The Lord bless you
And keep you
Make his face shine upon you
And be gracious to you
The Lord turn his
Face toward you
And give you peace

Chorus

Amen
Amen
Amen

Bridge

May his favour
Be upon you
And a thousand generations
And your family
And your children
And their children
And their children

Bridge

May his presence
Go before you
And behind you
And beside you
All around you
And within you
He is with you
He is with you

Bridge

In the morning
In the evening
In your coming

And your going
In your weeping
And rejoicing
He is for you
He is for you

Tag
He is for you
He is for you

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