

Worship on Sunday 18th October 2020 with Central Hall Church Family

God is here, His Spirit is with us – His Spirit is always with us... (Take a moment to pause, breathe deeply, allow your senses to settle, and thank God that He is with you now, as you come before Him in worship...)

Call to worship: ‘Exalt the LORD our God! Bow low before his feet, for he is holy’ Psalm 99 verse 5 (read the whole of Psalm 99 if you wish)

Hymn: stf 10 - ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord’ (sing or say or simply read)

Opening prayers: (Add your own prayers in the ...) Gracious God we thank You for Your holy presence with us now... We praise You for Your never-ending goodness... We thank You for the many blessings that we have received over the past few days... We thank You for Your love for us... We confess our faults and failings before You now... With grateful hearts we receive Your forgiveness once again... Thank You, Jesus, for dying in our place... Please refill us with Your Holy Spirit, and help us to become more like you... Lord Jesus, we love you... **Amen. The Lord’s Prayer:** Our Father...

Bible Readings: (read one or more of the following):

Exodus 33: 12-23 (Moses sees the LORD’s glory)

1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10 (The faith of the Thessalonian believers)

Matthew 22: 15-22 (Taxes for Caesar)

Hymn: stf 434 - ‘Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee’

WHO CAN WE ENCOURAGE? - Reflection by Trevor Gay

First, I pass on the love of Annie and me to all our dear friends at Central Hall. Like all of you, we miss the physical get togethers in church that we enjoy so much. We miss the hugs; we miss the smiles; we miss singing together; we miss enjoying that wonderful fellowship. At the same time, we remember in the middle of our most difficult challenges and in the storms of our lives that Jesus is our Living Hope and is carrying us through those storms that are so personal to us. It did not look good, did it, when Jesus died a horrible death on the cross for you and for me. We know that

although His death on the cross looked like a terrible defeat, it was in fact, a wonderful victory. Jesus had beaten death and three days later his resurrection set the tone for all of us. We can draw so much hope, indeed joy, from the resurrection because it reminds us that one day we will be back together in Central Hall enjoying those things we are missing at present.

Today I want to reflect briefly on the lectionary reading from Paul’s letter to the church in Thessalonica. You can read it here: 1 Thessalonians Chapter 1 Verses 1-10. This was the first of a series of letters (Epistles) that Paul wrote. This one was written around AD 51 just 20 years or so after the death of Jesus. On his travels growing the new Christianity, Paul had earlier preached three times in Thessalonica (Acts 17 Verse 2). Now Paul was writing a few months later to offer encouragement and love. I think it is wonderful when Paul writes he offers love and encouragement in the opening remarks of all his letters. Even more amazing when we think about his situation. For five years he was often either under house arrest, imprisoned in a cell and sometimes locked in chains. His letter to the Thessalonians encourages the new Christians of Thessalonica to carry on the work they have started in the new church. Paul knew what was happening in Thessalonica from Timothy (Paul was a mentor to Timothy). Timothy had been sent to visit Thessalonica and report back to Paul. He reported there was opposition to the new church from both Jews and Gentiles but there was determination among the passionate new Christians to spread the good news of Jesus. Paul recognised that these people needed encouragement and a reminder that God is with them in this work. The much loved and highly respected politician Tony Benn was asked what he would like people to say about him after he had died. He replied **“He encouraged us”**

This reading reminds me of the story of Coffee Shop Sunday. We started meeting 10 months ago in Costa Coffee on Gallagher Retail Park and it is fair to say we are a new church. We only had four months meeting together physically before lockdown arrived in March. Since March we

have developed Coffee Shop Sunday 'online' with 4 prayers sessions per week; pre-recorded online worship sessions every alternate Sunday published on You Tube; and writing prayer booklets. We have been blessed with lots of support and encouragement for what we are trying to do in Coffee Shop Sunday. We have a strapline in Coffee Shop Sunday; **"Meeting God in an Ordinary Place."** Over the next three years we will be looking to develop more such expressions of modern worship in places like Costa Coffee. We will be looking to use other venues like sports clubs, pubs, clubs, workplaces. In fact, anywhere where people go. Our principles are inclusiveness, accessibility, and collaboration. We are aiming to encourage people who do not know God to worship with us and we are looking to encourage those who already know Jesus to join us to re-energise their faith if it has gone a bit stale or if people just want to enjoy modern interactive worship. We are in a similar position to those early new Christians in Thessalonica. There are some people who struggle with the concept of modern worship in buildings that are not 'churches' and that is understandable. For some, this style will just never be a comfortable way to worship God and that is ok. Nevertheless a lot of people do enjoy the Coffee Shop Sunday style. My hope is that more people will come to know Jesus as we carry on our journey of finding new ways of telling people the good news of Jesus alongside the more 'traditional' church in our Circuit.

As we enter a new week, I ask that we think about who we might encourage over the coming days. We might want to identify someone who is going through a particularly challenging storm right now and might just need a few words of encouragement. We can be like Paul. We may be struggling in the teeth of this pandemic to see much optimism. Like Paul we should recognise that God is in the teeth of our storm alongside us and, like Paul, we can put others before ourselves and offer our support, encouragement, and love.

Jesus Christ is My Living Hope Amen.

Let us pray: Loving God, we thank you so much for Jesus who comes beside us in the storms of our lives. As we think about what we are missing during this Corona pandemic, things like the fellowship of being together in church, we remember that you are still very much with us. You Lord provide hope and encouragement at this challenging time just as Paul reminded the people of Thessalonica, 2000 years ago, as he wrote; "To the church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace" ... We are in awe Father, that you are with us in the turmoil of our current storms. Lord I ask for your blessing on all your people at Central Hall and I pray we will soon be back together again. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, your son, and our saviour **Amen.**

Hymn: stf 519 - 'Father, I place into your hands the things I cannot do'

Prayers of intercession: (Include your own prayers, too...) Loving God, we come before You with our concerns for this world that You love so much... We pray for our government and all those in positions of power and leadership across the globe... please give them wisdom and compassion, and guide them to make good decisions... We pray for all those who are struggling or suffering... because of the coronavirus pandemic... poor physical or mental health... bereavement or other loss... employment situation... difficult or broken relationships... financial situation... conflict or war... lack of resources... loss of faith or hope... please hold each one in Your love and bless them with what they need... We bring before You all those whom we love... each member of our Church family... Finally, our personal prayers for ourselves... LORD, in Your mercy, hear our prayers... We trust You to answer each one in Your best time and way... Once again, Father, we offer all that we have and are to You... our desire is to honour and please You every day... We pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our precious Lord and Saviour, **Amen**

Hymn: stf 555 'Jesus, all for Jesus; all I am and have and ever hope to be'

May **the Grace** of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, for evermore, **Amen.**