

Written Service 17th July 2022

Theme: Fountains of living water and broken cisterns

Call to Worship: Reveal O Lord, to our eyes, your glory
Expose O Lord to our hearts, your love
Disperse O Lord from our minds the darkness

Fill O Lord our lives with your light
And surround us with your presence

Hymn: Song of Fellowship 1674: Your love, shining like the sun

Your love, shining like the sun, I
come and lay my burden down
Pouring like the rain,
Gladly at your feet,
Raging like the storm,
I'm opening up my heart;
Refreshing me again.
Come make this joy complete.
I receive your love.

I receive your peace.

Chorus

Your grace frees me from the past,
It purges every sin,
It purifies my heart
And heals me from within.
I receive your grace.

Pour over me,

Pour over me,

Let your rain flood this thirsty soul.

Pour over me your waves of love,

Pour over me.

Prayers: Adoration and praise:

Loving Lord, you draw light out of darkness and coax beauty from chaos.
You spread a rainbow promise across time and space: **AMEN**

You make music and song in the sounds of creation. You paint pictures of glory in the stars and clouds: **AMEN**

You scatter sparks of creative energy. You penetrate madness with wisdom and truth: **AMEN**

You weave patterns of hope in the traumas of history. You lavish your love gifts in boundless excess: **AMEN**

You grace us with peace and warm hospitality. You welcome each person regardless of race: **AMEN**

You invite us to dine at the table of plenty. You fill us with hope, with faith and with joy: **AMEN**

You come to us, embrace us, believe in us and stay with us.

For you are our God, Redeemer and Friend.

Reading: John 4: 7-15

A Samaritan woman came to draw water and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink of water."

The woman answered, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan - so how can you ask me for a drink?" Jews will have nothing to do with Samaritans.

Jesus answered, "If only you knew what God gives and who it is asking you for a drink, you would ask Him and He would give you life-giving water."

"Sir" the woman said, "you haven't got a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well; he

and his sons and his flocks all drank from it. You don't claim to be greater than Jacob do you?"

Jesus answered, "All those who drink this water will be thirsty again. But, whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water and give him eternal life."

Reading: Jeremiah 2:9-13

"And so I, the LORD, will state my case against my people again.

I will bring charges against their descendents.

Go west to the Island of Cyprus, and send someone eastward to the land of Kedar. You will see that nothing like this has ever happened before.

No other nation has ever changed its gods, even though they were not real.

But my people have exchanged me, the God who brought them honour, for gods who can do nothing for them.

So, I command the sky to shake with horror, to be amazed and astonished, for my people have committed two sins: They have turned away from me, the spring of fresh water, and have dug out cisterns, cracked cisterns that can hold no water."

Sermon Pt 1: The Fountain

Introduction: Text: Jeremiah 2: 13 "My people have committed two sins. They have rejected me, the fountain of living water and have hewn out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Speaking through Jeremiah, God refers to Himself as 'the fountain of living water'. This picture of living water is used about God and His Spirit on a number of occasions in the OT – In our NT reading, Jesus is speaking to the Samaritan woman and He refers to the living water He is able to supply – Later in John's Gospel Jesus refers to Himself as the Living water.

Water is one of the four things we need for nourishment and life – air, water, food and light. In a country like ours, where we often see more water than we can deal with, perhaps we don't quite appreciate how important it is:

It is when we don't have water that we learn to appreciate it – some years ago during a particularly cold winter, the pipes in Sutton in Ashfield burst and a friend of mine was without water for nearly two weeks: She had to collect water from a collection point every day - even the simplest things like flushing the loo or making a cup of tea was a major task and took so much time.

When the Bible spoke about water, we have to remember that the people in Israel had an appreciation of the life giving properties of water. They got water from two different sources. There was natural, clean, running water either from a spring or well or there was standing, often polluted water from a stone cistern. Israel only has rain from November to April and the people caught as much of it as they could in cisterns to use during the dry times. Some cisterns were huge, built by

the town or village authorities and some were hewed out of stone by householders.

But this was static water, suitable for washing or irrigation and often mud and silt built up in the bottom of the cistern. In this passage God speaks about these two sources of water

God always referred to Himself as the source or the fountain of living water - of the clean, cool, running water – spoken to people Palestine in the heat of summer, they would have longed for a drenching in that cool clear, running stream.

God expects His people to long for Him in that way. Do you long to be drenched in the presence of God? God is saying – and Jesus means the same thing – that we can find refreshment if we turn to Him – we can be soaked in God. So often our lives are full and busy – sometimes with church duties, sometimes with family duties, sometimes with other work. But God longs to refresh us with His Spirit. But we need to take time out to be with Him, talk to Him about our lives, let Him help us to balance them and then refresh us. We don't want to wait until some illness or infirmity **makes** us stop – we need to take time out to walk in the countryside, or in a garden to admire the beauty all round us. Stand still, take it all in and allow the Spirit to wash over us.

This fountain of living water is also life giving:

In Cyprus, where I lived for six years - from April to November everything dries and is parched - the ground is white and lifeless -

then the rains come. There is a startling transformation - Within days the fields are carpeted with wild flowers, first the delicate wild cyclamen then the bright yellow crown daisies. They grow in huge and beautiful abundance.

Do you feel sometimes that your spiritual life is dry, dull and lifeless? Do you need it to grow and develop? It is so easy to just get into a routine - forgetting to pray until there is a crisis - never bothering to read a Bible - not really moved by worship. It takes commitment - putting aside time to just be with God - to read the scriptures - there are so many daily Bible reading notes to help. But be warned! If you ask God to refresh you and help you to grow, be prepared to change. That's what growing means - change and development. But, if you are ready - come to the fountain of living water and see what happens. **Or** will we be like the people of Israel and reject the fountain of living water?

Hymn: STF 544: As the deer pants for the water:

As the deer pants for the water,
So my soul longs after you,
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.

*You alone are my strength, my shield,
Chorus
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.*

I want you more than gold or silver,
Only you can satisfy.
You alone are the real joy giver
And the apple of my eye.

*You alone are my strength, my shield
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.*

You're my friend and you are my brother,
Even though You are a King.
I love you more than any other,
So much more than anything.

*You alone are my strength, my shield
To you alone may my spirit yield.
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship you.*

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jv6Z8t1Tzg

Sermon Pt 2: The broken cistern
So, let's look at the other part of God's
condemnation of His people.

He says that they have rejected Him, the
fountain of living water and **have hewn
out cisterns for themselves, broken
cisterns that can hold no water.**

The water from the cistern is very
different, polluted, muddy and often
diseased. God likens His people to these
cracked and broken cisterns so that even
the water they have is draining away.

What did He mean? Ever since the
Israelites came to the Promised Land they
had polluted their beliefs and worship
with foreign gods. Yes, they worshipped
Yahweh in the Jerusalem Temple but they
hedged their bets and at the same time,

they worshipped at shrines of the local
Canaanite gods, taking part in the rituals
that go with them. First Isaiah, Hosea and
Amos, and later Jeremiah warned them of
the consequences of going this way.

Already the ten tribes of the northern
kingdom of Israel had been swept away by
Assyria, Jeremiah warns that the same
thing will happen in the southern kingdom
of Judah and Jerusalem - but they don't
want to hear. The army of Babylon are at
the very gates of Jerusalem but still they
won't listen. Poor Jeremiah was so badly
treated and he wants to stop preaching
about destruction - but he can't keep it in.
Strangely enough, they threw him into a
huge cistern and left him to die in the mud
- until he was rescued by his faithful scribe
Baruch.

With Hindsight we can have 20/20 vision.
We can see of course that the Israelites
were heading for destruction and that
they deserved it. But have we got anything
to learn from this? We, like them are
faithful in our worship - we take part in all
that our church has to offer - but do we,
like the Israelites, worship false gods as
well? Do we rely on broken cisterns that
can hold no water?

Certainly the society in which we live are
doing this all the time - call themselves
Christian, use the church for weddings,
baptisms and funerals but as far as belief
is concerned, they cherry pick what they
like from Christianity and then add in folk
and pagan beliefs - very like the Israelites.
They have also made false gods of wealth,
possessions, celebrity and status.

But we are not like that are we? Do we worship false gods? Have we been polluted by the society we live in? Do we long for more money, possessions, status? Does God get pushed into second place. Interests and hobbies can of course be wonderful and help us as busy people to relax – but when they become an obsession and they take over our lives then they become our false gods.

How can we dare do this to the creator God of time and space? Have we tamed Him so that He is a nice comfortable god? This false view of God is making Him into a false god.

If the answer to any of these questions is 'yes' then this passage is for us. **We** have rejected the fountain of living water: **We** have hewed out cisterns for ourselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

The consequence for the Israelites was that they were carried away into captivity – Jerusalem was destroyed and the Temple stood in ruins. I don't think that we are likely to be carried away into captivity! But many churches, once vibrant and full, now stand empty. Do we want to reverse the decay? It is up to us, His people to turn back to the fountain of living water and give up the false gods of money, possessions etc.

So, the message is simple. Our God is waiting to bless us with a great outpouring of refreshment and life – if we will turn away from our false gods and come to Him and for His refreshment.

Story and meditation – Lazy geese

I read recently about a farm in the north of Norway which was on the flight path of the Canada Geese who in the spring time, fly thousands of miles north to their summer feeding grounds where, for the short summer months, the vegetation is rich and nourishing. There they mate and raise their young before making the long flight back south before the harsh northern winter sets in.

Every spring when the birds were flying over, some would land on the farm for a rest and peck at the corn lying around the farmyard before taking off again to join their kin on the journey north. Then, some years ago, a group of geese landed to feed and when the rest of the flock flew over, they started making honking noises and took off. They flew around for a few minutes and then came back to the farm yard. They did this every time more flew over but always they came back. They obviously thought that the living was easier in the farm yard!

Eventually all the geese flying north disappeared into the distance but his visitors stayed put. They raised a few chicks and stayed for the summer. The farmer wasn't worried. He thought that when the autumn came they would rejoin their brothers and sisters flying south. However, when the geese flew over head they made a terrific racket and flew around for a while but soon returned to the farm. The farmer was sad. The geese seemed to have given up the idea of flying anywhere. They gave up their freedom and sense of adventure for the easy living of the farm yard. During the harsh northern winter, the farmer made sure

the geese had food and shelter so they were really very comfortable.

Over the next few years they even stopped making an effort to take off. At first they made their honking noises but eventually even that stopped. Each year a few chicks were born, but they took no notice of their wild and free cousins as they flew first north then south.

Just occasionally, when the geese flew over, one or two would look wistfully up to the sky but nothing would persuade them to take off and fly with the others.

The farmer realised that, with no new blood and only a few new chicks being born each year, they would eventually die out. Over the years the older geese grew fat and slow and then died. At last, just a few of the younger ones were left. The farmer tried to encourage some of the youngsters to take off and join their cousins on their flight south. But no, they really weren't interested. In the end, they too will die and it made the farmer sad.

Meditation:

*Is that what we've become Lord?
Have we gone for the easy option?
You said we could rise up as on eagles*

wings;

Take flight;

Live the adventure with you.

And what have we chosen?

The comfortable life of the farmyard:

*Eating the corn and making do with
second best.*

*Sometimes we look wistfully at what could
have been.*

*As you provided nourishment for the geese
in the northern feeding grounds,*

*So you provide nourishment for us your
children.*

*You promised to pour your spirit into our
lives,*

A living fountain

*But again we may choose to ignore what
you provide for us to grow.*

It just takes too much energy

We're tired and we just can't find the time.

*Father God, what will become of your
church if we don't change and grow?*

If we don't learn again to fly with you?

*Perhaps there is a lesson to be learned
from the geese Lord.*

Prayers of Confession:

Lord, Holy Spirit of God,

Drench your children with your Spirit,
So often your Spirit in us is dimmed by our
selfishness and greed.

There are times when we ignore those in
need.

We sometimes look at other people and
feel we are better than them so we turn
away.

We criticise other people who are doing
the best they can.

We can make others feel inferior.

We are unprepared to speak out against
injustice.

We are unprepared to stand up for Christ
or witness to His love.

And so, the Spirit is dimmed. Forgive us
Lord and enable your Spirit to shine
through us so that others will see you in us
and turn to you and find the answer to all
their deepest needs.

We thank you Father that you have
promised that when we come to you in
repentance you are always prepared to
forgive – so forgive us Lord and help us to
change. Amen

Prayers: Intercessions

Lord of peace; bring peace where there is violence. We bring to you Lord, the people of Yemen, of Afghanistan and we continue to pray for the people of Ukraine. We also pray for the people of Russia who are unaware of what is going on in Ukraine.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of Justice; bring justice where people live in fear, for those places where governments and soldiers impose their will. At this time we pray particularly for the peoples of the Holy land, both Palestinians and Israelis. May all the communities of that land find ways to live together with justice and peace.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the poor and the marginalised; where there is poverty and unfairness, where people are hungry, homeless or suffering for the want of simple medicine, move in the hearts of those who have plenty so that there is a fair sharing of the earth's resources. We pray for all refugees living in terrible conditions in camps – suffering from disease and a lack of hope. May they receive mercy, compassion and practical help.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of creation; forgive us for misusing your created world and making deserts where there had been abundance, for polluting clean air and water. We pray for the governments of the world who promised to limit climate change. Give courage to those who work to save the environment. We pray for those who are

suffering because of climate change – the peoples of Sub Saharan Africa who are suffering the worst drought in living memory, those suffering because of violent floods or wild fires.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of healing and wholeness; we bring to you those who are known to us personally who need your healing power.....

In the Darkness

Let your light shine

Lord of the Kingdom of God, who came into this world, not to condemn it but to save, work with your people, give us courage, wisdom and power as we bring the message of your love and forgiveness to a needy world. Send your Holy Spirit and may your Kingdom Come.

In the Darkness

Let your light shine. Amen

Hymn: STF 99 : All creatures of my God and King

1. All creatures of our God and King, Lift up your voice and with us sing,

Refrain: O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

2. Thou burning sun with golden beam, thou silver moon with softer gleam
Refrain: O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

3. Thou rushing wind that art so strong, Thou clouds that sail in heaven
along
Refrain: O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

4. Thou rising morn in praise rejoice,
Thou. Ye lights of evening find a voice
Refrain: O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

5. Let all things their Creator bless,
And worship Him in humbleness,
Refrain: O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia!

6. Praise praise, the Father praise
the son. And praise the spirit three in one
Refrain: O praise Him! O praise Him!
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

www.youtube.com/watch?v=An1BzakUTms

Final Prayer

The Lord who conquered darkness
with light,

Grant us peace.

The Lord who conquered death with life,

Grant us peace.

The Lord who conquered loneliness with
love,

Grant us peace.

May the Lords blessing go with us this day
and always. **Amen**