



Just have faith!

Welcome to worship

I'm Jane Edwards, one of the local preachers who usually worships at Sherwood, and together we'll explore the theme of faith in difficult times. Wherever and whenever you're using this material be aware that you're sharing together with others who are also worshipping at different times and in different locations across Nottingham North East Circuit. I'd really encourage you to join in the songs in this worship, so you might want to find a space where you can sing out loud without worrying about distracting others! You will also need to have a piece of scrap paper to use for a reflection, and I would suggest that you have this ready before you begin. The prayers that I'm sharing this morning are based on those published in the Roots worship resources (with some alterations!)

Gathering prayer

Living God, we come from our busy, crowded lives,
to reach out in prayer,
and to touch the source of grace that we find in you.
Meet us now, and turn our sadness to joy,
our sickness to healing, and our mourning to dancing.
Amen.

Hymn

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty the King of
creation
O my soul praise him for he is thy help and
salvation!
All ye who hear, brothers and sisters draw
near
Praise him with glad adoration

Praise to the Lord who doth prosper thy work
and defend thee
Surely his goodness and mercy here daily
attend thee
Ponder anew what the Almighty can do
Who with his love doth befriend thee

Praise to the Lord, who doth nourish thy life
and restore thee
Fitting thee well for the tasks that are ever
before thee
Then to thy need he like a mother doth speed
Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee

Praise to the Lord, who, when darkness of sin
is abounding,
Who, when the godless do triumph, all virtue
confounding,
Sheddeth his light, chaseth the horrors of
night,
Saints with his mercy surrounding.

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me
adore him
All that hath life and breath, come now with
praises before him!
Let the amen sound from his people again:
Gladly for aye we adore him.

Joachim Neander (1650-1680)
translated by Catherine Winkworth (1827-1878)
and Rupert E. Davies (1909-1994)

Prayer of Praise

As we join together in this prayer based on Psalm 30 you may find it helpful to use physical gestures for the response.

“To you, O Lord” - point two index fingers point upwards.

“My heart” - place hand on heart.

“Shall sing without ceasing” - using your index and middle fingers of your right hand make spiraling motion outwards from your mouth.

To you, O Lord, my heart shall sing without ceasing

I praise you, LORD, because you have saved me
and kept my enemies from gloating over me.

² I cried to you for help, O LORD my God,
and you healed me;

³ you kept me from the grave.

I was on my way to the depths below,^[b]
but you restored my life.

To you, O Lord, my heart shall sing without ceasing

⁴ Sing praise to the LORD,
all his faithful people!

Remember what the Holy One has done,
and give him thanks!

⁵ His anger lasts only a moment,
his goodness for a lifetime.

Tears may flow in the night,
but joy comes in the morning.

To you, O Lord, my heart shall sing without ceasing

¹¹ You have changed my sadness into a joyful dance;
you have taken away my sorrow
and surrounded me with joy.

¹² So I will not be silent;
I will sing praise to you.

LORD, you are my God;
I will give you thanks forever.

To you, O Lord, my heart shall sing without ceasing

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven
Hallowed be your Name,
Your kingdom come
Your will be done
On earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread

Forgive us our sins
As we forgive those who sin against us
Save us from the time of trial
And deliver us from evil
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are
yours
Now and forever
Amen

Reflection

Pick up your piece of scrap paper. Crumple it into a ball in your hands. Open it out. Hold the paper gently in your cupped hands, reflecting on how easily it was damaged. Imagine that the damaged paper is someone's feelings, and reflect on how easy it is to hurt someone.

Prayer

God, who heals all wounds,
forgive us when we exclude others
by our fear of difference.
Forgive us when we label others
and accept stereotypes unthinkingly.
Forgive us when we push people to the edge,
treating them as if they are of little value or worth.
God, who accepts all,
help us to share in the generosity of your welcome,
and share the abundant love that we see in Jesus.

Hymn Listening for God's Word

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of Your holy Word
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
All Your purposes for Your glory

Teach us, Lord, full obedience
Holy reverence, true humility
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority
Words of pow'r that can never fail
Let their truth prevail over unbelief

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity
And by grace, we'll stand on Your promises
And by faith, we'll walk as You walk with us
Speak, O Lord, 'til Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory

Keith Getty (b1974) and Stuart Townend (b 1963)

Scripture Mark 5 v 21 - 43

Once again Jesus got into the boat and crossed Lake Galilee. Then as he stood on the shore, a large crowd gathered around him. The person in charge of the synagogue was also there. His name was Jairus, and when he saw Jesus, he went over to him. He knelt at Jesus' feet and started begging him for help. He said, "My little daughter is about to die! Please come and touch her, so she will get well and live." Jesus went with Jairus. Many people followed along and kept crowding around.

In the crowd was a woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. She had gone to many doctors, and they had not done anything except cause her a lot of pain. She had paid them all the money she had. But instead of getting better, she only got worse. The woman had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him in the crowd and barely touched his clothes. As soon as she touched them, her bleeding stopped, and she knew she was healed. She had said to herself, "If I

can just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” At that moment Jesus felt power go out from him. He turned to the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?” His disciples said to him, “Look at all these people crowding around you! How can you ask who touched you?” But Jesus turned to see who had touched him. The woman knew what had happened to her. So she came trembling with fear and knelt down in front of Jesus. Then she told him the whole story. Jesus said to the woman, “You are now well because of your faith. May God give you peace! You are healed, and you will no longer be in pain.”

While Jesus was still speaking, some people came from Jairus' home and said, “Your daughter has died! Why bother the teacher anymore?” Jesus heard what they said, and he said to Jairus, “Don't worry. Just have faith!”

Jesus did not let anyone go with him except Peter and the two brothers, James and John. They went home with Jairus and saw the people crying and making a lot of noise. Then Jesus went inside and said to them, “Why are you crying and carrying on like this? The child isn't dead. She is just asleep.” But the people laughed at him. After Jesus had sent them all out of the house, he took the girl's father and mother and his three disciples and went to where she was. He took the twelve-year-old girl by the hand and said, “Talitha, koum!” which means, “Little girl, get up!” The girl got right up and started walking around. Everyone was greatly surprised. But Jesus ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened. Then he said, “Give her something to eat.”

Reflection

‘Don't be afraid ’says Jesus to Jairus. ‘Just have faith’

An old friend of my Mum's phoned the other day. I don't hear from her much, but I guess she needed someone to talk to, and she chose me. Beryl was in a terrible state, worrying about her son whose going through a divorce, and her grandchildren who are suffering because their parents are splitting up. I felt desperately sorry for her. She's been a Christian all her life, but she can't see hope in this situation. I made a rather botched attempt at comforting her – telling her that God loved her and would be there whatever happened, but I can't say that she sounded wholly persuaded. And I can understand that. It's not easy having faith when you're scared for your children and grandchildren.

‘Don't be afraid ’says Jesus to Jairus. ‘Just have faith.’

Many of us will have heard of this man called Jairus in the Bible reading this morning. It's a really familiar passage that you may have read lots of times. We know that he's a leader of the synagogue in a small town by the side of the lake of Galilee. He wasn't particularly well-off, certainly by today's standards, but he would have enjoyed a certain amount of status and comfort, along with his family. He was an established member of the community. Perhaps think of him as a small town local councillor. He was probably quite happy with his life. And then out of the blue disaster strikes and his precious, cherished daughter becomes ill. So ill that it looks like she's going to die. All of a sudden his job and his security are meaningless. He throws away all caution and approaches the travelling preacher who is said to be healing people. He throws himself down at his feet and pleads with him to save his daughter.

‘Alright ’says Jesus ‘you lead the way.’

And Jairus takes him, but the crowds clamour around Jesus, demanding his attention. They're pulling at his cloak, clamouring and shouting. Time runs out, and a messenger arrives telling Jairus that his daughter has died.

‘Don't be afraid ’says Jesus to Jairus when he hears that his 12 year old daughter is dead. ‘Just have faith.’

But just a minute Jesus, how can you say that? How can you command a man who has just been told that his daughter has died ‘don't be afraid, just have faith’. His whole life is crumbling around his feet, and you're offering him platitudes, telling him to ignore all the evidence around him, the

feelings that overwhelm him. And aren't we supposed to follow your example? How can I say to Beryl, losing sleep because she's worried about her family, "Don't be afraid. Just have faith."

And what about me, Jesus. I worry all the time. I worry about my health, and my family, and my job. I worry about my friends. I mean it's nothing compared to what Jairus was coping with, but still these are real fears. How can you command me 'Just have faith'? It doesn't make sense. And it doesn't make sense. But then neither does what happens next.

Jesus is walking to Jairus' house, and is pursued by a crowd of people desperate for his attention. And hidden among the crowd is a woman. She's not important enough to have a name. Instead she's defined by her illness – she has a condition that makes her bleed. Now those of you who have had gynaecological conditions will know just how painful and exhausting that is, and she'd been like that for twelve years, spending all her money on doctors and simply getting worse. But add to that pain and exhaustion the fact that in her society that particular condition makes her unclean. If you so much as brushed against her you'd become unclean too and have to go through some elaborate washing routine to become clean again. So understandably people would have avoided her. She would have been shunned by her community. Just think about how that would have felt. If you had come to church and the welcomer at the door refused to shake your hands because you were dirty, that people in the coffee bar would have deliberately given you a wide berth, that no one would sit anywhere near you because they were afraid that your dirtiness was contagious. And she went through this **for twelve years.**

'Don't be afraid' says Jesus to Jairus. 'Just have faith'

What faith did that woman have? Probably very, very little. Life had knocked that out of her many years ago. But in that desperate position she hears about Jesus and something in her stirs. She believes that Jesus is more than just the man he appears to be, and has the power to transform her. She spots her chance. She follows the crowd, hiding herself among the visitors, slowly edging her way forward to the front. She's absolutely terrified, but she's propelled by a determination. And as Jesus passes by she stretches out her hand and touches the very edge of his cloak. And her life is changed forever.

And this faith I find incredibly moving. This is not the grand gesture of someone brimming over with confidence. This is the response of a woman downtrodden by experience, and yet who is prepared to reach out as a declaration of hope. It comes despite fear, and doubt and in defiance of all the things that have happened to her. Perhaps this is the faith that Mark is holding up as the example to which we should all aspire?

Because faith is one of those tricky concepts. My guess is that if I asked you to tell me what faith is we would get different answers from everyone. Certainly the Bible uses the word in different contexts. It's difficult to pin down. Paul describes the nature of faith in his letter to the Hebrews 11 v 1:

'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.'

Faith is that belief that whatever life throws at you God is still in charge, that you are part of something that is far bigger than you can imagine. It is an active decision. A lack of faith is easy. It's doing just what everyone else does. Faith is different. It's counter cultural Faith is deciding to believe that you are loved and valued as a member of God's kingdom. It's refusing to take world at face value and all the terrible things that happen, but instead believing in the power and love of God.

And when you think about it, that's an act of real defiance. It's shouting into the storm of life. It's refusing to be a victim of circumstance, but instead acknowledging that God is in charge. And I'm

sharing this with you not out of some theoretical reading of the Bible, but out of experience. I was quite ill a while ago, and it made me think about this a lot. The conclusion I came to was that my faith, however fragile, was incredibly important to me. It helped me to understand that there was a world beyond the fear and pain I felt, and that gave me a great deal of comfort. As the composer of the Psalm say - weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning.

So are you feeling strong in faith? If so, great! If not, don't worry, because I don't think the people in our Bible reading were. I'm certainly not. I think what Mark is trying to teach us here is that you don't need to be some sort of spiritual warrior in order to have faith. In fact it probably doesn't help much. Most of our journey of Christian discipleship is that odd mixture of fear and faith that allows us nudge our way forward through the crowd into God's presence. When life crowds in with all its pressures there is still room for us to creep up behind Jesus, if that's all we feel we can do, and reach out to touch him.

'Don't be afraid' says Jesus. 'Just have faith'

And heard again we realise that this isn't a command, it's an encouragement. Faith begins not with a leap but with step. Jesus stretches out his hand and encourages us to step forward, despite our fear, despite our circumstances, and to believe. He encourages us to make that declaration that whatever life has thrown at us, we will believe that God is in charge.

So are you ready to do that?

Hymn We're going to sing again; a version of the 23rd Psalm.

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
he makes me lie in pastures green,
he leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil;
and my cup — it overflows with joy,
I feast on his pure delights.
And I will trust in you alone ...

And though I walk the darkest path
I will not fear the evil one,
for you are with me, and your rod and staff
are the comfort I need to know.
And I will trust in you alone ...

Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

Prayer for others

God, who welcomes all,

we pray for those who are excluded or oppressed:
those who are pushed to the edge of society
because of poverty and debt,
lacking the resources to make the choices;
those who experience discrimination because of disability,
denied opportunities for work, travel or relationship;
those who are invisible through prejudice or fear:
those with chronic illness or pain,
older people with dementia whose care is under-resourced;
those who are abused or suffer violence in secret shame;
those who lack the security of home:
refugees forced to flee by war or conflict,

those who live on our streets,
women and children forced into prostitution to survive;
those who work to overcome prejudice and fear:
those who undertake the work of caring,
those who make decisions about resources,
those who break the silence to speak out against injustice,
those who campaign for change.

God, who welcomes all,
help us to reach beyond the limits that we impose,
to offer your hospitality to those on the edge of our communities,
and of our compassion.
Amen.

Hymn - Our final hymn reminds us that whatever happens God is in charge.

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation,
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Blessing

God, you have welcomed us as your people.
We have heard your words of love and
we have been touched by your grace.
May we go on our way,
reaching beyond the limits of our compassion
to share your hospitality with friend and stranger.
Amen.