

Nov 5 2023 – Online

Pre-service music

O God our help in ages past – StF 132

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZjdmLstpNGE&t=79s>

For all the Saints – StF 746

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GwNg8kU01LQ>

Deep in the shadows in the past – StF 463

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0fBnZ0C8Tj4&t=147s>

Lord, you call us to your service – StF 664

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=siBX8rVyc4&t=21s>

Make me a channel of your peace – StF 707

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g8eorCEMIK4&t=13s>

==ORDER OF SERVICE==

Call to worship: Psalm 90

O God our help in ages past – StF 132

Collect for All Saints

For all the Saints – StF 746

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Meditation

Make me a channel of your peace – StF 707

Intercessions

Lord, you call us to your service – StF 664

Benediction

For all the Saints – StF 745

Psalm 90: A Prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Lord, you have been our dwelling-place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

You turn us back to dust,
and say, 'Turn back, you mortals.'
For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night.

You sweep them away; they are like a dream,
like grass that is renewed in the morning;
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.

Turn, O LORD! How long?
Have compassion on your servants!
Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,
so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
and for as many years as we have seen evil.
Let your work be manifest to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.
Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us,
and prosper for us the work of our hands—
O prosper the work of our hands!

Collect for All Saints

We are who we are today
Because of those whose lives touched ours.
God does not ask us to forget
Those we have known and loved.
But sadness has to be tinged with gratitude
For the lives that shaped us,
For hands that held us,
For voices that inspired us,
For love that enriched our lives.
Believing that those we remember tonight
Are held in God's embrace,
We trust that we will meet them again –
In a place where there can never be farewells...
So we make our prayers
For those who now belong ... to heaven...

God of all creation,
Help us to know [today]
that those from whom we are separated in death –
By its long silence,
Its aching absence –
Are now still in your presence;
that beyond our horizons,
beyond our boundaries,
Beyond our understanding,
they are held in your embrace,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

(Jan Sutch Pickard, Saying Goodbye 165)

We're going to hear again the scripture that Tracey used for last week's service,
When she preached a bit on death and dying.
It was a helpful sermon for thinking about our own situations...
I want us to listen to this scripture again and think more about the 'succession' –
Where we each fit into the great scheme of things...
And, on the 5th of November, what it is we are to 'remember'.

Deuteronomy 34: 1-12

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo,
to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the LORD showed him the whole land:
Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh,
all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the Negeb, and the Plain—
that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees—as far as Zoar.

The LORD said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob,
saying, "I will give it to your descendants";
I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.'
Then Moses, the servant of the LORD,
died there in the land of Moab, at the LORD's command.
He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor,
but no one knows his burial place to this day.
Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died;
his sight was unimpaired, and his vigour had not abated.
The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days;
then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom,
because Moses had laid his hands on him;
and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the LORD had commanded Moses.
Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses,
whom the LORD knew face to face.
He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform
in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land,
and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power
that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

‘Remember, remember the fifth of November...’

This time of year, around the beginning of November

Seems to be deeply ingrained in our collective consciousness

As a time when we ‘remember,’ especially those who have gone on before us.

We have All Saints and All Souls Day at the beginning of the month,

When we remember the ‘big’ and the ‘little’ people

Who have come before us...

We have Remembrance Sunday next week, as we remember those killed in war.

Many of our churches have had ‘Remembering’ or bereavement services

To remember those from our church family who have died recently.

These late autumn festivals of ‘remembering’ are probably a carry-over

from the ancient Celtic Samhein festivals,

which was about remembering as well as about preparing for winter...

clearing out the ‘stuff’ that wouldn’t make it through the winter.

Coming just after the harvest, it was a time to clear the fields,

to make large fires with the leftover grass and branches...

Broken chairs and pieces of furniture were added,

Along with the carcasses of animals that wouldn’t make it through the cold...

These huge fires were called ‘bone fires’ –

From which we get the word ‘bonfire’...

A fire to clear the rubbish of the past, to brighten the dark sky,

To warm the chilly night...

There have been several bonfires this weekend, including tonight –

With fireworks as well to light up the night sky...

The particular ‘Fifth of November’ tradition in this country, of course,

Is linked with Guy Fawkes and his plot to blow up Parliament

In protest against the Protestant King James I ...

It was a period of deep distrust between Catholic and Protestant in this country –

The ‘remembering’ of the Fifth of November

involved rehearsing the accusations each side had against the other

The grievances, the hurts...

‘Hurt people hurt other people’ is a saying that still functions today...

We have only to look at the Israel/Palestine situation

To see how hurts of the centuries – even millennia – still boil up

Into unimaginable damage for all.

But ‘remembering’ doesn’t only have to be about re-fueling hate and hurt and grievance.

It can also be about recognising the past hurts

And, rather than continuing to assign blame,

It can be about finding ways to heal the wounds.

The Deuteronomy 34 about Moses’ death reminds us that Moses was an important figure.

Interestingly, Moses is a revered figure not only to us as Christians

But certainly to the Jews and Muslims and even those from the Baha’i faith.

He is remembered as a leader who recognised an unjust situation

And, when he heard God call him to do something about it, he did –

Though, like nearly everyone, first he thought of all the reasons why he couldn’t...

He is remembered as one who was certainly a flawed human being –

He was actually an unintentional murderer as a young man!

But more importantly, he was a person who learned to listen carefully to God –
And to follow through on what he heard from God
Even when everyone else was questioning and even rebelling...
He learned to listen, and he learned to follow – and in so doing, he became a leader.

These are the things we ‘remember’ about Moses –
I wonder what things Moses remembered –
He would have heard the tales of his infancy –
When he was hid in a basket in the bulrushes,
When he was rescued by the Egyptian princess
He would have remembered his childhood, growing up in the Pharaoh’s palace –
Perhaps it was later that he became fully aware of the situation of his own Hebrew people –
Who would have remembered and passed on the stories
Of the land they had come from,
Of the freedom they had experienced before drought forced them into Egypt.
In a sense, they ‘remembered’ who they had been –
They remembered that they were God’s people
And that gave them a previous identity which spurred them to reject
Their current identity as slaves.

Sometimes the remembered ‘hurt’ leads us to hurt others.
Sometimes the remembered ‘hurt’ can give us the energy
To find healing for ourselves and others.
In that way, the remembering prepares us and gives us energy for good.

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Many of you will know that this year Union Street MC is celebrating the 200th anniversary
Of its main church building.

Over the past several months, we’ve been looking again at its stained-glass windows –
Eight windows dedicated to various church leaders from the early 1900s
Especially those who died around the time of the first World War
Or the church’s Centenary celebrations in 1923.

Most of these windows also depict stories from the Bible,
apparently linked to the person being remembered.

We have the story of David and Goliath depicted on a memorial to a young man
Who was killed in the War, Charles Lever Smith.

The family that erected the memorial window would be expressing their hurt
At losing their beloved family member in a tragic war.

They were also using the opportunity to remind themselves and those who come after
That our ‘small’ efforts can often prevail against the bigger foe.
That we must not cower behind our littleness,
But use God’s power to prevail against evil.

There’s another window depicting Jesus blessing the children
While some elders scowl from behind.

That window was erected in memory of JT Baker, a toymaker and Sunday School leader,
Who probably had his share of elders scowling at him
As he set out to serve the children of the community.

We’ve also learned that JT was a close colleague of George Baker,
whose window shows Jacob and an angel on a ladder in his dream –
the angel telling him that God is with us when we travel to different places –

JT and George Baker were both church and circuit stewards from Union Street
Who helped to purchase the land for Tonbridge Road Methodist Church –
They, like Jacob of old, would have known well
the ‘danger’ of crossing into ‘foreign territory’...
Crossing a river – the Jordan River or the Medway River –
And finding God in that new place...
a God who loves both Hebrew and Gentile,
Kentish Men and Men of Kent.

There are many more windows and many more stories –
We’ve realised at Union Street – to our embarrassment! –
That we have ignored these stories, these bits of our legacies for many years...
One older member told me recently that his family pew had been next to one of the windows
For many years – but he’d never really looked carefully at the picture...
Remembering – retelling the stories of our heritage – is important!
As is using those memories to inform our present.

It’s also an important time for those of us who are still living
To remember that we, too, will not last forever...
Each of us will become dust and ashes...
And how we are remembered is often determined more by those who come after
Than by what we ourselves have done to be remembered...
It is a sobering time to think of those who have come before
And what we have learned or gained from them
As well as to consider what we will leave to those who come after.

I’ve often thought of the Moses and Joshua relationship –
How Moses’ legacy probably only lived on
Because Joshua was there to carry on with the unfinished business.
I’ve often said that Moses was a success because he had a successor –
Which means that each of us needs to consider how we are passing on
The duties, the attitudes, the gifts we’ve received and developed
To the next generation.

Perhaps this thought comes more specifically to those of us who are itinerant ministers –
We are sent (or invited) to be a pastoral leader, a preacher,
A counsellor, a confidant, a strategist, a healer of wounds,
For a few brief years
And then we will move on and someone else will take over.

Sometimes we catch glimpses of the churches we’ve left
And find, to our sadness, that the projects we worked on
Are no longer supported by those congregations –
Or the person that we worked so hard to bring into the fellowship
Is no longer a part of it...

And sometimes we find that something we started has blossomed and bloomed
And become part of the ‘tradition’...
It’s all humbling – and sometimes gratifying...
But that’s not the reason we do it.

We do what we feel God calling us to in each place
Because we feel it is, indeed, GOD calling us...

And sometimes the particular work we do is only for a season
And sometimes there is work that we must do
So that our successor can build on what we've done
To take the congregation to a different stage, a different place.

I wonder how Joshua felt about what he inherited from Moses –
Possibly quite proud that he would be chosen to follow in such footsteps
But he could only do this because he, too, had learned how to listen hard
To what God needed him to do –
And to recognise that, even though he was to carry to completion
A plan that Moses had received from God
He was to do it, allowing God to use his own particular strengths and gifts...

I've been thinking as well about the lay leadership of our churches –
Particularly as there seem to be an abundance of small fellowships
Which are still fiercely determined to remain as 'churches'
At a time when we have precious few ministers or even local preachers –
And they are stretched to their limits...
Some churches are quite content to carry on under the strength of one or two lay leaders...
Even as they are aware that eventually their strength will give out –
And there might not be anyone to carry on.
When I ask them what happens then, they say, 'This church will close'.
I'm glad Moses didn't have that mindset!
He purposely set out to determine who his successor would be
And to train him up in what he would need to know and do and be.

I've also been researching a bit of the history of our circuit and its churches.
I come across records of small groups of 5-8 persons
Who met together faithfully for prayer and Bible study –
And ended up starting the churches that still exist today...
They rarely saw a real preacher!
None of them were ordained and few were theologically trained...
And yet, God's Spirit was with them... and inspired them
And gave them the strength to persevere in difficult times.
Perhaps the problem has been with ministers
Who have felt compelled to do everything for their congregations –
So that our congregations have become 'consumers' of church
Rather than 'producers' of church...
We've forgotten that Moses also appointed others to share the responsibilities
So that the leadership expanded with the people.

On this Fifth of November, perhaps God is asking us to 'remember'
Not only those who have gone on before us
But those who will come after –
Those who are able to listen carefully to God's calling
And are willing to step out in faith beyond the hurt
And work with God to heal the wounds
And inspire further growth into peace.
So that God's reach will extend to every person, every situation –
To bring peace and reconciliation amongst all God's people, all God's children.

1 Thessalonians 2: 9-13

You remember our labour and toil, brothers and sisters;
we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you
while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.
You are witnesses, and God also,
how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was towards you believers.
As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children,
urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God,
who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

We also constantly give thanks to God for this,
that when you received the word of God that you heard from us,
you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word,
which is also at work in you believers.

Prayer

We remember that you have called your people in the past –
 Called them by name to ministries that involved many or few
 Called them to difficult tasks – and equipped them to do the tasks.
We remember their integrity and their insight –
 And we give thanks.
We also remember that their awareness that they were only a small part
 Of a greater effort – and so did not think of themselves as indispensable
 But essential for the success of the whole.
It was that understanding that made them look out for and nurture
 Those who would come after –
 And so must we.
Lord, you call us each to different tasks –
 Some might attract great attention
 Others might go unnoticed –
Still you call us. Still you equip us for what needs to be done...

Lord's Prayer