

Worship at Home - Sunday 26 September 2021

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use at home. We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people across the Methodist Connexion are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Words (Psalm 19:7-8)

The Law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes.

Hymn: StF 628, Faithful One
(Brian Doerksen - lyrics)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PjSO5IhIOM>

Faithful One, so unchanging,
Ageless One, you're my rock of peace.
Lord of all I depend on you,
I call out to you again and again.
I call out to you again and again.
You are my rock in times of trouble.
You lift me up when I fall down.
All through the storm your love is the anchor,
my hope is in you alone.

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

Let us pray together

Faithful One, we gather again in an act of Worship at home. You have been with us all these months, through the storm of Covid and you truly have been our anchor. We put our hope and trust in you. Whatever we face in the future,

we do not face it alone. Your Holy Spirit is with us to pick us up again, set us on our feet, and we go forward in and with the love of our precious Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Old Testament Esther 7: 1-6, 9-10; 9: 20-22

Esther 7:1-6

New Revised Standard Version

7 ¹ So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ² On the second day, as they were drinking wine, the king again said to Esther, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled." ³ Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of my people—that is my request. ⁴ For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men, and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king." ⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, "Who is he, and where is he, who has presumed to do this?" ⁶ Esther said, "A foe and enemy,

this wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

Esther 7:9-10

New Revised Standard Version

⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, “Look, the very gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, stands at Haman’s house, fifty cubits high.” And the king said, “Hang him on that.” ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the anger of the king abated.

Esther 9:20-22

New Revised Standard Version

²⁰ Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, ²¹ enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, ²² as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

Gospel Reading: Mark 9: 38-50

New Revised Standard Version

³⁸ John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your

name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.” ³⁹ But Jesus said, “Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰ Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹ For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

⁴² “If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. ⁴³ If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched.

⁴⁹ “For everyone will be salted with fire. ⁵⁰ Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.”

Reflection

At this second feast, Esther reveals to her husband, King Ahasuerus, the wicked plot of Hamaan. Uprightness prevails and the gallows that Hamaan built to hang Esther's Uncle Mordecai are now used to hang the King's regent. Yet this justice is not the end because a decree for the destruction of the Jews has already gone out from the palace of this Persian king. A new decree is delivered throughout the land which now gives the Jews the right to defend themselves. Although Esther 9:5-10 does suggest an indiscriminate slaughter as some commentators suggest. Nevertheless, Esther 9:22, tells us that the Jews gained relief from their enemies and their sorrow was turned into gladness and their mourning into a holiday. What ensued was "days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor" (9:22).

Isn't this what we have missed during Covid – meeting with family and friends where we can eat together, and join in days of gladness? If you are like me, we have done our best to safely visit one another – often by Zoom, Skype, or some other technical means. Even at our coffee times online, we have had to bring and make our own coffee. Our hugs have been virtual with blowing of kisses over a screen or through a window to our children and grandchildren.

To me it seems that spiritually our coronavirus has been hanged by a vaccine and now it is up to us to fight back and to gain relief from this enemy so that our time of mourning might be turned into time of joy. Many rejoice at the lifting of restrictions, but it has been a poignant reminder that we have been under enemy attack.

Esther's story has served Judaism for many years and is a story of hope amid despair. Notice how the Jews send gifts to one another but they do not forget to give presents to the poor. It is a lesson for us to remember those who have not fared as well as some of us. Rob Lacey in 'the Word on the Street' reminds the reader that "in the whole book of Esther God doesn't even get a mention – not by name. But the sheer number of 'coincidences' make it obvious that he's around, working things behind the scenes, protecting his people..." (Rob Lacey, *The Word on the Street*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003, p.127).

In contrast to God's name not being used in Esther, we find John criticising a man who used Jesus' name to expel demons. Jesus says, "Don't stop him. No one can use my name to do something good and powerful, and in the next breath cut me down. If he's not an enemy, he's an ally. Why, anyone by just giving you a cup of water in my name is on our side. Count on it that God will notice" (Peterson's, *The Message*).

So, whether we use God's name, or Jesus' name, or whether we do acts of kindness without using either name, we can count on God noticing what is going on. Wherever believers in Jesus Christ are looking after the needs of others, especially the poor, then because we bear the name of Christ, we will receive our reward from Him (Mark 9:41).

Take time to sit quietly.

A time of prayer

We represent God, the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ our Saviour. We pray today for those struggling in the aftermath of the pandemic with mental health, bereavement, economic downturn, and ... (name your situation). We have lost family members and friends, and as a nation we have lost any economic stability we thought was possible. May we be salt to those around us. **In the name of Christ.**

We pray for the results of global warming throughout the world: forest fires, mud slides, flooding, higher than usual temperatures, and much more. May we be salt to those around us. **In the name of Christ.**

The Lord's Prayer

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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: Listen to 'There is Power in the Name of Jesus'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkR33OsvJSs>

A prayer of blessing

Peace to you - to all who walk in Christ's ways. **Amen.**

Original Materials by Heather Wilson

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We are grateful to all the Ministers and Local Preachers from around the Connexion who have contributed to Worship at Home. This resource is administrated by Ministries: Vocations and Worship in the Connexional Team.