

**Basingstoke and Reading Methodist Circuit Service for Sunday 24th January 2021
prepared by Revd Lesley Martin "CONFIDENCE"**

Welcome This is a Sunday in Ordinary time. However, this coming Wednesday is the Holocaust Memorial Day, and so when we come to the time of intercessions we shall remember those who suffered through the Holocaust in our prayers.

Call to worship: Isaiah 41 verse 10: "Do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you....."

Prayer: Almighty God, as we meet to worship you in our various homes, we rejoice that we are connected through the wonder of the internet and through the written word on our printed sheets. May we also feel deeply connected by your Holy Spirit, to know your all encompassing love for every one of us, to know your care. Fill us with peace and hope as we worship together this morning. Amen

Our first hymn introduces our theme of confidence in God, with the words of verse 3 : "you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother, as full-grown children, confident and secure "

[STF 3 Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory cascades through life in overflowing](#)

<p>1 Eternal God, your love's tremendous glory cascades through life in overflowing grace, to tell creation's meaning in the story of love evolving love from time and space.</p> <p>2 Eternal Son of God, uniquely precious, in you, deserted, scorned and crucified, God's love has fathomed sin and death's deep darkness, and flawed humanity is glorified.</p> <p>3 Eternal Spirit, with us like a mother, embracing us in love serene and pure : you nurture strength to follow Christ our brother, as full-grown children, confident and sure.</p>	<p>4 Love's trinity, self-perfect, self-sustaining ; love which commands, enables and obeys : you give yourself, in boundless joy, creating one vast increasing harmony of praise.</p> <p>5 We ask you now, complete your image in us ; this love of yours, our source and guide and goal. May love in us, seek love and serve love's purpose, till we ascend with Christ and find love whole.</p> <p align="right">Alan Gaunt (b. 1935)</p>
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Prayers of thanksgiving and confession Almighty God, you created the world and you said that it was good. We praise and thank you for the total immeasurable wonder of your creation. We praise and thank you for joy and laughter; for tears and concerns shared with others. We praise and thank you wholeheartedly that you created the human race in your

own image Lord, not in ours. If it was after our design we wouldn't be as varied and beautiful.

Forgive us when we pigeon-hole people, always seeing them en masse, rather than unique individuals. Forgive us our habits of criticism, condemnation and intolerance. Forgive us those things we have done that have brought pain to others and to ourselves.

pause for reflection

We thank you that through Christ we are forgiven. Enable us with clean hearts to say with compassion and understanding the words that Jesus taught his disciples:

Our Father, who art in heaven...

SERMON PART 1 (also works as a Children's address)

The mother mouse knew that sooner or later she would have to introduce her little mice to the real world, so the day came when she said, "Children, come with me. We are venturing outside." So they all gathered around Mamma Mouse, and they poked their heads through the mouse hole and walked outside. Right there was a big, black, sleeping cat. Mamma Mouse's heart was thumping, but she gathered together all her confidence and she tiptoed with her brood around the sleeping cat, who suddenly opened one eye and raised his paw. Mamma Mouse arched her little back, and as loud as she could she Barked twice. Woof! Woof! And the cat shot out of the room.

A good lesson. Sometimes we too need to learn how to be brave.

But there are other times when we find it best to wisely sit back and accept what is happening: Here is a story from Margaret Silf *Wisdom Stories*" page 151

There was once an old man who had one son and a horse. One day his horse broke free and went galloping off to freedom in the nearby hills. The man's neighbours sympathized with him: "What very bad luck to have lost your horse", they said.

"Why do you say that?" replied the old man. "Who is to say whether it is good or bad?"

And sure enough, the very next night the horse returned, and behind him came 12 wild horses, which the horse had led back home with him. The man's son quickly closed the gate of the paddock and instead of one horse, they now had 13. And the neighbours stared at the paddock the next morning and said, "What extraordinary good luck – to have 13 horses!"

"Why do you say that?" replied the old man. "Who is to say whether it is good or bad?"

A little while later the old man's son went out riding one of the new horses. But the horse was still wild and it threw the boy off its back and the boy fell and broke his leg. The man's neighbours came round to commiserate with him: "What very bad luck that your son has broken his leg", they said.

"Why do you say that?" replied the old man. "Who is to say whether it is good or bad?"

And indeed, a short while later, the militia came to the village, conscripting all the able-bodied young men to go to fight in the war, where many of them would lose their lives. But when they saw the old man's son lying there with a broken leg, they passed him by and went on their way. "How lucky you are" the neighbours said.....

STF 645 Will your anchor hold in the storms of life HP 689

<p>1</p> <p>Will your anchor hold in the storms of life, when the clouds unfold their wings of strife? When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain, will your anchor drift, or firm remain?</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>We have an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll; fastened to the Rock which cannot move, grounded firm and deep in the Saviour's love!</i></p> <p>2</p> <p>Will your anchor hold in the straits of fear, when the breakers roar and the reef is near? While the surges rave, and the wild winds blow, shall the angry waves then your barque o'erflow?</p>	<p>3</p> <p>Will your anchor hold in the floods of death, when the waters cold chill your latest breath? On the rising tide you can never fail, while your anchor holds within the veil:</p> <p>4</p> <p>Will your eyes behold through the morning light the city of gold and the harbour bright? Will you anchor safe by the heavenly shore, when life's storms are past for evermore?</p> <p>Priscilla Jane Owens (1829–1907)</p>
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Matthew chapter 11 verses 1 – 6

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee. When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me."

Philippians chapter 1 verses 1 – 14

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

It is right for me to feel this way about all of you, since I have you in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard^[c] and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

SERMON PART 2

Today's sermon is about being confident that whatever happens in our lives, God is there for us. And I want to start really with the idea of how we are God's children and how we look at our grandchildren and our children and see how they have confidence in us. I particularly remember last summer, when we were allowed to meet, the little one climbing up steps that were quite hard edged and I followed this child – just turned one year old – and he got to the top of the steps, turned round and just flung himself off. Thankfully, although I wasn't expecting it, I caught him and he was very confident that I would catch him.

And I also watched the children learn to ride balance bikes. Two of them mastered it very quickly. There was a bit of a wobble but they soon got going and the faster they were riding this 2-wheeler bike without pedals or without stabilizers the faster they got, the easier it was to balance and the more confident they got. But there was one of the grandchildren, she couldn't get hold of it; no matter how she tried it was wobble, wobble, wobble, fall, and she just couldn't handle it. But that same child was the one who had the confidence to climb to

the top of the really tall wigwam climbing frame that is in Mortimer Park that is for the older children; and she is only 2 but she's scaling to the top and my heart's in my mouth. As expected her feet slipped off one of the rungs and she's hanging there with one arm, quite unperturbed, finds somewhere else to hold on with the other hand and then scrambles around with her feet until they are back on one of the railings. And I thought "Oh my goodness, that is confidence". Whereas the 4-year-old won't even contemplate climbing to the top of that wigwam climbing frame.

So they are confident about different things, and as they learn, grow through life, it's like with us, we too find that we're confident in other things ... and I was terribly lacking in confidence when I was learning to be a local preacher. My children actually laughed when I said that's what was going to happen. They said: "mother, your whole body is wobbling when you're just reading a lesson in church, never mind preaching. You hold on to the lectern and we can see that wobbling too because you are clutching on to it".

And yes, when I was learning to be a local preacher I did wobble and I did fall yet God was there and I became more confident. Sometimes I learnt to bark when I thought, mmm, I've only got a little meow left inside of me. You probably know what I'm talking about. We get braver as we get older and we learn to do things, and some things are easier and some things are not quite so easy.

So I want to stop talking about me, but look at what was happening with St Paul when he wrote to the church at Philippi that we heard this morning. He's possibly awaiting death in that prison, we're not too sure. And yet the tone of that letter is so joyful, emboldened, calm, assured, confident. Despite the situation he is in he is master of events not victim. He writes this (verse 4-6) "In all my prayers for all of you I always pray with joy ... being confident of this that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion". So positive! And then he says this: (Verse 12) "I want you to know that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel." Paul is so sure that even in prison God's work is abounding, with others being encouraged to speak the word of God and they're speaking "more courageously and fearlessly". And I think there will have been times during this pandemic and the lockdowns when the situation has served the gospel in ways that probably we may not have recognised, in the way that St Paul's predicament in prison emboldens others and inspires others, throughout the years. What has been happening in lockdown you probably know in your own lives some good that has been coming out of our situations.

But I also want to reflect on what was happening in the life of John the Baptist. He's been put in prison, and this is some time before Paul, and he appears, does John, to be losing

confidence, so much so that he has sent out his friends to ask Jesus if he really was the Messiah. John In his captivity and loneliness has begun to doubt, has begun to lose his faith, as it appears from what he does, sending his friends out just to check with Jesus.

And it reminds you doesn't it of how we might feel in our lockdown...lonely, our faith a little bit dodgy perhaps. We may need reassurance. We may not be at all like Paul, who is confident and calm and emboldened. We could all do with some boldness as we live in this further lockdown, couldn't we? We are physically apart from places we'd rather be and from people we'd rather be with. And It brings on anxieties that we couldn't contemplate a year ago, things that we are so anxious about, when we were living quite joyfully before and now it's difficult. If only we could find that trust and that confidence that God's got it all in hand actually; that He knows our anxieties and God is there, and we can say like that old man, even though the old man lived in a reality as we are living in a reality that early death is possible for his neighbours that have been taken by the militia, possibly to die. We are aware of our neighbours and friends and family that have died. We have to live in that reality, and yet still be brave and still be confident that God is working through this somehow.

There is no quick answer to finding that faith, to finding that confidence but there is a deep answer. Continue to pray and trust in God, no matter what. And you will wobble of course, as I'm sure did St Paul at times, as did Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. But continue to trust in God, whatever happens, whatever your circumstances. Remembering that God loves You and delights in You. Amen

Prayer Walking on water looks difficult, but I have seen it done.

Those with enough grief to sink them have kept on - drawn by an invisible source of strength they were not let down.

Crossing this sea some swim and others drown, but some there are walking on water
(Cecily Taylor)

<p>1 When our confidence is shaken in beliefs we thought secure ; when the spirit in its sickness seeks but cannot find a cure : God is active in the tensions of a faith not yet mature.</p> <p>2 Solar systems, void of meaning, freeze the spirit into stone ; always our researches lead us to the ultimate Unknown : faith must die, or come full circle to its source in God alone.</p>	<p>3 In the discipline of praying, when it's hardest to believe ; in the drudgery of caring, when it's not enough to grieve ; faith, maturing, learns acceptance of the insights we receive.</p> <p>4 God is love ; and he redeems us in the Christ we crucify : this is God's eternal answer to the world's eternal why ; may we in this faith maturing be content to live and die !</p> <p>Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000)</p>
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Prayers of intercession

You are almighty God: You lift up those we step over in our race to success;
you soak our aching feet in the waters of life; you massage hearts bruised by others.

You pick those not chosen on the playgrounds of life;
you cover open sores with your grace;
you wander our streets, inviting those who huddle in doorways to feast at your Table.

You gather those who are cast aside by a throwaway society, and call them by name;
you melt hearts hardened by cynicism with the warmth of your hope;
you energize us so we can sprint into the kingdom.

And so it is to you, Loving God, to whom we bring our prayers. We come not with a great list – for you know the needs of your world before we even name them – but we come to you with hearts of compassion that are aching and breaking for the needs of those we see in our media and in our own lives. In a time of silence we think of the people and situations that are on our hearts, both locally, nationally and globally. We pray that your healing grace will reach the dark corners. *Let us keep a Short silence*

Loving God, where there is illness send your healing power, where there is despair and grief, let your Spirit lift the darkness from their souls. Almighty God, we remember all those who died and suffered during the Jewish Holocaust where humanity destroyed humanity. We

remember how too often humankind, in the face of prejudice and persecution, fails to stand together against evil. We remember the lives of those murdered in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur. We recommit ourselves to join in the campaign started by Jesus to heal and transform the world by God's love working through us. To stand bravely for justice and righteousness, in Jesus name. **Amen**

STF 156 From the breaking of the dawn (I will stand on every promise of your word)

<p>1 From the breaking of the dawn to the setting of the sun, I will stand on every promise of your word. Words of power, strong to save, that will never pass away ; I will stand on every promise of your word. For your covenant is sure, and on this I am secure : I can stand on every promise of your word.</p> <p>2 When I stumble and I sin, condemnation pressing in, I will stand on every promise of your word. You are faithful to forgive, that in freedom I might live, so I stand on every promise of your word. Guilt to innocence restored ; you remember sins no more. So I'll stand on every promise of your word.</p>	<p>3 When I'm faced with anguished choice I will listen for your voice, and I'll stand on every promise of your word. Through this dark and troubled land, you will guide me with your hand as I stand on every promise of your word. And you've promised to complete every work begun in me, so I'll stand on every promise of your word.</p> <p>4 Hope that lifts me from despair ; love that casts out every fear as I stand on every promise of your word. Not forsaken, not alone, for the Comforter has come, and I stand on every promise of your word. Grace sufficient, grace for me, grace for all who will believe. We will stand on every promise of your word.</p> <p>Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)</p>
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Blessing May the God of Peace ... equip you with everything good for doing his will
(Hebrews 13:20,21)