

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 18th October 2020

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

Last Sunday, Sarah helped us to see how it is ok to bring our lament to God in times of pain and questioning. I pick up this theme and we hear the call of scripture to draw near to God, like a child to a loving parent. Come; let us worship our God who brings light and life.

Hymn/Song

Opening Prayer

Eternal and sovereign God, We are thankful that we have been led to worship you today. This is central in our lives, leading us to your purposes and your love. We rejoice that whether we are at home or in church we are one family at worship today. From this we receive encouragement. So we pray for all who are with us in this moment, those who sit beside us, those in the circle of faith whom we know, those whose prayers are joined with ours. May we know the Spirit that makes us one, and the truth that makes us free so that our worship may be part of your life, O God our creator and our end. We crown you our Lord and King. **Amen.**

Bible Reading

Matthew chapter 6 verses 24-34

Prayer of Confession

Gracious God we confess we bring to you minds that are distracted by daily pressures and cares, we offer to you hearts that are far from pure, and we present to you souls unprepared for this meeting with our Maker. How dare we approach you? How could you come near to us? Yet in Jesus Christ, your Son, we meet one who lifts the burdens on our minds, who touches our frail hearts with pardon, and who loves each human soul uniquely. So in confidence today we lay before you our distracted minds, our frail hearts, and our unready souls, that you might fill our minds with heavenly thoughts, turn our hearts to love you and love each other, and heal our wounded souls to make them fit to sing your praises, hear your

truth, and know your love in Christ, our friend, our redeemer and our living Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn/Song

Bible Reading

Psalm 131:

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high; I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvellous for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me.

O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore.

Sermon

I want to begin my sermon by giving you a memory test:

“What were you worrying about this time last year? Most likely, we can’t remember. Many of our worries and fears are not realised. It has been said worry is like a rocking chair, it gives you something to do but it doesn’t get you anywhere. Psalm 131 is the antidote to worry. It is a prayer of complete trust in God. I want to share its message with you today. Psalm 131 is described as a Song of Ascents, probably written by David to be sung on going up to the temple, a journey to a higher place, literally and figuratively.

Here are words to lift you up to that meeting point with God, a ladder to an encounter. It is very short ladder – only 3 verses but one that reaches from earth to heaven. As Christians we desire to make a similar journey – a similar ascent – together we desire a journey to a higher place. Psalm 131 begins ‘O Lord’ - so we know it’s a prayer addressed to God, Jehovah – a heart to heart conversation with the eternal God. ‘My heart is not lifted up’ – and here we understand ‘heart’ to mean feelings, the will, the intellect, the centre. This heart is not lifted up – lifted here means to soar, to be lofty, exalted, or to be haughty and proud. Is the psalmist feeling low, or is he feeling lowly? It could mean either. The word ‘too’ is not there in the original Hebrew, so he could be expressing how low, how despondent he is: so verse one could read:

“My eyes are not raised high, I don’t occupy myself with things great & marvellous”. Or here is genuine humility, a right understanding of fleeting humanity’s relationship with eternal God. He’s got his feet on the ground and his eyes on the Lord, a commendable approach to the life of worship. Either way, the writer is being honest to God,

and honest with himself. There's no other way to ascend the dwelling place of God. It's an important reminder for us. Honesty is the first footstep up to the presence of God.

We need to look within – and look to God for cleansing.

We need to be honest with ourselves, before God.

We need to be honest about the condition of our heart, our feelings.

This verse reminds us it's ok to admit to feeling grounded, to feel that we're plummeting to the depths rather than soaring on the high places. It is ok to admit we cannot control the uncontrollable, that things are too great for us to face alone. We are not alone.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ tells us of one who came down and found us. In Christ Jesus God has come down to where we are. We can come to him just as we are. If Psalm 131 is a song of ascents, the salvation story is, for me, a song of descent, of God, in Jesus coming down to us, noticing our need and making his home with us, accepting us, forgiving us restoring us, helping us. No longer lost, we are now found - we belong. Let's see where the writer goes from that point of opening honesty. Psalm 131 Verse 2:

“But I have calmed and quieted my soul”. A very important first word! But! Lo! Yet! He is aware of his limitations and struggles within, but they don't lead him to despair or agitation, they lead him to a place of confidence and serenity. “But I have calmed and quieted my soul”. The root meaning of that word translated ‘calmed’ means to adjust, to level, balance, or equalize. Imagine a set of scales finely balanced. He knows his need for God, but he has full measure of God's presence, God's peace. Or imagine a bicycle wheel with its hub correctly placed in the centre – this man's life is correctly aligned. So often ours is not. Our lives are out of centre – we're literally eccentric! We are naturally self-centred instead of God-centred. One commentator David Powlison rewrote this Psalm into its opposite form:

My heart is proud

(I'm absorbed in myself), and my eyes are haughty (I look down on other people), and I chase after things too great and too difficult for me. So of course I'm noisy and restless inside, it comes naturally, like a hungry infant fussing on his mother's lap, like a hungry infant, I'm restless with my demands and worries. I scatter my hopes onto anything and everybody all the time.

As we recognise ourselves, we might ask where shall I turn?

We turn to Christ. He embodied Psalm 131. He lived it. His life was balanced; he was humble, peaceful, at one with his Father.

He is our pattern, our example. The teaching of Christ in our Gospel reading from Matthew chapter 6 helps us to realign our lives and regain our balance: We worry about our lives, but our Lord invites us to put our trust in God's provision. We look to outward appearances; but God looks beyond to what really matters. We try to serve two masters, but our Lord reminds us we cannot.

We have our own priorities, but Christ urges us: seek first God's Kingdom. If we live by this teaching of Christ, then like the Psalmist we will truly be able to say: "I have calmed and quieted my soul".

He is well adjusted, poised. It's no easy task to find that position of equilibrium, stability and balance in our lives! One commentator says of this verse: "It is no easy thing to quiet yourself – sooner may a man calm the sea, or rule the wind, or tame a tiger".

What is the rough sea, the whirlwind or that ferocious tiger in your life? Such stability and balance does not come without a conscious effort. It begins with a desire that we then act upon.

One translation puts it this way: "I have cultivated a quiet heart" I like that word 'cultivated'. Picture a gardener at work in their garden. Our goal of a God-centred life is a growing process, which needs tending and hard work, for it to reach fruition. It does not happen overnight. How has the psalmist achieved this?

How do we calm the sea, or rule the wind, or tame the tiger within? The key, it seems to me, is in the second part of verse 2:

"Like a weaned child with its mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me". I'm intrigued by the imagery of these words. It's a picture of intimacy with God, source of contentment, wholeness, and so on.

I'm reminded of Charles Wesley's rhyme:

*Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child,
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to thee.*

We look to Christ who calmed the wind and the waves with a word – 'peace, be still'. He will do the same for us.

But that word 'weaned' gives us greater scope for understanding. It takes us beyond a sentimental picture of us snuggling up to God. Weaning is about change and growth.

Weaning is when a baby moves on from milk to solid food.

It's a natural part of growing up.

Weaning can be tough and sometimes messy.

Life can be tough and sometimes messy too.

At these times our faith can be tested and milky faith just doesn't satisfy. We hunger for something more solid, more grown up. God wants us to grow up to salvation.

This verse reminds us that the soul has to be weaned as well as the body. The soul is first nourished by others. It is afterwards thrown upon its own resources. The soul is weaned from one thing by giving its attention to another. But in what way?

God's word teaches us that the Christian soul is weaned:

1. From worldly things by heavenly things.
2. From self-righteousness by the righteousness of another - Jesus Christ.
3. From sin to holiness.
4. From the world to Christ.
5. From self-reliance to dependence on God.

How we need such weaning. How we need to be weaned from self to God. Weaning from self to God will calm the sea, rule the wind, and tame the tiger within. Such weaning will give us the balance we seek in our lives. Then, we are able to look to the needs of others and encourage hope in God within others.

For that is the final rung on this psalm's ladder to God.

"O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time forth and forevermore."

The Voice of Hope is heard in the calm. We pray our church family will hear the voice of hope today. These are tough times.

Deep down in our heart of hearts we know: that which cannot be changed has to be faced. By God's grace and gift of hope, our prayer 'God get me out of this' becomes 'God get me through this'. And God is with us. We taste and see that the Lord is good. We are calmed and comforted. Calmed souls appreciate God. Calmed souls confide in God; seen to be so worthy of trust. Calmed souls look fearlessly into eternity; "from henceforth and for ever." Hope now; hope always! Let this psalm be the song of your life and mine, let it be the soundtrack to our life's journey and our ascent to the dwelling place of God, at the same time as allowing the descended Christ to dwell richly within. We pray we will continue to grow more centred on God than on self. Do not worry – only trust.

Amen.

Hymn/Song

Prayer of Intercession

Christ our Saviour, born for us,
bring healing and peace to all people.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, baptized in the Jordan,
give hope to all who come to you.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, tested in the desert,
give courage to those who are tempted.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, who comforted and healed,
bring wholeness to all who are broken.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, who hung in agony on the cross,
bring strength to those who suffer.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, who died to save us,
give peace to all who face death.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, raised from the tomb,
bring light and life to all the world.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, present among your disciples,
unite all your people in love.
Lord, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

The grace of Christ attend us,
the love of God surround us,
and the Holy Spirit keep us,
this day and for ever. **Amen.**

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray
The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

We offer all that we have and are.

Into your hands we place our praise and thanksgiving, our suffering and sacrifice, our songs and our sighs.

Take it all, Lord, for your glory.

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit rest upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Coffee Time Conversation

- Where would you like more balance in your life?
- What helps you to rest in God?
- Take your worries to the Lord in prayer.

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Holy, Holy, Holy <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AgHrNNM23p8>

Jesus lover of my soul https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1hQTRN_9JE

What a friend we have in Jesus

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

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_sgSowQ1rzY&list=PLU55_j0tiQXHwypTuSqMofMh4tOoJZJms&index=2

More Contemporary Music:

Sovereign Over Us

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uhx37FRpclw&list=PLU55_j0tiQXF2VW2lqWsSCCuFyVgDDt-y&index=5

Turn your eyes upon Jesus <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zTZtKoAwf0U>

When the music fades

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwIGdZBSX8k>

Keep social distancing. Keep safe. Keep communicating.

Keep abiding in Christ.

God bless you and keep you until we meet again.

You are missed!

My prayers are with you.

With love, Peter