

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home  
Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 All Saints Day

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

The darkness and hopelessness of Halloween yield to the light and hope of All Saints Day. As we worship God today we join our worship to the worship of heaven. We join with that great cloud of God's witnesses who have gone before us.

'I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'  
(Revelation chapter 7)

Hymn/Song

Prayer of Praise

Creator God, for the smell of autumn leaves, for the bright colours of berries and fruits, for the brilliance of fireworks and the blaze of fire, we thank you. Eternal God, for times of remembrance, for times of rejoicing, for times of reflection, for times of reunion, we thank you. Lord God, for the good news of who Christ is, for the insights from your living word, for your promises to us made known in Jesus, for his work of salvation and the power of his cross bringing us forgiveness, for the gifts of your Holy Spirit, enlivening your Church, for your eternal love, for your unlimited graciousness to each and every one of us and our loved ones, we bring our thanks and praise to you today. **Amen.**

Bible Readings

Moses has died and Joshua has taken over as leader.  
The people of God are preparing to enter the Promised Land.  
Read Joshua chapter 3 verses 1-17

## Read Hebrews Chapter 12 verses 1-3

### Prayer of Confession

Everlasting God, you have called us to a rich hope and a glorious inheritance among the saints. From the dust of the earth you formed us into your image, and breathed into us the breath of life. We are sorry for the times when we have turned away from you, and for our failure to love others as you have loved us. In your mercy, you gave us your son Jesus Christ. He lived our life, died our death upon the cross, and was raised back to life. He reigns forever and he will return in glory. With gratitude we receive your forgiveness and love in our hearts through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Hymn/Song

### Sermon

My preaching text today is Joshua chapter 3 verse 17:

“While all Israel were crossing over on dry ground, the priests who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan, until the entire nation finished crossing over the Jordan”.

My message today is centred on this picture of the priests faithfully standing there in the middle of the river bed as the people of God miraculously passed safely through the river Jordan to the Promised Land.

As the priests stood there, it was their duty to hold the heavy gold-laden Ark of the Covenant, for them the place where heaven and earth met - the very dwelling place of God on earth.

Today we are going stand with them.

Let us grasp what it means at those times in our lives when God calls his priestly people to stand firm. I want to make 3 points.

Firstly we are to **stand firm for others.**

That’s what these priests were doing. In obedience to God and in service to God’s people they were up to their ankles in mud and no doubt casting anxious glances upstream. We are told the river Jordan was swollen and its banks were overflowing. They risked their lives when they tentatively stepped in. Would they be swept away? Would their precious cargo – God himself - be swept away?

Yet the Priests did what was asked of them – and sure enough the waters were held back as they trudged their way to the middle of the river Jordan. It was a hard slog – but once there, they stood still on dry ground for long hours with aching legs and arms.

The priests may have complained to Joshua – “Can’t you get us out of this? We want to get ashore and get on with the job”

To which Joshua would have replied “For the time being, standing still **is** your job. Do it”. I like to think they encouraged one another to keep going and no doubt they received words of encouragement from the countless men women and children who trekked passed them. These priests did it for God and out of love for their own people.

So it is with us. Sometimes as God’s priestly ones we are led to the very brink and look at the chilling waters which would threaten to overwhelm us or our loved ones and swamp us. We look for a way through. We seek instruction and guidance. At those times, like the Israelites, we are in un-chartered waters: ‘you have not passed this way before’. How true in this pandemic. Yet God will provide a way forward. His power will hold back the waters. We shall not be overwhelmed. We may find ourselves right in the middle in the mud and the mess, and all we can do and need to do is to stand still and stand firm.

For God and for our loved ones we will stand firm, and in doing so we will take our part in holding back the waters that would overwhelm.

By standing firm we can enable others to cross safely over to God’s Promised Land. Standing firm and waiting for the Lord’s deliverance is not as easy as it sounds. It is not a pleasant place to stand – it may be within sight and touching distance of the Promised Land but it is not the Promised Land. The River Jordan is a metaphor of the river of death and pain, which must be crossed by one and all.

Standing in the middle of such a fearful place takes immense courage. It takes devotion and toil and it takes encouragement, both given and received. And it might make all the difference to someone.

Secondly, like those priests, we are to **stand firm in hope**.

Hope doesn’t come easy when you are in the middle of no-mans land. The Methodist theologian Harry McKeating called these priests “the men who stand nowhere”.

He wrote *“Behind them are the great days of the Red Sea (Crossing) and the wilderness, of Sinai and its thunders and the giving of the law. Behind them the manna and the water from the rock. Ahead – or so they are promised – are the great days of conquest, of King making, of temple building, of the making of another holy Mountain to match the one they have left. But they have not yet come to mount Zion or the city of the living God”*. He concludes: *“For the people of God the great days are usually yesterday and tomorrow”*. Christians today are the ones who stand nowhere. We stand in the gap - in the middle of God’s sweeping story of salvation. But we are not without hope or a goal. Today is November 1<sup>st</sup> - All Saints Day. All Saints Day is an important reminder that we do not belong only to the here and now. You and I take our places in the great march of the people of God with a countless number ahead of us, countless alongside us and countless behind us, yet unborn. Like those priests, we stand in hope that our turn will come to cross over and enter God’s Promised Land. Charles Wesley pondered this truth when he wrote: *“Part of his host have crossed the flood and part are crossing now...“Come Lord of hosts the waves divide and land us all in heaven”*.

Yes we struggle, but there is strong hope of an end to that struggle. We are not just soldiering on – we have a destination.

We mourn the passing of our loved ones and Christian friends.

And yet we rejoice today with gladness and strong hope that they stand with the countless multitude before the throne and before the lamb robed in white with palm branches in their hands, declaring aloud Salvation belongs to our God! Their hope is your hope, their heavenly home is your heavenly home. All Saints Day reminds us that that faith is not forever, and eventually we shall no longer believe, we shall know, we shall see face face.

With this great anticipation, when we need to, let us stand firm in eternal hope. And trust that ‘Tomorrow the Lord will do amazing things for you’. (Joshua Chapter 3 verse 5)

Thirdly, we are to **stand firm with God**.

We never stand alone. God is there. God stands with us.

The Israelites knew this to be true because of the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of Covenant did not merely show people the way, it was going to actually make the way. Then and now, God goes ahead of his people and makes a way where there is no way.

Without God, we would be overwhelmed, without God leading us on we couldn't put one foot in front of another. We are 100 per cent dependent on God. In their minds, God's presence was confined to the Ark of the Covenant. We know that the all-encompassing presence of the living God cannot be confined to a box, or indeed a church. God is the Lord of all the earth, as Joshua told the priests. God has walked in our shoes. In Jesus his Son, God has stood alongside us, has got his feet dirty in the mud and the mess of our humanity. Jesus has stood where we stand. We read in the Gospels that at the tomb of his friend Lazarus, Jesus **stood** weeping. He weeps with you.

On seeing blind Bartimaeus Jesus **stood still** and called him, saying, "What do you want me to do for you?" Jesus is a friend in need. When falsely accused, Jesus **stood** in silence.

He understands your silence.

After his resurrection just after daybreak, Jesus **stood** on the beach and called to his disciples.

He stands on the shore of your life today.

Christ has stood where we now stand. Christ's cross and empty tomb show how he crossed the waters of death and has kept them at bay until all God's children are safely over. Wherever you stand today, God stands with you, he reassures you with His word of comfort: "Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you" (Isaiah 43) God will be with you. You can depend upon him. His Holy Spirit will strengthen you to lead a life worthy of God. When the Lord tells us to stand firm and when the Lord tells us to pull up the tent pegs and move on, he has promised to be there.

In this week ahead, whatever comes your way, wherever you find yourself, be open to the possibility that God is calling you to stand firm for others, stand firm in hope and stand firm with God. Amen.

Hymn/song

### Prayer of Intercession

We pray to Jesus who is present with us to eternity.

We pray for others in need today.

We pray for those who suffer in body, mind or spirit.

We pray for an end to the global pandemic.

We pray for peace in our world.

We pray for all who mourn the loss of loved ones; that they may be consoled and strengthened with the love of Christ.

We pray for those who face death; grant them and their loved ones courage and give them the hope that life is eternal.

We pray for ourselves. God of comfort be with us all when we suffer loss and ache with the pain of grieving. Give us a glimpse of the way it will be when love will never be taken away, when life itself will not be diminished and when all that we hold most precious will live and remain with us forever. **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.

*'Come, let us join our friends above,*

*That have obtained the prize,*

*And on the eagle wings of love*

*To joys celestial rise'.*

Bring us, O Lord God, at our last awakening into the house and gate of heaven to enter into that gate and dwell in that house, where there shall be no darkness nor dazzling, but one equal light; no noise nor silence, but one equal music; no fears nor hopes, but one equal possession; no ends nor beginnings, but one equal eternity; in the habitations of your glory and dominion, world without end. **Amen.**

### Coffee Time Conversation

- What crossing points have you faced in your life or are facing today?
- Remember those who have stood firm in the gap for you.
- Who can you stand firm in the gap for today?

## Suggested Hymns and Songs

### More Traditional Music:

For all the saints who from their labours rest  
I will sing the wondrous story  
Onward Christian soldiers  
Guide me O Thou great Jehovah

### More Contemporary Music:

Be still for the presence of the Lord  
King of kings, majesty  
Blessing and honour

Keep social distancing. Keep safe. Keep communicating.  
Keep abiding in Christ.  
Stand firm for others, stand firm in hope and stand firm with God.  
My prayers are with you.  
God bless you and keep you until we meet again.  
With love, Peter

Amen.