

10 January 2021

*Christ Church New Southgate &
Friern Barnet*

Please join with us at 11am to read this service together either in printed form, whatapp or via the youtube link on our website www.christchurchnsfb.org

Each person in the church is assigned a deacon who will call you to see if you are alright in these times and to pray for you.

Welcome to Christ Church New Southgate and Friern Barnet today.

Reading: Psalm 29.1-4,10 read by Diana Bensted

Praise the Lord, you heavenly beings;
praise his glory and power.
² Praise the Lord's glorious name;
bow down before the Holy One when he appears.
³ The voice of the Lord is heard on the seas;
the glorious God thunders,
and his voice echoes over the ocean.
⁴ The voice of the Lord is heard
in all its might and majesty.
¹⁰ The Lord rules over the deep waters;
he rules as king forever.

Hymn: I heard the voice of Jesus say

Played by John Moriarty

<https://youtu.be/JrR6NlAgLgo?t=66>

1 I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Come unto me and rest.
Lay down, O weary one,
lay down your head upon my breast.”
I came to Jesus as I was,

so weary, worn, and sad.

I found in him a resting place,
and he has made me glad.

2 I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live.”

I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream.

My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

3 I heard the voice of Jesus say,
“I am the dawning light.

Look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright.”

I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun,
and in that light of life I'll walk
till trav'ling days are done.

Prayer

God says:

Look! See my chosen servant,
the One in whom I utterly delight;
**I have placed my Spirit on him,
he will bring true justice to the nations.**

When Jesus was baptized,
the heavens opened up,
and Spirit came down like a dove;
and there was a voice from heaven saying:

**“This is my dearly loved Son,
with whom I am delighted.”**

The joy of the Lord be with you all.

And also with you.

By Bruce Prewer

<http://www.bruceprewer.com/DocA/10B.APTIS.htm>

Reading: Mark 1.4-11 read by Pennie Bongomin

⁴ So John appeared in the desert, baptizing and preaching. “Turn away from your sins and be baptized,” he told the people, “and God will forgive your sins.” ⁵ Many people from the province of Judea and the city of Jerusalem went out to hear John. They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan River.

⁶ John wore clothes made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He announced to the people, “The man who will come after me is much greater than I am. I am not good enough even to bend down and untie his sandals. ⁸ I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹ Not long afterward Jesus came from Nazareth in the province of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ As soon as Jesus came up out of the water, he saw heaven opening and the Spirit coming down on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, “You are my own dear Son. I am pleased with you.”

All age activity : Baptism spinner

Create a paper spinner, download the spinner from here:

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/2016/01/printable-baptism-of-jesus-spinner.html>

Cut, colour, stick a straw in the middle and spin it to see the Spirit anoint Jesus. While you are making think about the story of John and Jesus. I wonder what might God be doing in this story?

Thank God in prayer that he loves us as his children and blesses us with the Spirit. Amen

Confession Prayer

In lockdown, we are lost . . .
**wandering without purpose,
meaning, value,
acceptance, or place.**

We wander lost.
We navigate these days
with weary hearts.

But the Spirit of God descends
like a dove upon us.
We hear the ancient words
that name and claim
us as children of God.
**We are cleansed, refreshed,
and made new
in the love of those words.**

Reflecting together

Consider Mark 1.4-11 again. Pray and read it again asking the Spirit to show you God's message for you today. Read it while reflecting on the questions:

Is there something new here I haven't noticed before?

What do I learn about God from this part of the bible ?

What might God be asking me to do as a result of reading scripture?

Sermon

Have you ever lived in a desert? Me neither. But this experience I will share with you. When you travel from Jerusalem towards the Jordan, there are two strange things that you notice on the journey. First you cross over a disputed border. But second, you leave the lush green hills eastern hills of the city and plunge down and down and down into a completely different terrain, you enter into this: the Judean desert.

We visited Jerusalem in 2019 and discovered there is still really only one road out of the city to the east and now it's a beautiful fast motorway which tears through the desert. As we travelled, we could see some families living in this inhospitable place, with makeshift shelters and animals tethered to trees. As we dipped down further towards the river Jordan, the land was more and more arid until we arrived at the dead sea for our very touristy visit. As we stepped out of the minibus, we realised it was also 10 degrees warmer. As you get near to the sea, there's a smart beach style complex with ice-creams and plenty of souvenirs to buy, but of course what most people go to do is to float in the water of the dead sea.

There are plenty of signposts with the warnings: do not swim, don't put your head under the water, do not taste the water. Trust me – just a drop will send you gasping for a litre of water.

The shores of the dead sea are made up of squelchy slippery mud. Some people were brave and walked. Very slowly. For in and around the mud were sharp salt rocks, most sensible people humbly sat down and crawled in. As you take your first steps into the water, your feet are completely engulfed by oozy and pretty disgusting mud, and then you reach the shelf and you enter the sea fully not able to touch the bottom.

Normally when we are at the seaside, we swim, we play silly games, we splash each other. In this sea in the desert, you cannot do any of these things. You cannot drink the water, you cannot swim, you cannot dive underneath it. It's very difficult to even get in it gracefully, you cannot rest at the shores edge, and once you are in the sea all you can do in it is float.

You can't really even swim with your head above the water, for the water itself is not like

normal water, it's gloopy and resistant to your strength, all you can do in this sea in the desert is float. You have to surrender to the dead sea of the desert and just bob along. Float around and take a different kind of swim, at a different kind of pace.

In the same Judean desert just outside of Jerusalem a bit further upstream from the dead sea where the Jordan river is lush and free-flowing, John the Baptist called the people of God to repent and be baptised. He called the people of God to come away from the city, to leave their homes and comfort and come to the desert, to come to the banks of the Jordan river.

Who is John and why is desert so important? John is known as a prophet, and prophets in the bible speak for God by his Spirit. John has submitted to the desert, he lives in a wild place, eats wild food and wears wild clothing. From the desert he calls the people of God to come. To come to repent. Prophets throughout scripture like Isaiah and Hosea have called the people of God to repent, to be humble, to know the humility of following God in the desert, through the wilderness years. The people of God are formed by their calling out of slavery, out of Egypt led by Moses and Joshua into the Promised Land. The desert or the wilderness is where the people of God learnt to rely on his presence, sought his light to lead, and his food to sustain.

It strikes me that our experience of Covid 19 is similar. The entire world has been humbled by a virus, all of us have had to submit to authority and stay at home, to live differently now and it has felt like a desert for many. In this last year we have struggled to find a way to navigate our lives, with every aspect being challenged and reshaped by social distancing.

All that we love – socialising, exploring new places, worshipping together, singing

together have been difficult or absent. This current lockdown has forced us again to return to the desert and the novelty has worn off. All we can do now is submit to the desert, submit to the dead sea and float about not seemed to get anywhere.

And yet time and time again, it is in these desert times that God speaks. In our loneliest times, God's Spirit is present. And every time we humble ourselves and submit to God's call to repent in the desert we grow in faith and knowledge of his grace.

As the people come to John in the desert, they come to repent and they are baptised. The people of God have always had to turn back to God, to rend their hearts, for just as much as us they wander away from his path. But this time, it's different, this time they are baptised to remind them of God's forgiveness and grace. For their journey into the desert they are rewarded by discovering God's grace.

Somewhere in the queue of people at John's baptism service was Jesus. John knew Jesus from the time he leapt for joy in Elizabeth's womb. I'm guessing he was delighted to see Jesus that day. For suddenly as Jesus submits to baptism, we learn even more in the desert. We learn that heaven cannot hold the love God the father has for his son. We learn that the sky is torn apart to declare his identity: that Jesus is the son of God. And we learn that God is pleased with him.

In our desert, we can learn this too! The God we worship is full of love, of grace and of boundless power. He created the heavens, and yet is bold enough to declare aloud that he loves his son. As God called his people out of Egypt, he called them out of slavery because they were his children.

Just as Jesus was baptised, and the people are baptised, and each of us are offered baptism

– so all of us are part of this family that like calling out their love for each other. In the desert, God too speaks, we hear his voice and it always says this: you are my child and I love you. Come follow me.

The desert gives us one final gift- a vision of the Spirit of God anointing Christ. We see the Spirit descend like a dove. A beautiful, graceful, delicate dove, as a symbol of the mighty power of the Spirit. Here we learn that the Spirit is gentle, life giving and present in the desert.

The Spirit is present with us now too. Whenever we seek God in humility, whenever we seek to point others to him, whenever we come before him and rend our hearts, and in honesty offer ourselves to him – the Spirit is present. The Spirit gives strength for time in the desert, for Jesus and for us now. The Spirit gives us peace, peace to know that all we need to do now is to hold still, to stop flapping about, and submit to the desert time now. Take time to float along, learn a new way to swim in this desert place, try to relax and in the different terrain we now live in, for in our humility then we will see the Spirit descend on us too granting us grace and new appreciation of God's love for us.

Response

Lord, open the windows of heaven
and pour out your Spirit upon us.
Let it fall like rain
on a hot summer's day.
Let every drip and drop
be as a refreshing breeze.
Let it penetrate our hearts,
our minds, and our Spirits.
Lord, we are your vessels.

Let your Holy Spirit
wash over us and fill us,
so that we may walk
as you have called us to walk

and talk as you have called us to talk.
Let us now have the power
to carry your gospel
to our neighbours far and wide.
It is in your wonderful son, Jesus' name, we
pray, AMEN.

If any of you listening would like to be
baptised, you are warmly welcome and we
can organise this as soon as our church is
reopened.

Intercession

We pray for all those unwell physically or
mentally in our congregation at the moment,
Lord please be a healer to each person. Lord
we ask that you would be especially close to
Kevin, Steph and Val.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

We pray for our keyworkers and especially
for the those in the NHS stretched out and
wrung out. We pray for energy, sustenance
and for lockdown to have a significant
impact on the number of cases we are seeing
at present.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

We pray for our world. We pray especially
for the USA today. We pray for peace, for a
smooth transition of power, and we pray
that humility might be seen among those
who seek to incite violence and commit acts
of violence.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

We pray too for Croatia mourning seven
people who died in an earthquake trying to
rebuild with so many tremors in the past two
weeks. For Norway after a landslide in Alta
where 10 people are missed or have died.
Grant each place wisdom for rebuilding and
healing of broken hearts and lives.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

We pray for those affected by recent deadly
attacks in Niger, near the border with Mali
where militants have killed 89 civilians. Lord
we ask for peace, we ask for calm and we
ask for justice.

Lord in your mercy – **hear our prayer**

Blessing

Go now, and live in the Spirit
even when you are led
into wild and hard places.
With repentance and trust,
give yourselves to God,
and with fasting and prayer,
strengthen yourselves against
the ways of the tempter.
And may God enfold you
in tender and lasting love.
May Christ be beside you
in times of struggle.
And may the Spirit guide you
back to the path whenever you stray,
that you may keep the covenant.
We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,

In the name of Christ. Amen.