

*Christ Church New
Southgate & Friern Barnet*

26 March 2023

Welcome

Song: Sweet is the work, my God and King,
To praise your name, give thanks and sing,
To tell your love by morning light,
Your faithfulness all through the night.

How good it is to join the song,
Angels and saints around your throne,
Lift every voice, fill every lung,
Come strike the strings and beat the drum.

*Praise him moon and stars,
Praise him shining lights,
Praise him in the morning,
Praise him when the sun goes down.*

All that has breath join heaven's song,
East to the West, old and the young,
And bless his works and bless his name,
Tell of his love with hearts aflame.

Song: Sing a hymn to God's great glory,
just and holy all his ways.
Let us tell redemption's story
singing songs of thankful praise.
God, who long ago created
music to inspire the heart,
lifts our souls, that stimulated
we may play our joyful part.

Sing a hymn of Christ's salvation,
our Messiah, Servant, Priest;
building us a true foundation,
giving us a holy feast.
He who lived and died for others
from his virgin mother's womb
now unites us, sisters, brothers,

through his conquest of the tomb

Sing a hymn, in which shall feature
all the Spirit's living power;
animating every creature
day by day and hour by hour
Sing, oh sing, in rhythm's motion
joining music, words and beat;
till the tongue and mind's devotion
in exultant worship meet.

Sing forever, all creation,
to the Trinity above.
Let the church in every nation
join in bonds of holy love.
Music of the highest order,
instruments and voices blend,
overcoming all disorder:
Songs of praise shall never end.

Reading: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd;
I have everything I need.
² He lets me rest in fields of green grass
**and leads me to quiet pools of fresh
water.**

³ He gives me new strength.
**He guides me in the right paths,
as he has promised.**

⁴ Even if I go through the deepest darkness,
**I will not be afraid, Lord,
for you are with me.**
**Your shepherd's rod and staff protect
me.**

⁵ You prepare a banquet for me,
**where all my enemies can see me;
you welcome me as an honoured guest
and fill my cup to the brim.**

⁶ I know that your goodness and love will be
with me all my life;
**and your house will be my home as
long as I live.**

Prayer

Song: There's nothing worth more that
could ever come close
No thing can compare,
You're our living hope
Your presence, Lord

Holy Spirit, You are welcome here
Come flood this place and fill the
atmosphere
Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for
To be overcome by Your presence, Lord

There's nothing worth more that will ever
come close
No thing can compare,
You're our living hope
Your presence, Lord

I've tasted and seen of the sweetest of loves
Where my heart becomes free and my
shame is undone
In your presence, Lord

Holy Spirit, You are welcome here
Come flood this place and fill the
atmosphere
Your glory, God, is what our hearts long for
To be overcome by Your presence, Lord

Let us become more aware of Your presence
Let us experience the glory of Your
goodness

Reading: I Samuel 16.1-13

16 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you go on grieving over Saul? I have rejected him as king of Israel. But now get some olive oil and go to Bethlehem, to a man named Jesse, because I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

²"How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "If Saul hears about it, he will kill me!" The Lord answered, "Take a calf with you and say that you are there to offer a sacrifice to the Lord." ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice,

and I will tell you what to do. You will anoint as king the man I tell you to."

⁴Samuel did what the Lord told him to do and went to Bethlehem, where the city leaders came trembling to meet him and asked, "Is this a peaceful visit, seer?"

⁵"Yes," he answered. "I have come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. Purify yourselves and come with me." He also told Jesse and his sons to purify themselves, and he invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Jesse's son Eliab and said to himself, "This man standing here in the Lord's presence is surely the one he has chosen." ⁷But the Lord said to him, "Pay no attention to how tall and handsome he is. I have rejected him, because I do not judge as people judge. They look at the outward appearance, but I look at the heart."

⁸Then Jesse called his son Abinadab and brought him to Samuel. But Samuel said, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either." ⁹Jesse then brought Shammah. "No, the Lord hasn't chosen him either," Samuel said. ¹⁰In this way Jesse brought seven of his sons to Samuel. And Samuel said to him, "No, the Lord hasn't chosen any of these." ¹¹Then he asked him, "Do you have any more sons?"

Jesse answered, "There is still the youngest, but he is out taking care of the sheep."

"Tell him to come here," Samuel said. "We won't offer the sacrifice until he comes." ¹²So Jesse sent for him. He was a handsome, healthy young man, and his eyes sparkled. The Lord said to Samuel, "This is the one—anoint him!" ¹³Samuel took the olive oil and anointed David in front of his brothers. Immediately the spirit of the Lord took control of David and was with him from that day on. Then Samuel returned to Ramah.

All age activity: Guess who quiz

Sermon: A closer walk with God

At my previous church, I once told the congregation about how I began to pray more at college. It involved sitting down on a chair I didn't use often and praying for 5 minutes before lunch. After the service, three people wanted to know where they could buy a prayer chair. Maybe we could start selling prayer chairs? This week in our lent course we have been thinking about growing confidence through consistent spiritual practices. What is your spiritual habit? Are you keen to pray in the morning? Before or after coffee? Do you like listening to an app, or are you a bible and notebook kinda person? Do you prefer listening to worship songs or do you enjoy silence?

It struck me that our reading for today also displays a particular spiritual practice shown by Samuel. Samuel is a prophet in the Old Testament. Prophets were used by God to speak to the people. Take a look at the passage and let's see:

How many times the Lord speaks to Samuel?

V1 – how long will you grieve over Saul, a king gone bad.

V2 – the Lord gives a plan to Samuel.

V7 – the Lord directs Samuel's choice.

V12 – the Lord affirms David as king to Samuel.

How many times does Samuel talk about the Lord to other people?

V5 – Samuel answers the elders with the Lord's direction for a sacrifice.

V6 – Samuel talks to himself, 'surely this one Lord?'

V8 – Not this son – he's not been chosen by the Lord.

V9 – Not this son – he's not been chosen by the Lord.

V10 – Not this son – he's not been chosen by the Lord x7.

Sometimes on tv programmes or in films, an actor will turn to the camera, and break the fourth wall and speak directly to us those who are watching. Here in Samuel 16, it's the same. It is almost as if we are inside Samuel's brain, we can hear God speaking to Samuel, we can hear Samuel speaking to himself and we can hear Samuel talking to other people.

Here we see the internal and external pattern of Samuel who is totally devoted to God. This is a spiritual habit. Sometimes we have bad habits, like eating sweets all day. Samuel's habit is a good one, and its one that he is attentive to, and is absorbed in his life.

How many times is Samuel guided by God?

V1 Stop grieving.

V1 Get some oil

V1 Go to Bethlehem

V2 Gives Samuel a crazy plan.

V4 And he does it

V7 Not this son, humanity looks at the outward appearance, I look at the heart.

The major benefit of having a habit of talking to God, of praying to God and listening to God is that he will direct your steps. Don't we all want guidance from God? Don't we all want to discern the mind of Christ as individuals and as a church? Then we need to pray. We need to pray. You need to pray, I need to pray, all of us need to pray and we need to listen. For when we pray, God listens. When we pray, God guides us.

One little problem with the habit of talking to God, is that he will speak to us and will ask us to act. If you'd like to be a Christian who just enjoys attending church – great. If you'd like to be a disciple of God, a follower of Jesus, then pray and expect God to lead you, expect God to encourage you to act.

God leads Samuel in the most unusual way, to anoint a king before the old king has gone. God gives him a plan – that is a sort of ruse, a cover up plan – so that Samuel, who everyone knows is God’s prophet, can find David and anoint him. But did you see that God doesn’t give Samuel the whole plan straight away? God’s plan is revealed gradually. First go get prepared to anoint a new king. Then get to Bethlehem. Then go to Jesse, then go through the sons one by one. God guides us in the same way today, the God of love, walks with us through times of change and shows us step by step what to do next. He does this because he is present in this world, his spirit dwells in our hearts and he leads us lovingly. How often we need to trust God for the next step.

Samuel had a habit of prayer. His habit of prayer enabled him to be led by God and anoint a new king. How can we start and keep going with a habit of prayer?

Professor Piers Steel was on the radio this week talking to author James about procrastination. Procrastination is what humans do when we need leave early to get to the airport but fuff about having a cup of coffee instead. When we want to write an essay but surf the internet instead. When we want to tidy the house but end up scrolling on Instagram.

Professor Steel is a psychology expert. He said that our brains have two decision making systems – the olympic and the pre-frontal cortex. The first part of our brain is the Olympic which is basic, it thinks about sense, touch, smell, sight. If we smell fire, our brain uses the olympic to warn us to move away from the fire. The secondary layer of the brain that makes decisions is the pre-frontal cortex, this is the part of our brain that makes future plans. We will all use this part of our brain to decide to start a new habit of prayer.

The problem with starting a good habit like prayer, is that our world distracts and tempts us. Professor Steel says it’s like being on a diet in a candy store. Our brains are trying to process phone calls, letters, notifications, tweets, messages, social media and adverts on the internet. Our environment now means it is very difficult to be focussed without a habit. He recommends a different approach to starting a good habit.

- 1/ Don’t pressure yourself. If you make pancakes, the first one isn’t always good is it, so put the first one in the bin, and make some more.
- 2/ Turn off notifications
- 3/ Block out time and space
- 4/ Make a habit by creating a ritual.
- 5/ Build up the time

If we want to have a habit of prayer.

- 1/ Don’t stress
- 2/ Put your phone away
- 3/ Decide a regular time and a regular place. Pick 5 minutes that you can make everyday, before work, after the school drop off, before bed. Pick a place that you can get to everyday. Sit in a corner of your room that you don’t sit in normally. Don’t sit in the same place you also watch tv, because our brain will automatically want to watch tv because we know already, we enjoy it. Decide a set amount of time that you can achieve, 5/10minutes a day. You are only allowed to pray for 5 minutes.
- 4/ Once you do something for 66 days, it becomes a habit. Then you will automatically fall into your pattern of prayer. Make it a ritual, sit in the same place, at the same time, with the same bible, with the same notebook, with a drink if you want, and do the same thing : pray.
- 5/ Then see if you can add more time, to 15 minutes, 30minutes. We can all fit in what we want to do with our time.

Then gradually as we learn the habit of prayer,
the same God who spoke to Samuel, will
speak to you. The same God who led Samuel,
will guide your steps. The same God who led
Samuel all the way to David, will lead you step
by step in a closer walk with him.

Prayer

Song: O for a closer walk with God
A calm and heavenly frame
A light to shine upon the road
Leading to the Lamb

Where is the blessedness I knew
When once I saw the Lord
Where is the soul refreshing view
Living in His Word

O fire of God come burn in me
Renew a holy passion
Til Christ my deepest longing be
My never-failing fountain

A light to be my guide
The Father's presence at my side
In Your will my rest I find
O for a closer walk with God - leading to
the Lamb

So shall my walk be close with God
With all the hopes made new
So purer light shall mark the road
Leading to the Lamb

Prayers for the world

Song: Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes, for Your glory.

Teach us Lord full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.
Cause our faith to rise
Cause our eyes to see,
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for
us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time,
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises;
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, 'til your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

Blessing