

# Service on a Sheet – 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2022.

**Lectionary readings for today:** Nehemiah 8: 1-3; 5-6; 8-10; 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31a; Luke 4: 14-21

**Call to worship:**



I was quite a sickly child. If there was a bug going round I caught it and got it worse than all my class mates. Every year also saw me on the old sofa, lying with my face to the back, covered in a blanket, deaf and with a storming temperature and tonsils the size of balloons (slight exaggeration there). Antibiotics did their level best but I was allergic (and remain allergic) to penicillin which was a problem. Recovery saw me listless, and my main play interest was that of Lego. I still have much of my childhood Lego bricks and bases and even an original battery-operated engine. I would happily build for hours on end creating houses, castles, estates, road-ways, shops and the like only to break them down and start again. Our readings for today reminded me of that childhood favourite (which still occasionally gets added to I must admit and one of the best trips ever was to Legoland Windsor!) I would love to visit the Lego shop in London and would stand amazed at the huge models in Hammonds in Hull when I was a child and in Hamley's on Oxford Street as an adult. The colours, the imagination, the creativity, the making, breaking and re making. So many hours spent happily with bits of plastic – never was there such a contented child!

**Prayers:**

- Look around you at the building blocks that make up your life, the places and people that keep you going and that you enjoy. Give God thanks.
- Look at your life and at the faith, the behaviours and 'rules' that keep you on the straight and narrow – give God thanks.
- Look inwardly at your relationships, your attitudes and habits which may be harmed or harming. Ask for God's forgiveness and restoration.
- Thank God that His loving presence is always there to correct and guide if we will but allow ourselves to be corrected and led.

**Lord's Prayer**

*'Rejoice the Lord is King! Your Lord and King adore;'* [Singing the Faith 335]

In Nehemiah we finally, albeit briefly, find the scattered nation back together again in a recently rebuilt city of Jerusalem and a restored Temple where the builders kept their weapons by their side as they worked. The highest priority in the leadership's minds is to establish the national and religious identity once more. The people are called together and the leaders read them the Law – to remind them of their faith heritage, to offer them a shared identity, to put God back in the centre of their community life, to remind them of their obligations and to release the people into a sense of rejoicing and celebration at their rescue and at God's presence, power, grace and willingness to fulfil the ancient promises that were told time and again by many voices through the ages of dispersion. The leaders were starting to build a nation once again.

- When have you experienced a really tough time in your life and then came through it? What happened and how did it change you?
- When have you been aware of God with you in the tough times and waiting to celebrate with you at the other side? How did that feel?

In the first letter to the church at Corinth we face one of the best known metaphors for human life and community that has ever been written. Taking the image of a body, with which all are familiar, the writer uses it to explain that

everyone has a role to play, everyone can offer something to the whole, all believers have skills, abilities, knowledge, understanding and experience that can be used by God to build their faith and show God's glory to others through their living and working together. A preacher and a scone maker are both needed. Someone who can dream and scheme is as much value as the maker and doer. The one who can only smile a welcome or offer a shoulder to cry on has as much a part to play for God as the ones who can organise anything at the drop of a hat. No one is excluded. No one is of lesser value or worth. The writer is building a body, a coherent functioning community of faith.

- Who do you value for their contribution and why?
- What can you bring to God from your part of the body?

The more astute and observant among you will have noticed the clerical error I made a couple of weeks ago when I used the gospel reading in the wrong place in the lectionary. Apologies for that on one hand but on the other it will not do us any harm to read the words from Isaiah again in the context of Jesus' usage where he is outlining the job description for his life and ministry that was laid out by the prophets as the voice of God to the people many centuries before. Now millennia later we can read this in our context as our job description as the followers of Jesus taking the good news into the community of our day and age. Good news to the poor, healing (and wholeness) to those in need, release to those imprisoned in all manner of ways and the good news of a God who is with us. Jesus was building his own job description but also building the foundation of a work force for God's kingdom – you and I.

- What job do you fulfil within God's kingdom? Not the job you do 'officially' within your church family but in your everyday life?
- Is that still what God has called you to be and do or is there something else? What is that? What are you going to do about it? (Nothing is not an option!!)

### **Prayers:**

I base our prayers today on Singing the Faith 478 which also offers itself as our second hymn for sharing:

*'Thank you, O God, for the time that is now, for all the newness your minutes allow, make us alert with your presence of mind to fears and longings that move humankind'*

- We think of political unrest and dis-ease around the globe, the leaders of the many nations and our own Parliament.
- For Tonga and other parts of the world struck by natural disaster.

*'Thank you, O God, for the time that is past, for all the values and thoughts that will last. May we all stagnant tradition ignore, leaving behind things that matter no more.'*

- We recall how our lives and the lives of our communities have been changed by Covid and seek God's wisdom in laying down what needs to change and embracing the 'new ways' that will become the norm in time.
- We give thanks for those who have gone before us laying the foundations for our lives, our society and our faith.
- We think of the families of Kevin, Kay, Jim, Lyla and Jim as they grieve the loss of loved ones.

*'Thank you for hopes of the day that will come, for all the change that will happen in time; God, for the future our spirits prepare, hallow our doubts and redeem us from fear.'*

- We seek God's guidance and vision for what the church must be for the world of today.

*'Make us afraid of the thoughts that delay, faithful in all the affairs of today; keep us, Creator, from playing it safe, thank you that now is the time of our life!'*

- The way ahead is uncertain so we offer ourselves to God's loving care once again asking for vision, courage, hope and strength to become and be the people God needs to carry the good news in our day and age.

### **Blessing:**

Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me. Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ in quiet, Christ in danger. Christ in hearts of all that love me, Christ in mind of friends and stranger. Amen.