

# Service on a Sheet – 7<sup>th</sup> August 2022.

Lectionary readings for today: Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-16; Luke 12: 32-40.

***'Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.'***  
***[Hebrews 11: 1 – NIV]***



One of the simple joys in life that I enjoy from time to time is standing and looking out to the horizon. Where I holiday on the Isle of Mull has rocks behind the house which, if you scramble up the pathway, you can stand and look out towards the far islands of Dutchman's cap, Staffa, Col and Tiree. Nearer to home there are endless vistas at Blyth and Whitley Bay and from St Mary's lighthouse along the N.E coast of the UK. Standing still on a quiet evening, hearing the water lapping onto the beach or sucking greedily at the pebbles and stones and looking out to where the sky and water meet is sometimes overwhelming. It reminds me of how small I am and helps me realise how big our world is and, therefore, how much bigger God is in comparison. It keeps my feet firmly on the ground of reality and offers me a sense of peace in the midst of the chaos, noise and activity of everyday ... reading that, I really should do it more often! But my focus is pulled out of who I am and where I am and what is happening to the grandeur of big skies and wide space and that sense of other and beyond. Glorious!

## **Prayers:**

- Look around you at some small thing in your room or garden or space. Touch it, pick it up (if you are able to do so), remember what it is and where it came from. Admire the colour, texture, style, make of it. What memories does it evoke? What do you use it for nowadays? Is it of use or has it just got some intrinsic personal value for you? Thank God for the small things of life.
- Look beyond the bounds of your room or garden. Imagine that shoreline or look to the sky. What do you see? What can you hear? How does such vastness make you feel? Thank God for the big things in life.
- Look around you or open your phone or wallet and find a picture, at random, that you have stored there. Who is that person? What is that object or scene? What memories does it or they evoke? Name it or them, remember why you took that photo or hold that photo still. Give thanks for family and friends and adventuring new experience and horizons.
- Pause and think through the past 24 hours - where have you been aware, or are now aware, of being less than you can be, of episodes of impatience, intolerance, annoyance, sharp tongued-ness or internal criticism of yourself or others? Ask God's forgiveness.
- Lift your eyes once more to give thanks to the God who supplies our every need, loves us beyond measure and journeys with us.

## **Lord's Prayer**

*'For the harvests of the Spirit, thanks be to God; for the good we all inherit, thanks be to God; for the wonders that astound, for the truths that still confound us, most of all, that love has found us, thanks be to God.'*  
*[Singing the Faith 124 v4]*

God is cheesed off! That is putting it mildly compared to the rant that Isaiah voices on God's behalf. God is sick and tired of an endless procession of sacrifices and offerings, prayers and incense, jabbering and formality, celebrations and festivals when they do nothing to change the behaviour of the people. The folk come bringing their offerings, undergo the rituals of sacrifice and cleansing and then go off and repeat what it is they felt they needed to seek cleansing from in the first place. And it goes on and on and on and no one changes as a result of it. No wonder God is cheesed off! The

idea of the sacrifices and offerings, the rituals and celebrations are to keep the focus of the people on God and to keep their relationship with God in good order. Instead, they are going through the motions as instructed but with little to no meaning or effect on their lives.

- Have you ever simply 'gone through the motions' of an act of worship or other activity of faith without any meaning for you or effect on you? When and what happened?
- Even now how deep is your real relationship with God – not the one you wear on the outside but the one deep inside you? Go on, be honest with yourself and with God!
- How could you go about changing this?

I think that the opening sentence of the letter to the Hebrews (a new Christian congregation with a strong and largely Jewish background) gives me so much hope. I do not have to fully understand God. I do not need to know all of the answers all of the time, it's okay to not know and it is more than okay to simply have faith in God. I do not have to prove anything to anyone I simply have to hold onto the God I say I believe in and allow the Spirit to shape my life and living to God's way and manner of Life in all of its fullness.

- Have you ever admitted to not knowing something to do with your faith when questioned? How did that feel?
- What does it mean to you to be able to say, 'I don't know' and leave it at that knowing that it is your life that is supposed to show God's presence and not your intellect?
- Imagine for a moment what it might feel like to have all the answers ... then consider what you might ask God should you be able to ask anything in the presence of the Almighty!

Remember that, when Jesus was speaking he was always speaking to a very mixed audience. There would be those who, rather self-righteously, felt that they had got it right because they kept all of the rules and were therefore better than the average in behaviour and intellect. There would be those who had consistently and persistently been told that they had got it all wrong, or who were disabled in some way and therefore outside God's love along with all none Jews and women. There would be those earnestly seeking God and those, like the disciples, in the middle of having their minds totally blown away by a new experience of God. Each one would hear what Jesus is saying and interpret it according to their own understanding and circumstances – just as we do today!

To each one Jesus is giving a reminder that God is the One in charge, that God is the one who provides what they need so they do not need to be anxious in what they give or share with others for God will provide. He is encouraging all of his listeners to consider where their focus is – on societal standards and demands of acquisition, learning, power and wealth or on what God is wanting in terms of living their lives God's way with justice, love, peace and compassionate concern.

Given such a wider listening audience and such a variety of possible interpretations it's no wonder Peter asks who Jesus is actually trying to teach (v41) – Jesus is challenging all of them to think where their focus is and where their attitudes and behaviour may take them when God comes 'home' to find them.

- Where is your focus or attention? What is your *raison d'être* (reason for being)?
- Do you need to refocus your life and being and doing? How and why?

*'Evil things are there before thee; in the heart, where they have fed, wilt thou pitifully\* enter, Son of Man, and lay thy head? Enter, then, O Christ most holy; make a Christmas\*\* in my heart: make a heaven of my manger\*\*\*; it is heaven where thou art. [Singing the Faith 197 v4]*

*\* = pitifully in the sense of filled with love; \*\* Christmas = in the sense of new birth and hope; \*\*\* manger = in the sense of resting place, place of safety, place of cradling.*

**Prayers:** Think through this week's questions and come talk to God about it all.

**Blessing:**

*May the Sending One sing in you, may the Seeking One walk with you, may the Greeting One stand by you, in your gladness and in your grieving. May the Gifted One relieve you, may the Given One retrieve you, may the Giving One receive you, in your falling and your restoring. May the Binding One untie you, may the One Beloved invite you, may the Loving One delight you, Three-in-One, joy in life unending. [Singing the Faith 472]*