

**Prayers and Reflection for Sunday 9th
August 2020 'Take Heart'**

Welcome to this act of worship. Although we are a dispersed community we gather together as one body as we come before God today.

The Iona community have recently published *Voices from Lockdown* (ed. J. S. Pickard) which gathers together prayers and reflections on our experiences during recent months. This is a meditation written by Thom Shuman:

We haven't cancelled worship¹

*We haven't cancelled worship,
We've cancelled a religious service
at a specific time, in a specific place,
on a specific day, but folk will still
worship God when they are caring
for the grand-kids and walking the dogs;
worship as they serve beside Jesus at foodbanks
and pick up groceries for a neighbour
worship when they share the Spirit's peace
by singing songs over the phone to a parent;
worship when they work from home
worship when they endure extra shifts
in nursing homes and group homes;
worship when they email someone far away
and wave to a stranger across the street;
worship when they take toilet paper
to a homeless shelter
and volunteer at a polling place.
We haven't cancelled worship,
just the 'official' part
that may be the smallest part
of it all.*

Sending prayers and best wishes to you all.

Revd. Helen Hollands
Assistant Chair of District (Eastern Area)

¹ From *Voices Out of Lockdown* JS Pickard (ed) 2020 Wild Goose Publications pg. 16



Walking on water Maggi Hambling 2006²

Hymn (STF 158)

- 1 Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders,
unmistakable and clear,
mighty signs that show your presence,
overcoming doubt and fear.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in wonders.

- 2 Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers,
still and small and scarcely heard;
only those who want to listen
catch the all-important word.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in whispers.

- 3 Lord, you sometimes speak in silence,
through our loud and noisy day;
we can know and trust you better
when we quietly wait and pray.
O Lord, you sometimes speak in silence.

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4 Lord, you often speak in Scripture,
words that summon from the page,
shown and taught us by your Spirit
with fresh light for every age.
O Lord, you often speak in Scripture.

5 Lord, you always speak in Jesus,
always new yet still the same:
teach us now more of our Saviour,
make our lives display his Name.
O Lord, you always speak in Jesus.

Christopher Idle (b. 1938)³

Opening Prayers⁴

Faithful God,
We gather this morning in Your presence:
Those of us who come here often
and those who have not been for a long time.
Those who are full of faith
and those who don't know what we believe.
Those who can hardly keep from singing, and those who can barely face the day.
We gather because You have called us, because You love us,
because You are our God.
We gather, not because we are good or pure or holy,
but because of our need.
We gather, knowing that again and again
we have failed to live as You would have us live, that we have not loved one another,
that we have not loved Your creation,
that we have not loved You,
that we have not loved ourselves.
Forgive us, God,
and renew us to be Your people.
Make us one,
and reassure us in our true identity
as children of the One who is above all things. For we pray this in the name of Jesus Christ,
our faithful and forgiving friend. Amen

³ Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 158
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⁴ Church of Scotland, Weekly Worship <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/weekly-worship/monthly/august-2020>

Accessed 5th August 2020

Before the world began, You loved us.
Before You had created us, You were faithful to us.
And we, as Your people, are thankful for Your great and abiding love, shown again and again down the ages.
You have never abandoned us,
even when we have abandoned you.
You have never forgotten us,
even when we have strayed far from the path.
We praise You, faithful God,
for the steadfast love which has always guided us,
for the promise which has never faltered,
for the light which has lightened our way,
for the story which has reminded us of those who came before us.
For Your steadfast love and mercies new with each morning,
We join with one the voice
To give You praise and thanks. Amen

Old Testament Reading: 1 Kings 19: 9 – 13 (NRSV)⁵

9 At that place he came to a cave, and spent the night there.

Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” 10 He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.”

11 He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; 12 and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. 13 When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Gospel Reading Matthew 14: 22 – 33 (NRSV)⁶

Jesus Walks on the Water

22 Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. 23 And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, 24 but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them. 25 And early in the morning he came walking toward them on the sea. 26 But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out in fear. 27 But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, “Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

⁵ <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Kings+19%3A9-13&version=NRSV> Accessed 5th August 2020

⁶ biblegateway.com; Accessed 5th August 2020

28 Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." 29 He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came toward Jesus. 30 But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!" 31 Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" 32 When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. 33 And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Hymn (StF 624)

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
enfold me, Lord, in your peace.

Calm me, Lord, as you calmed the storm;
still me, Lord, keep me from harm.
Let all the tumult within me cease;
enfold me, Lord, enfold me in your peace.

David Adam (b. 1936)⁷

Reflection by Revd Helen Hollands

'Take heart'

At this point in Matthew's gospel more than five thousand people have just been fed, gathered on the hillside distant from the town and Jesus sends the disciples away on the boat to go ahead of him so he can take some time to himself.

They have been travelling at an extraordinary pace, healing, teaching, being alongside people, feeding and sharing. In the midst of all the activity and busyness Jesus takes time to be alone with God, to find a place to go away and be alone to pray.

I believe this a key part of this reading, perhaps easily overlooked as we reflect on Jesus who walks on water during the storm but it is essential both to Jesus and to us.

During this extraordinary summer, when so much is uncertain from one day to the next and many of us are getting ready for what we know as 'the new normal', preparing risk assessments, action plans, property checklists, I wonder if we need to be reminded of Jesus' regular pattern of life and his taking time to be with God.

Perhaps we, just like the disciples, need to be told by Jesus to "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while."⁸ I suspect that we often need such a reminder.

⁷ Reproduced from Singing the Faith Electronic Words Edition, number 624

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⁸ Mark 6.31 NRSV Biblegateway.com accessed 5th August 2020

The image below shows one of Anthony Gormley's sculptures, *Another Time XV111 2013*⁹, which is in Folkestone Kent, under the harbour. You have to seek it out at low tide by climbing down steps to find it and it has the most extraordinary presence. In the face of the ebb and flow of the tides the sculpture stands, solitary and reflective. It makes me think of the stillness that is so essential to our relationship with God.



It is often from such stillness that we are reminded that we are always in the presence of the One who calms our fears and encourages us to take heart.

In our Old Testament reading we find Elijah, fearful for his life and hiding in a cave, fleeing from his enemies and overwhelmed by his own sense of inadequacy. He hears God's voice, 'what are you doing there Elijah?' Of course he is asking himself the same question. He has been called as a prophet of the Lord, but he is terrified, even though God has provided for him so far.

He is told that the Lord will pass by, but God is not to be found in the earthquake, wind or fire, in the powerful or the spectacular, but in the sound of sheer silence. It is in this quietness that Elijah finds the courage to go on.

There is a story about Anthony Bloom of the Russian Orthodox Church who once advised an older lady, take your knitting and for 15 minutes knit before the face of God but do not say one word of prayer. Just knit and enjoy the peace of the room. She reported experiencing a density and a richness to the silence that pervaded and enriched her. She said, 'all of a

⁹ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/01/pictures-day-1-september-2017/sculpture-artist-anthony-gormley-titled-another-time-xviii-2013/> accessed 5th August 2020

sudden I perceived that the silence was a presence. At the heart of that silence was the one who is all stillness, all peace, all poise.¹⁰

We are encouraged to stillness too.

So we return to the disciples in our gospel reading. In that region wind storms are said to be sudden and frequent, characteristic of the pattern of how the weather can change in a moment. The disciples may well have set off in the boat when all was calm and predictable and suddenly the storm whipped up the waves, they lurch in the boat and chaos comes. The storm that has come on the outside reflects the storm of panic that was building within them even if they are used to sudden changes in the weather. Their fear increased at the sight of Jesus, a figure that appears like a ghost, walking towards them on the water. I suspect we would have been terrified too.

And yet they hear these words, 'take heart, it is I, do not be afraid'. Words that Jesus repeats on other occasions such as at the end of John's gospel in some of his last words to the disciples¹¹ 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.'

Take heart, have courage, do not be afraid.

There are many storms going on inside us at the moment, both individually and collectively. We wonder about money, jobs, insecurity, family relationships, bereavement and loss. We worry that we will be in stricter lockdown again, we worry about those close to us that we haven't seen for a long while and sometimes these things feel overwhelming and like they are coming at us left, right and centre. We are not sure how any of this will end.

We might feel like we too are in a small boat lurching in the storm of life, uncertain about what is coming next. We can empathise with the disciples.

Jesus invites Peter to step out of the boat, to walk towards him in faith, to take a risk and Peter to his credit does so. As he falters Jesus catches him and they return to the boat. Jesus is calm in the eye of the storm, carried by an inner stillness and power that goes way beyond the wind and the waves. Perhaps we too need to look into the eyes of Jesus and know that we are held, loved and challenged – like Peter– all at the same time.

I have a book at home that is called, *If you want to walk on water, you've got to get out of the boat*¹². Despite storms raging we are encouraged to look towards Jesus and take steps in his direction. We are challenged to look beyond and to wonder about what will come next for us in our journey of faith. This is Jesus who puts out his hand and hauls us to our feet and says come on, you can do it...Take heart, it is I, do not be afraid' and in another place he reminds us all, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age.'¹³

¹⁰ <http://missingbecheery.blogspot.com/2017/04/knitting-advice-from-metropolitan.html>

¹¹ Biblegateway.com John 16: 33 NIV accessed 5th August 2020

¹² John Ortberg, 2001

¹³ Matthew 28:20 NRSV

A time of prayer¹⁴

Almighty God, I come now to pray for Your world.

Your world which is full of brokenness, injustice, and inequality.

I bring before You the rulers of the world, local or national, and pray that they would remember that all power comes from You.

Almighty God, I pray for your church.

I pray that during these times we would unite in worship and service. I pray for my local church, and its ministers, that they would be strengthened by Your Spirit.

Almighty God, I pray for those known to me and name them before You, particularly those who are experiencing sadness, illness or uncertainty.

I pray for myself, that I would be transformed by Your Spirit, and live in the love which You have given me through Jesus.

In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

A blessing

Summer¹⁵

When young-leafed June is summoned by the sun,
And new-mown grass breathes fragrance through the air,
When work is over, holidays begun,
May peace and pleasure in themselves be prayer.
And in your leisure may you hear the one
Who is your blessing and by whom you're blest,
Still calling you: *Come un to me and rest.*

Acknowledgments:

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¹⁴ <https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/17958/9-august-worship-if-you-are-unable-to-attend-church.pdf>
Accessed 5th August 2020

¹⁵ Malcolm Guite, The Season's Benedictions, Summer. *After Prayer, New sonnets and other poems* 2019 pg. 109