**Worship Sheet for Sunday 10th January 2021**

**Compiled by John Green of Berkley Street Methodist Church, St Neots**

**A gathering prayer:**

Lord God, giver of light and life, by your word you bring everything into being – the far-flung galaxies and the tiniest atomic particle. You have given us a world to enjoy and to care for. Give us compassion in the use of its resources, wisdom in our stewardship of your gifts, and reverence for all that you have made – for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

**Hymn: H&P 492/StF 76 Give me joy in my heart**

**Prayers:** **Thanksgiving:**

O God, through your might and power the world was created, and through it now the world is changed, and ever changing. Perhaps not in the way we would have expected. Help us in this period of uncertainty to hold fast to our faith and trust in you. We read in the Scriptures of how you changed and continual to change people’s lives as witnessed from the stories and experiences of saints old and new. Thank you for the unswerving devotion and sacrifice of many in our communities. We also thank and praise you for all many changes you have made and are still making in our lives. We thank and praise you for the gift of your Holy Spirit who gives us guidance courage, fortitude, personal reassurance and the blessing of your everlasting peace. **Amen.**

**Prayer of Confession:**

God of grace, where we have lacked integrity, **cleanse and anoint us in Jesus' name.**
Where we have been complacent, **cleanse and anoint us in Jesus' name.**
Where we have been deaf to your voice or rejected your call, **cleanse and anoint us in Jesus' name.**
Where we have been quick to criticise and slow to affirm, **cleanse and anoint us in Jesus' name.**
**For we are truly sorry.**
**Amen. *(These 3 prayers including leaving prayer are taken from Roots)***

**Readings/Sermon:** Psalm 86. 1-13 **Mark 1.4-11** Rev chpt 21 vs 1-4 Rev Chpt 22 vs 1-5

**Returning Home**

**Disorientation:**

Living in our current environment with Corvid 19 understandably has created difficulties on many levels. Our NHS is at breaking point and where other acute illnesses are having to be put on hold. Disruption to our mode of living, through self-isolation, unemployment, homelessness, bereavement, or the destabilizing of many of the world’s economies. Subsequently this has made its mark in many areas of our lives. It has too, taken its toll as noted by the increase in related Mental Health issues.

The continual changes regarding lockdown will have left many unsure as to their future. All of which has created a sense of disorientation. On a lesser level it is where we can find ourselves losing our sense of time even day of the week.

This sense of disorientation is the underlying message of Psalm 86. It also provides the opportunity for us to use it for personal reflection when all is not right with either our world or ourselves; when we face grief, pain, or bewilderment. Initially the sense of bewilderment seems to pervade the psalm for example you read in verse 1 the psalmist cries “Hear O Lord, and answer me for I am poor and needy” But then in vs 5 declares, “You O Lord, are good and forgiving abounding in love to all who call you” But then rawness soon follows “Show me a sign of your favour” but at the end of the psalm we find David comes through with the words of previous blessings of reassurance “You Lord have helped me and comforted me”.

What also stands out is the roller coaster of emotions which David experienced. All of this provides reassurance for us, pleas, life’s challenges, and lament provide opportunities to open out our prayers to God.

The Pandemic has certainly left its mark upon the world and has given cause for a sense of disorientation.

**Reconstruction:**

“Man plans and God laughs” which is a derivative from the poet Robby Burns “The best laid plans of mice and men go aft wary” which itself is a misquote.

Perhaps the virus has “sharply pulled us up” that we are not in control of our own destiny as we thought. Unknowingly we have wrongly shielded ourselves from many of life’s uncertainties and realities. By way of a practical example, if we are too hot or cold, we either turn up the air conditioning or central heating whilst at the same time we pollute our atmosphere and have created “global warming” which explains the contrast in weather in different parts of the world. Alternatively, we stockpile food in our cupboards or freezers. To protect our health, we avail ourselves of the various screening processes or medical treatments without looking at some of the possible causes which could help in reversing the situation, for example the complexities and stresses of modern day living. Alongside this, there are those due to their circumstances, living in intolerable conditions or political instability all of which creates insecurity and an uncertain future. For them they do not know what tomorrow will bring. And yes, the pandemic has put life on hold where many have lost loved ones that they too face an uncertain future.

Although before the Pandemic we were aware of the plight of others the virus has enabled us more time to reflect, to take an inner gaze and to re-prioritise as to what is important. Equally we can more fully empathise with others. It can too, not only enable us to realise the precariousness of life but in our vulnerability, it can point us to a greater interdependency of one another. Although the Corvid 19 posters “Keep your distance” helps to reinforce self-distancing it has also created many difficulties, particularly when we were created to be social animals. God loves to speak and communicate with us. On the positive side some families have said how helpful the bubble has opened greater communication within the family.

Many of you will be aware of the new year’s honours list. As always it becomes a contentious issue. There is, however, a list that has not appeared, the Roll of honour of all those in the front line who unselfishly sacrificed their lives for others. But God has them in mind!

What we will have found that life cannot be the same again. It will inevitably involve reviewing, challenging, taking down and reconstructing many facets of our lives – which can be a painful process – but it can also be an enlightening process too!

**Revised Planning?**

The account of Jesus baptism from Mark is very apt in relation to our current situation as it underlines what we have been thinking about.

The gift of the Spirit kick-started Jesus’ ministry. It was also symbolic, for through his baptism being placed below the water he was dying to his old way of life and by rising from the water was rising to a new life a new beginning. It was also signifying too, the process or a journey of changing one’s mind, heart, and self. Although not out of choice COVID-19 has laid the path open for our own personal reflection.

The Greek word and translation associated with this is *metanoia* in that it invites people to look towards a new future where one repents of old mistakes and new possibilities can open. It can also describe multiple moments or “snapshots” of our lives so far, where our opinions and perspectives on reality are questioned and where we can more deeply think about things than before, to question the world around us and to ask whether the world must be the way it is.  Sometimes doubting and questioning makes us realize more profoundly the nature of things and how strongly we feel about it. It has too, to be a continual quest.

John’s mission was to prepare the way for the Lord – to create the circumstances in which change could happen. He built a group of people whose lives were oriented towards the promise of a new future, ready and waiting for Jesus. His call was pointed to the steady, patient work of preparation, laying the foundations for all that Jesus would do. Do we value his contribution towards preparing the way for Jesus highly enough? Do we value our own work enough when it does not lead to immediate change but demands steady, patient commitment and preparation, as we wait to see what God is going to do? How can we open the door for others to experience metanoia and to a new, fresh way of life? Jesus experienced many challenges and disappointments during his ministry, but he was steadfast and faithful even up to his dying moments on the cross.

**Homeward Bound – Paradise Regained**

In our reading from Revelations, we are challenged further. Just as Jesus acknowledged his calling and commissioning to follow his Heavenly Father, we are too. To be faithful in our allegiance to him and to follow his word, that is, if we are to gain a close relationship with God - which was his intention from the beginning. It will be a returning home where there will be no longer death or mourning, crying or pain and the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearlingtogether; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. **Amen**

**Hymn: H&P 183/StF 289 When my love for Christ grows weak**

**Intercessory Prayers:**

Eternal God, it feels as if the whole world has changed and yet in you there is stability and the opportunity of a new beginning. So, we pray now for those whose lives are in turmoil, those whose lives have been turned upside down, those who feel lost. May they feel supported, find fresh hope,

**and use our prayers in Jesus’ name to strengthen them.**

We pray for those for whom the lockdown has come as a relief, for those who now feel safer,
but we pray too for those who now feel desperate, alone and worried about their jobs, their finances, their mental health. May they feel supported, find fresh hope: **Lord, use our prayers in Jesus’ name to strengthen them.**

We pray for children and young adults as their schooling is disrupted, we pray for those who enjoy learning from home, but pray too for those who will lose confidence, who miss their friends, who feel vulnerable. We remember their parents and the parents of children with special needs,
struggling to cope on their own. We pray for teachers, administrative staff, and all those who feel overwhelmed. May they feel supported, find fresh hope:
**Lord, use our prayers in Jesus’ name to strengthen them.**

We pray for the people of a divided America at this time of political and racial tension and transition, for outgoing President Donald Trump and President-elect Joe Biden. We pray too for countries around the world struggling with ethnic violence and militancy. We remember the people of West Africa and in particular the people of Niger, villagers who live in fear, those who have been wounded in recent attacks and those who have been bereaved. May they feel supported, find fresh hope:
**Lord, use our prayers in Jesus’ name to strengthen them.**

We pray for those who have been injured or lost their homes and loved ones in the severe weather, remembering particularly the people of Norway affected by landslides, and those in Australia battered by cyclones.
We pray for those who work in the emergency services, those whose work is dangerous and traumatic. We pray for those in refugees camps with little protection from the weather, those who sleep rough, those who can't afford to heat their homes. May they feel supported, find fresh hope:

**Lord, use our prayers in Jesus’ name to strengthen them.**

We pray for one another, our families, our communities, our church fellowships. May we support those who are unwell or grieving. May we bring fresh hope to those who feel forgotten and are vulnerable, and may we – both practically and prayerfully – share our faith in your Son Jesus in whose name we entrust these prayers to you. **Amen.**

**Lord’s Prayer:**

 **Hymn: H&P 804/StF 415 The Church in every age**

**Leaving Prayer:**

Loving God, we look to a time when your kingdom shall come and there will be an end to suffering, sorrow, evil, and injustice. But we cannot leave all that simply to another time and place. You call us to work for your kingdom here and now, to give our all in bringing it closer here on earth. Help us through who and what we are, through all we do or say, to make your love more real in the daily round of life and those with have the opportunity to share our lives with. **Amen.**