**Worship sheet for Sunday 4th July 2021**

**Compiled by Barbara Spencer of Berkley Street Methodist Church, St Neots**

**Call to worship: “**Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One, is here”

**Hymn:** 317 (StF): At the name of Jesus <https://youtu.be/r4d4UXSJXig>

**Prayers:** Gracious God, heavenly Father, as we join our prayers with your family everywhere, we come with praise and thanksgiving for all that you are and all that you have given to us. We thank you that you love us, whatever happens, and that your love is manifest in the provision of your creation. We thank you, too, for the generosity of so many people, especially noticeable during the past year. We thank you for the people who have given their time, energy, and knowledge to make life better, and continue to do so…

We are sorry for the times when we have misused your gifts or have been unappreciative…

We live in a world that seems to take pleasure in being negative and bringing others down and are sorry if we have participated in any way. So often we are misled by the pressures of society to conform with material things or attitudes. Enable us to be positive and confident in you even when times are difficult… Lord forgive us and help us to follow more closely in the way that Jesus taught us. In his name, we pray.

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Reading:** Mark 6: 1-13

**Hymn:** 404 (StF): God’s spirit is in my heart <https://youtu.be/nzi2q2m65mA>

My mother used sayings a lot. One of them was “familiarity breeds contempt”. It seems that it could be applied to the people of Nazareth at the time of this reading. Jesus had been back to his hometown before, but this time he arrived as a rabbi, a teacher. At first, he was well-received but then some of his listeners couldn’t take his teaching. It was at odds with what they wanted to hear. They had known Jesus since he was a boy. He had not been educated in the way of the Rabbis, so how could he be right? He was of no importance; what right had *he* to teach?! How could they have faith in such a person? This was in spite of the fact that he had healed several people. After they had questioned his authenticity, he was unable to heal anyone. Status was more important to them than ability and outcome. He accepted he could not help them. I think we need to recognise that there is a right moment for change too. It is often difficult and requires perception and patience. If the change is for the right reason, then the opportunity will arise.

Jesus sent out the Twelve, in twos, to the surrounding villages to teach and heal. They were successful and amazed at their success. Jesus taught them well. He also made them realise that faith in him was sufficient. By being unencumbered with material goods they found that the villagers responded with generosity, as people often do. None of the Twelve had status but all were accepted and their faith in Jesus enabled them to teach and heal in unexpected ways. However, Jesus told them again, if they were not welcome anywhere they should not persist. They did not carry a bag, which could be used for begging, and shaking off the dust was symbolic to mean that the people would not find a place in heaven.

Perhaps there is a necessity not to view people well-known to us as being incapable. I have often been surprised when I have discovered someone’s hidden talent. Maybe you have had the same experience and have thought “Well, would you believe it?!”. Someone told me of her sporting prowess when young. I couldn’t imagine her playing hockey to such a high level! What might people say of you? Do you, and they, acknowledge your gifts, or are they so familiar as to be dismissed? Could they be used for God’s Kingdom here? No fancy trappings are needed, just you and faith in Jesus – just like the Twelve!

**Hymn:** 286 (StF): What kind of love is this <https://youtu.be/4cQf231N918>

**Reading:** 2 Corinthians 12: 2-10

When I read the Bible I am often surprised at how it speaks to modern times. The gospel reading today spoke of people’s unwillingness to accept that someone they knew could be capable of something amazing. The Corinthians had another trait of modern times. Paul’s opponents were boasting that they were better than he was. He was obliged to counter their arguments by detailing his experiences of suffering for Christ and then goes on to recount his revelations/visions – more recent than his Damascus Road encounter. Once again, he has not been dependent on the Corinthians for his needs but has performed “wonders and signs and miracles” – his opponents have not. He has an affliction, which keeps him grounded, but his faith persists whatever may befall him. In spite of everything, his boasting is about Jesus, not himself. He is more concerned that his hearers should understand and experience the love of Christ. He is not trying to achieve status, although he is a leader and teacher.

We live in a competitive world. Sometimes competition is good. It enables progress. It has to be assessed. Are we being competitive for the right reasons? Is someone boasting just for status or because they don’t have self-confidence or a sense of self-worth? Is that why such awful things are being written in the press and on social media? Is God given the priority he deserves? Are the teachings of Jesus the ones followed or are those of society easier? How to choose! Why?

I nearly selected “How deep the Father’s love for us” <https://youtu.be/3IQUXJ_H16Y> but it needs some explanation. However, it reminds us that Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice because God loves us and so that we may have eternal love and eternal life. That ***is*** the only thing we can truly boast about. No other competition comes even close! That’s not to say that we cannot have pleasure in achievements, either ours or someone else’s. We should celebrate the gifts that God has given to us - and others. Let us be bold for Christ – winners in God’s Kingdom!

**Hymn:** 566 (StF): Take my life and let it be <https://youtu.be/Gf11rReeWIs>

**Prayers for others:** Lord, we hear so many negative stories about people and situations. Often they are biased or inaccurate, but always hurtful to someone… We pray that you will enable the truth to prevail.

We hear of people suffering because of neglect or abuse, of many kinds… sometimes they are victims of someone else’s need for power or greed… We remember those who are caught up in wars, suffering through no fault of their own. We pray that they will find relief and justice.

We pray for the many who have found the past year especially difficult and have struggled with loneliness, poor mental health, inadequate care or other restraints…

We remember those who are selfless in their giving to others – of their time, talents or money.

We pray for all who are in authority and ask that they will not be flattered by status but will work for peace and justice… We pray for politicians who are having to make major decisions in this country and internationally. We ask that they will be mindful of the needs of the people and less of their own status.

As the restrictions over the current pandemic are likely to be eased, we ask that everyone will continue to make the right decisions and that the effects of the virus will reduce. We pray for students and teachers as they return to a more normal way of education. So many have been adversely affected over the past year…

We pray for those who feel inadequate and who feel that they have to be aggressive to become noticed; for those who feel that no-one listens to them or understands their needs; for those who feel threatened by change or the demands of others…

We pray for those struggling to maintain businesses and work...

We pray for your church worldwide and, in particular, Berkley Street, that your gospel of love will be proclaimed and enacted.

We pray for ourselves and ask that we may be the people you want us to be, ever mindful of the commandments Jesus gave us – that we should love you and that we should love our neighbour as ourselves.

**Hymn:** 418 (StF) We have a gospel to proclaim<https://youtu.be/I5wWRYq57EM> orThese are the days of Elijah <https://youtu.be/WA2_LM3fm_E>

**Benediction**: “’Tis Jesus the first and the last, whose spirit will guide us safe home; we’ll praise him for all that is past, and trust him for all that’s to come.” May we go in peace to follow where Jesus leads.