West Sussex Area Ministry, United Reformed Church (Billingshurst, Petworth and Pulborough)

**Bulletin for Sunday 29th January 2021**

Good morning to you all!

I know worshipping at home can be hard, whether on Zoom or following this order of service (or, indeed, in any other way). Some suggestions which might help:

If you work at a desk with your computer during the week, is it possible to move somewhere different for worship?

Can you create a calm worship space, with less distractions, and perhaps a helpful focus, such as a cross, Bible, appropriate picture, or even some flowers?

Perhaps sit quietly before worship for a few minutes - think about what you hope for in worship; focus on God; and pray for your loved ones and community…

Then let’s begin our worship by praising the living God as we sing:

Hymn: Morning has broken (R&S 45)

Prayer: Living God, we are called to recognise that

all authority in heaven and on earth belongs to you.

We pray that we may feel your presence with us,

and that you will guide our thoughts and prayers,

giving us real confidence in our faith… and in our lives.

We ask your blessing on everything we do,

and everything we give in your service,

today and every day. Amen

followed by The Lord’s Prayer

Reading: Mark chapter 1 verses 21-28

Reflection: For most of us it’s a long time since we were pupils at school. But I suspect I’m not the only one who can remember the difference between those teachers who taught (and managed a classroom) with natural authority… and the ones who didn’t and couldn’t. I can still hear, in memory, the racket a class makes when they are out of control… Presumably the people in that Capernaum synagogue were largely adults, and there because they wanted to be, unlike an unruly class of schoolchildren, but they equally clearly recognised the difference that real authority makes in teaching. I could feel sorry for the scribes, who were so unfavourably compared to Jesus. Did they, perhaps, lack personal conviction in what they taught? Jesus certainly didn’t.

Another word for authority is power. It doesn’t always mean quite the same thing, but it adds to our understanding of this passage if we bear in mind that Jesus is exercising both natural authority and power. Healing the man with the unclean spirit was something which others were unable to do - it was an action which took the authority of Jesus’ teaching to a new level. Not just a trick to impress, or to draw attention, it was the practical outworking of his teaching - it was the tangible expression of God’s love for everybody.

Jesus’ teaching and healing were both part of his conviction, his faith, his love… who he was… May we understand… and follow… Amen

Hymn: Hail to the Lord’s Anointed (R&S 127)

Prayer: God of our fast-moving, ever-changing, world:

we pray for the powerful leaders of the nations -

that they may exercise authority with justice and wisdom;

we pray for all in the NHS, and for care workers;

for those involved in vaccinating;

for teachers, parents, and especially children…

We hold before you our communities and our loved ones,

and the many who are anxious, lonely, ill or grieving;

and we pray for ourselves, that we may be guided by you.

Hear all the prayers of all our hearts… Amen

Hymn: From heaven you came, helpless babe (R&S 522)

Blessing: May we recognise God’s authority in our world;

and may the blessing of God,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

be with us and with all those we love

this week and always. Amen

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Quite a few of you will remember Revd Peter McIntosh, who sadly died this week. There is a brief tribute on the URC website:

<https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/3706-the-revd-peter-mcintosh-1938-2021>

We continue to worship on Zoom each Sunday at 10.30am and 6.00pm.

And there’s a chance to chat at the 11.30 ‘After Church Coffee’ Zooms.

All are very welcome - contact me for more details if you would like them.

We intend to run a series of Lent meetings on Tuesday evenings, based on the book, ‘God of Surprises’, by Gerard Hughes. More details available.

Anne Lewitt phone (01798) 872535 email [aelewitt@gmail.com](mailto:aelewitt@gmail.com)