



Welcome to Blackburn Baptist Church, on May 16th 2021 at 10:30, meeting once more at Bethesda Chapel. Today, we join with thousands of Baptists around the globe as we share together in a Broadcast Service from the Baptist Assembly, held on-line. It's a different format, but wherever we are, we are part of the Baptist family and we come to share together in worship today.

(The lifting of lockdown restrictions has resulted in the decision to meet in person at Bethesda Chapel once again. We still plan to use our YouTube channel to broadcast the services, and will continue to provide this written service sheet for those unable to attend Bethesda. We hope and pray that you will find this outline of our service helpful, as we all seek to worship God as a Church family, wherever we are.)

So today, we may be meeting at Bethesda, but we are watching the screen. There is a sign language interpreter at the bottom right hand corner of the screen, busily signing for those who are hard of hearing (part of a team, it takes so much concentration that it is only possible to sign for a limited period of time!)

As we sit and wait for our service to begin, we can listen to songs, extolling that Jesus is Lord of all.

It's not the traditional format for a time of worship that we would normally expect, but rather a time to share together, exploring different aspects of church life, and coming from a studio "set". **Our time together begins with introductions and welcomes** from Megan Chester and Adrian Semerene, our hosts for the morning. Megan works for BMS World Mission, and Adrian is the lead Pastor at Gamlingay Baptist Church - its between Stevenage and Peterborough!! Adrian has a transatlantic accent and is fluent in both English and Spanish, though he sticks to English today!

Adrian gives us a flavour of some of the things to be included in our worship today - welcoming all those newly accredited Baptist Ministers and Mission Personnel, praying for both the outgoing and incoming Presidents, hearing more about BMS World Mission, and listening to Shane Claiborne our keynote speaker over this weekend, who is from Philadelphia, USA, and one of the leaders of Red-letter Church there.

Adrian prays, as we begin our worship together: "Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that you are an awesome, amazing, loving, gracious God who is in control of all things. We thank you that this morning, though we cannot be gathered together in the flesh, we are still gathered virtually together in the thousands to worship you with one voice, united by Christ. Lord we thank you for all you have yet to share with us this morning and we give over this service to you, that you would urge us, stretch

us, challenge us, remind us of just who you are Lord. We long to hear from you this morning, again open our eyes to see you clearly, clear our ears to hear you clearly, that we be further transformed by your spirit. We pray all of these things in Jesus precious and awesome name. Amen."

After the welcome, young people from **Vision**, a group from the Rossendale Valley lead us as they play and sing (and rap!!) a song new to many, entitled "With me all along" . Recorded at home, we can all listen to (or read) the words, and take it to heart. A quiet, reflective song with a heavy beat, its followed by a bright song of praise led by a music group from Goole, Uganda. Whilst the young people's video shows a variety of instruments being played, and a large number of children and young people singing, all in their own homes, with the video then being edited so that we see and hear them all together, the choir from Uganda (10 in total) are all singing together, in what appears to be a tent, accompanied by two guitarists. They are all wearing clothes made from matching fabric in flamboyant colours, as is common in African communities, and are very enthusiastic!

The young people sing together "With me all along."

"My world was falling down all around me, the waves of depression could have drowned me, I couldn't see a future through all of the pain, but I knew even then you were carrying me,

When I had nobody you didn't let me go, I wasn't on my own, I know you were with me all along. You were with me, oh you were with me all along. You were with me, oh you were with me all along.

I was closing my eyes but I couldn't sleep, had thoughts on my mind that I couldn't speak, silenced by darkness and all of my fears, but you told me that I could cast my cares....

When I had nobody you didn't let me go, I wasn't on my own, I know you were with me all along. You were with me, oh you were with me all along. You were with me, oh you were with me all along.

And I'm cold and alone I know God we're always together, and I can't remember a time when I couldn't feel your presence ,it was never taken from me. You make it better 'cause Lord you are here with me forever and ever.

They try to keep me down but you lift me up, they try to keep me down but I won't give up. They try to keep me down but you lift me up, they try to keep me down but I won't give up.

You were with me all along. You were with me, oh you were with me all along. You were with me, oh you were with me all along. When I had nobody you didn't let me go, you were with me, oh you were with me all along."

Now from Uganda, a change of pace and mood:

"If we call to him he will answer us,
if we run to him he will run to us,
if we lift our hands he will lift us up,
come and praise his name, all you saints of God!
 Oh sing for joy to God our strength,
 oh sing for joy to God our strength, our strength.

Draw near to him he's here with us,
give him your love he's in love with us,
he will heal our hearts,
he will cleanse our hands,
if we rend our hearts he will heal our land.
 Oh sing for joy to God our strength,
 oh sing for joy to God our strength, our strength."

We now see and hear from Rev Lynn Green, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union of Gt Britain. She leads us as we **pray together over and for Geoff Colmer**, our new President. We were told at the AGM yesterday how 2020 had been even more of an unexpected year for Geoff than for many of us, as in July last year he was admitted to hospital and diagnosed with multiple myeloma , a form of bone marrow cancer, in his back. He was discharged some weeks later with a full back brace and having received aggressive chemotherapy, and is about to undergo a stem cell transplant now he is in remission. He gave thanks to God for his recovery.

Geoff has asked Sarah Crane and Colin Norris to pray with him this morning, as he undertakes this presidential year. "Attentive to the rhythms of grace" will be the theme of the year, and we pray that we too will be attentive to these rhythms.

In prayer, Colin and Sarah share:

"As he serves among us, may he, and may we, receive grace to be committed to the way of Christ, faithful to the call of Christ, discerning the mind of Christ, offering the welcome of Christ growing in the likeness of Christ engaging in the mission of Christ in the world that belongs to Christ and so may God father son and holy spirit bless preserve and keep you enabling you to remain faithful to all that you have entered into this day. Amen"

As well as welcoming and praying for Geoff, **we also want to pray for those who have recently transferred as fully accredited Ministers, Pastors and Preachers, and Mission Personnel**. As we gather virtually, we will be doing things differently this year and we have an opportunity, if we go on the website, to watch videos from each of these people, so in fact we will be able to find out more about them than we are usually able to know! Normally we see them walk across the stage and shake a

hand, but this year that's not possible. However, perhaps we can use the videos as a tool to pray for these friends, which would encourage them and perhaps inspire us all.

All those to be welcomed are then asked, by Lynn, to affirm their commitment to Jesus Christ in his kingdom before we pray for them.

"Today we commit ourselves to being those who are led by the spirit of God seek gods will and purpose. Celebrating diversity we will value, trust and respect one another, in Christ. Being serious about discipleship we will embrace adventure and risk, taking faith in our faithful God. Following the servant king we will be generous in spirit, encouraging and inspiring one another to be all that God created us to be. Seeking Gods kingdom we will hunger and thirst after his righteousness, confronting evil and praying for the grace to live the life of gods coming kingdom, now. These are our hopes and these are all clear intentions."

Led by Kang-san Tan General Director, BMS World Mission, they all respond:

"And so we say together: we hear your call and dedicate ourselves to you afresh. Amen"

Ken-sang Tan then prays for all those newly transferred, leading into prayers for the wider world.

Lynn hands back to Megan, who introduces "**Virtual Sunday school**" and their take on the Bible passage for today - the parable of the sheep and the goats.

The narrator is constantly interrupted by an off screen voice. He is trying to make it "more relatable" - by amending the sheep and goats to Star Wars and Star Trek characters, whilst the off screen voice gets more irate, insisting on a straight reading!

This was followed by a traditional rendition of the passage, but perhaps the Star Wars/Star Trek version gave a different perspective on a familiar reading, and led us to think afresh of what Christ himself was saying.

At this point we welcomed back Shane Claiborne, who had pre-recorded his message in view of the time difference between UK and US! There was also a parental warning, as talks about issues with which he is confronted in a deprived area of Philadelphia, some of which are, thank God, alien to our society.

He began by sharing a little of his Christian journey, how he was brought up in a strong christian culture, and that at times this meant it was easy to believe in Jesus but more difficult to live as a disciple and follower of Jesus. When he read about some of the radical things that Jesus said, such as sell everything and give it to the poor, love our enemies, the first shall become last and the last first, it all became very confusing. As a high flying student, he remembered a Pastor saying we need to be careful if we start on the ladder of success, as on our way up we may pass Jesus on his way down.

He commented that as we look at Jesus we see the one who left the comfort of heaven to join the struggle here on earth, pulling us towards the margins of the

world. The kingdom of God is upside down, and we need to be ready for the 'good trouble', to build the world that God dreams of. Perhaps we need to be reminded that the world has become too adjusted to injustice, to racism, to inequity between rich and poor, and we need to become maladjusted as Dr Martin Luther King said many years ago!.

He feels that our faith has to manifest itself in acts of compassion, our works do not earn our salvation, but demonstrate our salvation, so that we are not just worshippers on a Sunday morning. He stressed that we need to hold together faith and works, personal salvation and social justice.

He shared some of the ways in which he demonstrates his faith, and its outworking in his life and situation. One thing in which he is involved is transforming guns into useful objects that can themselves demonstrate love rather than hate, such as gardening implements, trowels, and he also showed his passion to care for and work with those involved in drug abuse.

This was not your average either sermon or Bible exposition, but maybe it gave food for thought as to different ways of sharing God's love with a very broken world.

Possibly in response to this unconventional message, **Ben Drabble, on behalf of BMS World Mission, gave an update on the desperate situation in India.** BMS have responded with a recent donation to India, but further aid is needed as the situation in Nepal deteriorates -**Dipak Rai shared sad news.** Young leaders of the Baptist Church have died from coronavirus this week, 50% of all tests are positive, only 1% of the population have so far been able to be vaccinated. More vaccine has now been made available, but there is now a need for fridges, transportation boxes and other vital equipment. If everyone watching this morning were able to donate £3 we could fund all the equipment requested, with any additional funds being used to pay for oxygen concentration machines for both Nepal and India - a chance to live out the message of Matthew 25. A link for donations was displayed on the screen at this point whilst Kang-san Tan prayed for India and Nepal, leading into wider prayers for the world, and prayers of confession.

"Turn our eyes upon Jesus. Jesus, the Saviour of a broken world, God move our hearts."

Back to Megan and Adrian who lead us in a time of silence enabling us to listen to God.

Our time together draws to a close with more music; first from Mill Hill East Church and finally the choir from Uganda:

First a quieter reflective song "You are here, moving in our midst."

You are here, moving in our midst
I worship You I worship You.
You are here working in this place
I worship You I worship You.

Waymaker, miracle worker, promise keeper,
Light in the darkness;
My God, that is who You are.
Waymaker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper
Light in the darkness;
My God that is who You are.

You are here, touching every heart,
I worship You, I worship You.
You are here, turning lives around
I worship You, I worship You.
Waymaker, Miracle Worker....

Even when I can't see it, You're working
Even when I don't feel it, You're working.
You never stop, You never stop working
You never stop, You never stop working.
Even when I can't see it, You're working....
Waymaker, Miracle Worker....

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The Ugandan choir then sing together:

"I know he rescued my soul, his blood has covered my sin,
I believe, I believe.
My shame he's taken away, my pain is healed in his name,
I believe yes I believe.
I'll raise a banner, my Lord has conquered the grave,
my Redeemer lives, my Redeemer lives,
my Redeemer lives, my Redeemer lives, he lives.
You lift my burden, I'll rise with you,
I'm dancing on this mountaintop to see your kingdom come:
My Redeemer lives....in me."

Back to Megan and Adrian, who gave **thanks for all joining together** this morning - at one stage there were more than 5000 devices logged on, making it the biggest ever gathering of UK Baptists. They shared that all sessions from this weekend have been recorded and are available on the website so can be viewed by friends. They pray that we may be able to take what we have heard and shared into our lives over the coming weeks. We were encouraged that wherever we are on the "Back to church" journey, we can listen to what God is saying, what to pick up and what to let go. They expressed thanks to all the speakers, to the interpreters, to all involved - whether seen and unseen- and of course all the IT team.

Our time together closes with Adrian saying:

"May the Lord bless you and keep you, would the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you, would the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace."

(Should you wish to make a donation to either the Nepal appeal specifically, BMS generally, or to help cover the costs of the Assembly, Paul Carter will pass on any cheques received, made payable to either BMS World Mission or Leamington Road Baptist Church)

We hope you'll be able to join us for virtual fellowship:

Sundays at 11.45, Meeting ID: 962 5576 8258, Passcode: 491306.

Wednesdays at 2.30pm Meeting ID: 954 0425 3654, Passcode: 064246.and the Prayer meeting on Thursdays at 7.30pm. Meeting ID: 923 9680 7071, Passcode: 411034

Its very easy to join on the phone, and it would be lovely to hear your voices again!

Just ring 02034 815237, then use the ID and password as above when you are prompted.