



Stamford Methodist Church and Circuit



Order of Worship : Sunday 18th April 2021 **led by Rev'd William Booker, Circuit Minister**

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Song as people gather -

All heaven declares the glory of the risen Lord;
who can compare with the beauty of the Lord?
Forever he will be the Lamb upon the throne;
I gladly bow the knee, and worship him alone.

Welcome

Call to worship: 1 John 4:9-10:

God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.,,,God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.

Hymn – The strife is o'er, the battle done:

The strife is o'er, the battle done;
Now is the Victor's triumph won;
O let the song of praise be sung.
Alleluia!

Death's mightiest powers have done their worst,
And Jesus hath his foes dispersed;
Let shouts of praise and joy outburst.
Alleluia!

On the third morn he rose again
Glorious in majesty to reign;
O let us swell the joyful strain.
Alleluia!

He brake the age-bound chains of hell;
The bars from heaven's high portals fell;
Let hymns of praise his triumph tell.
Alleluia!

Lord, by the stripes which wounded thee
From death's dread sting thy servants free,
That we may live, and sing to thee.
Alleluia!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, you come to us offering your victory over the power of sin, the power of death, and the power of evil. You offer us freedom from these, and healing, but we must let your love into our lives and, as you offer us your life, so we must offer you ours. As our risen Lord, we ask you now to fill us:

onto our places of shame and guilt, as for Peter who denied you, shine your light into our fears, as for Mary Magdalene, may we discover you before and with us, into our lack of faith, as for Thomas, speak to us, "Stop doubting and believe".

touch our wounds within - the places wounded by sin – our own sin and that of others, and upon our resentments, speak your word of loving challenge – "no-one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again,"

and, as for the first disciples, call us saying, "Follow me, and I will make you..."

SILENCE

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

Christ himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds we have been healed. Thanks be to God!

Collect:

Christ our friend, you ask for our love in spite of our betrayal. Give us courage to embrace forgiveness, know you again, and trust ourselves in you; we pray in your name. Amen.

Reading:- Ezekiel 47:1-12

The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple towards the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar. He then brought me out through the north gate and led me round the outside to the outer gate facing east, and the water was trickling from the south side.

As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep. He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist. He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in – a river that no one could cross. He asked me, 'Son of man, do you see this?'

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. He said to me, 'This water flows towards the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, [where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live. Fishermen will stand along the shore; from En Gedi to En Eglaim there will be places for spreading nets. The fish will be of many kinds – like the fish of the Mediterranean Sea. But the swamps and marshes will not become fresh; they will be left for salt. Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.'

Address: from Helen Walton of the Leprosy Mission and Dame Darcey Bussell:

Helen Walton: Thank you for asking me to speak and share with you our 2021 World Leprosy Sunday campaign, "UNCONDITIONAL", coming alongside people affected by leprosy in Mozambique. Every penny raised before April 24th will be doubled by UK government. In Mozambique in 2019 there 2,200 new cases of leprosy, 211 of them were children; 2 in 3 people live in extreme poverty on less than 1.9 dollars a day, and 53% of the girls are married before the age of 18.

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The theme of this talk is looking ahead to the glorious restoration that God has promised through his one and only Son Jesus Christ who came to earth as Emmanuel (God with us). Let us begin with prayer: Father God, please speak to us as we look into your word. Give us deeper understanding of your love and restoration, freely available through your Son Jesus Christ. Amen.

At the beginning of the sixth century BC the global superpower was Babylon. Its king Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and took 10,000 people of Judah into exile. One of those exiles was a man in his mid twenties called Ezekiel. Five years later God called Ezekiel as a prophet to the exiles in Babylon. The people of Judah, including Ezekiel, believed that their identity was bound up in God's place, Jerusalem – in God's presence symbolised by his temple. Some believed this meant that Jerusalem could never face ruin, but Ezekiel recognised that God's people had not kept their covenant with the Lord, and that this would have consequences. He prophesied that God's presence would leave the temple and that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and this happened in 587 BC. But 14 years after the fall of Jerusalem Ezekiel received a remarkable vision of the temple being restored. In the vision the glory of the Lord enters the temple again. It is a wonderful symbol that the Lord would return to be among the people he loved again. Chapter 47 is a continuation of this vision which we are going to look at under three headings:

NO MATTER HOW FAR
NO MATTER HOW LONG
NO MATTER WHAT.

I remember going with my family to NASA in Texas and as I looked through the windows into the famous control centre I imagined the many there who would have witnessed the landing on the moon and those who would have helped Apollo 13 limp back to Earth. The size of the rockets laid on their sides was immense. But I would suggest that the best tour on Earth wouldn't be as the tour that Ezekiel experienced in his vision. He had an incredible guided tour of the temple in Jerusalem. He sees water flowing out of the temple. A man with measuring equipment guides him through the vision leads him through water that becomes increasingly deep until no-one can cross it. Ezekiel is told that the river empties into the Dead Sea and the water there becomes fresh. That is remarkable, because no plant or fish can live in the Dead Sea because its salt concentration is 8½ times that of typical sea water. In the vision the Dead sea is full of fish and fruit trees grow on the river bank. It is a beautiful picture of the lengths that God will go to to bring blessings and life to his people to show them that he loves them. It is a reminder to God's people in exile that he would bring a remnant of them back into their land if they take hold of God's promise and put their trust in him.

Gabriel is a community health worker specially trained by The Leprosy mission to travel, find and cure people with leprosy in northern Mozambique. Every day he travels miles on his motor bike on red dirt roads in baking heat to reach people in the remote parts of

Cabo de Gardo, the most northerly part of Mozambique, only slightly larger than Scotland. The average Mozambique man must walk over an hour to their nearest health facility, so when Gabriel arrives with a cure for leprosy he is greeted with excitement and shouts of joy because people know he has come to help. Thanks to his expertise a person diagnosed with leprosy can experience God's unconditional love. I wonder how far you and I would go to show someone that we love them? Someone was once baptised by immersion in a paddling pool in a church. The paddling pool wasn't huge so people were baptised forwards from a kneeling position rather than submerged backwards. There was a man so tall that as he was baptised water gushed over the top of the pool and flowed down over the raised platform into the church. The minister remarked that it reminded him of the message in Ezekiel 47. Of course the water from the pool wasn't able to bring life or healing. But in Ezekiel's vision the leaves of the trees bring healing. To a people scarred by exile this offers great hope. God's people in exile were patiently waiting for the restoration that God had promised. Perhaps you feel you have been waiting for the Lord for a long time to bring you healing to your life, physically or emotionally. Let this passage encourage you that, however long your exile seems to last, the Lord has promised that, as a follower of Jesus, you will enjoy his presence for ever.

When people in Zania's village realised that she had leprosy they banished her to the bush. Together with her young son she became homeless. When people came to take her three year old boy back to the village she was devastated and heartbroken. Without food or medicine Zania's body became increasingly weak. She hit rock bottom. But by the grace of God a stranger found her and built her a hut to shelter her. And took her to a health post where her leprosy was diagnosed and cured. Leprosy Changemakers, trained by The Leprosy Mission were able to go to Zania's village and teach the villagers about leprosy and how it can be easily cured. Now Zania has trained as a Leprosy Changemaker herself. She is able to recognise the early signs of leprosy and has made it her mission to encourage others to do the same. Leprosy need not exist today. It only exists because of the lack of medical care, fear and ignorance. But you can help to change this today by partnering with the Leprosy Changemakers of Mozambique. The Book of Ezekiel finishes on a triumphant note as it speaks of exiles returning to Jerusalem and the city being named "The Lord is there". A remnant of the people of Judah did return to their land. The temple was rebuilt, but the Bible doesn't speak about God's glory returning to the temple; but hundreds of years later God's own son, present with the Father through eternity, came to earth as "Emmanuel" - "God with us". Jesus referred to himself as the temple, announcing that he would be killed and raised to life. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins, and he has bought us atonement (at-one-ment) with God. We can know his presence with us through the Holy Spirit within us, and we will be at one with God forever in God's new creation, where there is no longer any need for a temple made of bricks and mortar because the Lord is there; all because Jesus loved us unconditionally.

In the book "The Cross and the Switchblade" a country pastor named David Wilkerson moves to New York, risking his life to talk about Jesus with young street gang members such as Nicki Cruz from the feared Mau Mau gang. David meets Nicki, "Jesus loves you and will never stop loving you." Nicki slaps David and says to him, "I'll kill you". David replies, "Yeah, you could do that. You could cut me into a thousand pieces and lay me out on the pavement, but every piece would still say, "I love you." Later, Nicki became a Christian, gave all his weapons in to the police, and began to devote his life to talking about the love of Jesus. The power of God's unconditional love broke in to Nicki's heart and transformed him. The powerful image of God's glory flowing out of the temple turning

salt water fresh and bringing life wherever it flows reminds us that God will stop at nothing to bring life and healing to his people because he loves us.

Will you partner with us to build a hub from which God's healing and love can flow out to people affected by leprosy? A hub is a safe place where every villager is welcomed unconditionally, a place where people who can't read or write can learn about leprosy through drama and dance and song, a place where health workers and Leprosy Changemakers can be trained to recognise the early signs of leprosy and provide treatment, a place from which lasting change and God's blessings can flow out to the rural communities. By helping to build a hub today you are partnering with people like Zania to work towards the end of leprosy related stigma and discrimination.

Dame Darcey Bussell:

Hello I am Darcey Bussell and I am proud to be supporting the Leprosy Mission's **Unconditional Appeal.**

I first met people living with leprosy three years ago while on a trip with my family in Mozambique. It was shocking to discover so many cases of leprosy hidden away in remote rural areas, but I was struck by the love, grit and determination of those working to find and treat people affected by it.

People like Zaina. She knows from personal experience just how devastating leprosy can be. Zaina was a young mother when she first noticed discoloured patches on her skin. She didn't know what they were, but when neighbours recognised the signs of leprosy they banished her to the forest and took away her three year old son. Thanks to the unconditional efforts of Leprosy Mission staff Zaina was found, treated, and cured. Today she is a leader of her community, helping to find and welcome home other people affected by leprosy.

Zaina: "Anyone who needs help come to me. And the people who once banished me now come and participate in our meetings. We are changing peoples' attitudes. I am so happy. I wish I could take my heart out and show everyone how happy it is."

Darcey Bussell: Zaina is just one member of a large community of Leprosy Changemakers made up of health workers, public speakers and volunteers, all determined to make leprosy a thing of the past. And you can join them by becoming a leprosy Changemaker too, by giving a gift to set this all in motion. When you become a Leprosy Changemaker you'll help find people affected by the disease, no matter where they are, and get them the urgent medical treatment they need.

In the far north of Mozambique Gabriel, a health worker trained by the Leprosy Mission, is on the road for three hours. He's heard from local villagers about a young woman showing early signs of leprosy. If he finds someone with symptoms he undertakes a full assessment, checking for patches, loss of feeling, and inflamed nerves. People often worry about what will happen to them if leprosy is confirmed; so Gabriel is ready to offer help and advice.

Gabriel: "Often, when a patient first receives the diagnosis they feel frightened, dejected, and need supporting. We have to prepare them because the treatment is long. We also talk to the community. We invite them to a community hub where we give lectures about leprosy and its treatment to reassure people."

Darcey Bussell: The Leprosy Mission is helping communities to build hubs across Mozambique. These are places of hope where people affected by leprosy are welcomed unconditionally; a place where they can meet without fear of rejection or stigma and receive the care and treatment they need. But a hub is much more than a place where leprosy is cured. It is the beating heart of village life, a safe space where everyone is welcome, where health camps are held, and everyone learns about leprosy through song, dance and drama. Please, will you help build more community hubs by giving a gift to the Unconditional Appeal? And if you give before April 24th your donation will be doubled by UK government, at no extra cost to you, meaning your gift will change twice as many peoples' lives. Please join our community of Leprosy Changemakers and help make this ancient disease a thing of the past in Mozambique. Together with your help we will stop at nothing to prevent leprosy and end the disability and prejudice it causes. That is Unconditional. Thank you.

£24 doubled to £48 finds and cures two people of leprosy.
 £161 doubles to £322 pays for a community health hub
 £5,000 doubled to £10,000 builds a hub of hope.

Helen Walton: Will you please partner with us and help us to love and transform lives of people affected by leprosy in Mozambique, as Zania is trained and Gabriel goes out on his motor bike to reach people affected by leprosy in the rural communities of Mozambique.

Hymn: "Brother, sister, let me serve you". STF 611 and it will be followed by our prayers, led by Maz Roberts

1. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
 let me be as Christ to you;
 pray that I may have the grace to
 let you be my servant too.

2. We are pilgrims on a journey,
 and companions on the road;
 we are here to help each other
 walk the mile and bear the load.

3. I will hold the Christlight for you
 in the nighttime of your fear;
 I will hold my hand out to you,
 speak the peace you long to hear.

4. I will weep when you are weeping;
 when you laugh I'll laugh with you;
 I will share your joy and sorrow,
 till we've seen this journey through.

5. When we sing to God in heaven,
 we shall find such harmony,
 born of all we've known together
 of Christ's love and agony.

6. Brother, sister, let me serve you;
 let me be as Christ to you;
 pray that I may have the grace to
 let you be my servant too.

Prayers (led by Maz Roberts):

Almighty Father, the giver of life and health, look mercifully on those who suffer from leprosy.

Stretch out your hand to touch and heal them as Jesus did during his earthly life. Grant wisdom and insight to those who are seeking the prevention and cure of the disease; give skill and sympathy to those who minister to the patients; reunite the separated with their families and friends; and inspire your people with the task set before The Leprosy Mission, that it may never lack either the staff or the means to carry on its healing work, in accordance with your will, and to the glory of your holy name.

We ask this for the sake of Jesus Christ your son, our Lord.

God of wholeness, heal the hurts, both inside and out, that make life difficult each day. Ease the pain, loosen the chains, bringing freedom in their place.

For all whose nights are broken by pain, discomfort, anxiety and so many other reasons, leaving them irritable, tired and unable to concentrate, refresh their minds, grant patience in times of stress, keep them safe in the nights to come may they find peace and rest.

For those weighed down by ill health, bring wholeness to body, mind and spirit.

For those weighed down by worry, bring wisdom, peace and reassurance.

For those weighed down by fear or oppression, bring freedom, release and liberation.

For those weighed down by sadness, bring comfort, strength and joy.

For all whose hearts are troubled at the start of this new day, be the voice that they hear, the warmth that they feel, the wisdom they seek, the strength they require, and the one in whose arms they rest.

Healing God, in your world that's hurting,

Grant strength, patience, and freedom from pain.

Bring restoration of health through your Spirit's power.

Reach out and touch all your children so we know you are there, bringing comfort and light

even in the darkest of times.

We ask these things in the name of your son, our Lord Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Our last hymn takes up the theme of Ezekiel's prophecy about the river of God.

Hymn – "The river of God" by Andy Park.

Down the mountain the river flows
And it brings refreshing wherever it goes
Through the valleys and over the fields
The river is rushing and the river is here

The river of God sets our feet a-dancing
The river of God fills our hearts with cheer
The river of God fills our mouths with
laughter

And we rejoice for the river is here
The river of God is teeming with life
And all who touch it can be revived

And those who linger on this river's shore
Will come back thirsting for more of the
Lord

The river of God sets our feet a-dancing
The river of God fills our hearts with cheer
The river of God fills our mouths with
laughter

And we rejoice for the river is here
Up to the mountain we love to go
To find the presence of the Lord
Along the banks of the river we run
We rejoice for the river is here.

Blessing:

Go forth into the world in peace;

be of good courage;

hold fast to that which is good;

render to no-one evil for evil; strengthen the faint hearted; support the weak; help the afflicted;

honour all people;

love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And the blessing of God almighty,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,

be upon you and remain with you always. Amen.

Song after the service – Ubi caritas et amor (StF 783)

Ubi caritas et amor

Ubi caritas, Deus ibi est.

(Where charity and love are.

God is there.)