

Dear friends,

I hope and pray this letter finds you well, and that this second round of lockdown isn't proving too difficult. Please do let us know if there is anything we can help with; whether that be practical help with shopping or someone to talk to and pray with. As I have said at the last two services at St John's, we need to think of these times in terms of physical isolation, not social isolation. Whilst we cannot be physically near to people, we can still be connected and in relationship with one another.

These are not easy times for any of us, but I am often reminded that we face these restrictions and embrace them as our act of love and service to others. Or to put it a little more bluntly, we live a little less as we'd like to so that others can live. Thank you for the part that you are all playing during these times. You're all in our thoughts and prayers, and we long for the time when normality can resume again!

If you'd like to join us for our online services on Sunday mornings, we begin with coffee and chat from 10am, with the service itself starting at 10.30

<https://stjohnshw.online.church>

Also, if you would like to listen to a hymn appropriate for this morning's passage, please follow here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gax8GL7EViE>

God bless,
Matt

The readings for this week:

- Exodus 19:1-13
- Hebrews 12:18-29

This week, we continue on in our series in Hebrews. Hebrews is not necessarily an easy book to read, or to understand, but it is full of beautiful and deep insights into the character of God and the essentials of our faith. Today we come to a stunning passage which reflects deeply on our Old Testament reading.

In Exodus, God speaks to his people from a mountain, bringing his word and presence down to them. However, due to his presence the mountain is declared too holy for the people to approach, or they will be put to death. It appears to be a fairly brutal passage, but the message is clear; God is not to be trifled with, and he is holy. We see this concept played out throughout the Old Testament. But, because God is the same throughout the Bible, this is a truth that never disappears. God is still utterly holy, and we are too sinful to approach.

However, that is not the end of the story. We live post-Jesus. He died, once for all, to set us free from our sins forever and to restore us to a right relationship with God. We read in our Hebrews passage that, because of this, we now come to a different mountain. We no longer come to a mountain "burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and

storm.” We are permitted to come to an entirely different place, the mountain of the Lord itself; “Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we are welcomed into the most holy of places. The Temple curtain that was torn in two when Jesus dies acts as a sign to us that the way to God himself is torn open and we can freely approach.

And this is profound for us, and provides a different framework. Jesus is for us. God is for us. We are loved and cared for. No longer is God unapproachable, utterly “other”. He has drawn near. He understands. He has felt what we feel, experienced what we do, lived how we do. That sin and shame that separates us from God is gone, removed. We no longer have to live under it but can live free, safe in the knowledge that we have a “kingdom that cannot be shaken.” As Jesus said “I no longer call you servants...instead I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

So today, and this week, why not spend some time seeking God. Spend some time praying, in worship, knowing that he longs to draw near to you. We know that he has opened up the way to him and welcomes us with open arms. Perhaps you need to know his presence in what may feel like lonely times. Perhaps you need to see him speak to your friends and family. Perhaps you need his healing hand. Or perhaps you need to know you are loved. You are. Pray to him and seek him.

The Psalm for today

“Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvellous things.

His right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn—
shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;
let them sing before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

(Psalm 98)

The Collect for today

Heavenly Father,
whose blessed Son was revealed to destroy the works of the devil
and to make us the children of God and heirs of eternal life:
grant that we, having this hope,
may purify ourselves even as he is pure;
that when he shall appear in power and great glory
we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom;
where he is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.