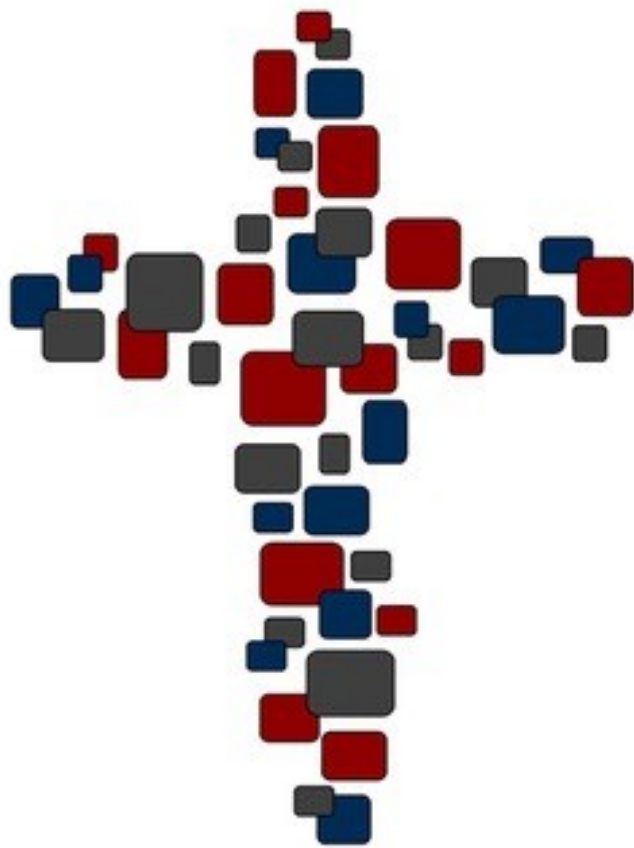


Penge Congregational Church



September 2020

An initiative of Hope Together

We are asked to pray where we are, that God will give us opportunities to witness to Christ, at 8.20pm (20.20 hours) on the 20th of each month, for 20 minutes.

The Prayer for Sunday 20th September:
Read John 10: 7, "I am the gate for the sheep"

And pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all those people who will be joining groups to learn more about the truth of Jesus this autumn. We pray for questions to be answered, for fears to be removed and for healing to be experienced as they encounter more of your grace and truth.



*Pray ... that God
will give many
opportunities to
speak about Christ.*

Colossians 4:3



From the Minister

Throughout August as through the whole of lockdown, we have continued on three evenings each week to hold a Zoom meeting. Although this is open to anyone and is a wonderful opportunity for those who are shielding and those who live remotely from PCC to join in, very sadly only myself and the Deacons have participated. Such a shame as we have all found it such a positive experience both on a church level and a personal spiritual level. (I take the opportunity to extend the invitation again: the easiest way, if you haven't used Zoom before is to Google Zoom, and opt to Join a Meeting. Zoom ID 597 482 5851. Password 304 428)

Anyway, those of us who have "attended" have taken it in turns to choose a passage of Scripture, we have read it together and then reflected on it, mostly on what strikes us about it rather than any intellectual analysis. I wrote last month about some of the themes we have found. This month we seem to hear God talking to us about being a small church.

Our last passage was the story of Gideon. We may remember that, during the time of the Judges when Israel was beset by enemies, God came to Gideon, who was the most insignificant member of a family of the most insignificant of the clans of Israel, Manessah. And God told Gideon that he was a mighty hero who was going to rescue Israel from the army of the Midianites. Perhaps understandably, Gideon asked God for signs to prove that this was true. And then he managed to get together quite a considerable army of fighting men. But God looked at them and said there were too many. If Gideon defeated Midian with that many men, people would think the victory had been won by them and not by God. So God repeatedly found ways of whittling the force down until there were just 300 men to fight a huge army of Midianites! And yet,

the army of Midian was routed because God was there on the side of the Israelites.

And, reflecting together on this passage, we realised that this was a lesson for us. We *are* a small church but we are powerful because God is with us.

We worry too much about numbers or other obvious measures of success. With Harvest coming up, now is the time to remember that we sow but it is God who reaps. The harvest is his.

St Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, encourages us, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people."

Our job is to be faithful to what God wants us to do and then leave the harvest to him. God determines the outcomes.

May God bless us as we look for ways of doing good. And we also ask his blessing on our groups as they begin to come back to our halls during September.

Pam

Following our Zoom quiz night in August, which did pull in some newcomers, we are holding another social on Friday 4th September at 7pm. No quiz this time, just the opportunity to chat and catch up. We would really love to see some of our far flung members and friends! if you haven't used Zoom before, simply Google Zoom, and opt to Join a Meeting. Zoom ID 597 482 5851. Password 304 428.

Marilyn Nicholson

Marilyn has sent a letter to the Church Meeting: she says, "After a great deal of prayerful consideration, I have concluded it is time for me to resign as Church Organist".

In normal times, we would of course have the opportunity to thank Marilyn for her many years of service at a Church Meeting. But times are far from normal; we can't have a Church Meeting under the Covid regulations and Marilyn is still shielding.

Deacons have written to Marilyn on behalf of the Church Meeting, thanking her for her dedication to the role of organist and for her devotion to the organ itself. We look forward to happier times when we can properly honour Marilyn's service to the church. In the meantime, Marilyn does of course remain a member of our church family and we look forward to the day when she can worship again with us. We ask God to bless her and keep her safe under his sheltering wings.

Communion

Since we have been able to meet back for worship we have had to adapt to the way communion is served. Someone has resourced some individual grape juice cartons similar to the one shot milk carton you get at some cafes. We also use those individual cellophane wrapped biscottis that arrive with a cup of coffee.

Lynn served communion this particular Sunday and asked us to think, smell and taste the *elements* carefully before we

consumed them. I thought I would share my thoughts that morning.

I looked at the biscotti in its see-through wrapper and inside is this dark brown object. It was like me before I submitted to Christ. There I was in a dark place, wrapped tightly and not allowing anyone in. What I was unaware of was that God was looking in. I was see-through to Him. There was nothing He didn't know about me. Eventually He broke in and unwrapped me. I bit the biscuit and crumbs fell into my lap. These were the bits that I allowed God to have but a large part I still held onto between my thumb and finger. This was the bit God and I still needed to work on and give totally to Him. The taste was sweet like Jesus welcoming me to him. The biscuit melting in my mouth was the love of Christ consuming me.

The juice was also sealed and on breaking it a sweet odour. I imagined the smell of the burial perfume that Mary Magdalene used to wash Jesus feet. The taste was sweeter. I imagined how great a sacrifice Jesus made when He hung on that rough wooden cross in such pain. The receptacle was empty, just like the tomb Christ was put in, because He rose again and lives in me.

What were your thoughts as you took the elements that morning? Please share.

Chris Parker

Harvest Festival 4th October

Although we can now meet on Sundays for small worship services, we can't sadly hold a Harvest celebration service this year. However, we know that the calls on food banks is greater than ever with so many people losing their jobs and having to

live on reduced incomes. We would very much still like to collect food to donate to Living Well at Holy Trinity, and have worked out a way to do this safely:

We would ask our groups to collect items of food and toiletries during September.

Items most urgently needed are:

Rice

Tinned veg including baked beans

Tinned meat

Tinned tomatoes

Mash

UHT milk

(tins with ring-pulls if possible)

If a representative of your group can come to the service on 4th October, you can leave your donations then. If not, please leave them with us at the beginning of October. We will leave everything untouched for at least 72 hours before packing it all up and taking it to Holy Trinity. In this way, we can still help the most vulnerable in our community in their time of need.

Little snippet from a Facebook site Chris P saw recently:

An atheist was having a dig at a Christian about their belief in God.

Atheist – So what makes you think that you can persuade me to believe in some being that no one can see.

Christian – That mask your wearing, why do you wear it?

Atheist – To protect me and others from catching Covid 19

Christian – I presume you haven't seen this virus but you still wear a mask. No further questions.

Autumn Worship theme

Our worship theme for the weeks from 6th September to 1st November is Unity/Harmony. It is planned that this will lead us into Remembrance with a theme of Reconciliation.

The theme arose out of a Zoom reflection on Psalm 133:

How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!

²For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil
that was poured over Aaron's head,
that ran down his beard
and onto the border of his robe.

³Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon
that falls on the mountains of Zion.

And there the Lord has pronounced his blessing,
even life everlasting.

So our readings on the theme for September are:

6th September: John 17: 20-26 (NLT)

²⁰“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²²“I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. ²⁴Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began! ²⁵“O righteous Father, the world

doesn't know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. ²⁶I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them."

Reflect: this is part of the prayer Jesus offered up to his Father on the night of the Last Supper. It is a prayer not just for the disciples with him on that night but for every person since who has ever given their life to Him. And what he prays for us is "perfect unity."

13th September: Exodus 19: 3-8 (NLT)

³Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "Give these instructions to the family of Jacob; announce it to the descendants of Israel: ⁴'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. ⁶And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel." ⁷So Moses returned from the mountain and called together the elders of the people and told them everything the Lord had commanded him. ⁸And all the people responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded." So Moses brought the people's answer back to the Lord.

Reflect: this is the covenant God made with his people through Moses. The people would be God's special treasure; in return they promised to obey him. Reflect that you are God's special treasure and praise him!

Sunday 20th September: Romans 12:9-21 (NLT)

⁹Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰Love each other with

genuine affection, and take delight in honouring each other. ¹¹ Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. ¹² Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. ¹³ When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! ¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honourable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the Lord. ²⁰ Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads." ²¹ Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

Reflect: if you could live by what St Paul says here, you would be perfect! Just pick our one or two things you think you could work on and pray for God's help in doing so.

Sunday 27th September: John 10: 1-21 (NLT)

10 "I tell you the truth, anyone who sneaks over the wall of a sheepfold, rather than going through the gate, must surely be a thief and a robber! ² But the one who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ They won't follow a stranger; they will run from him because they don't know his voice." ⁶ Those who heard Jesus use this illustration didn't

understand what he meant, ⁷ so he explained it to them: "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me were thieves and robbers. But the true sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ Yes, I am the gate. Those who come in through me will be saved. They will come and go freely and will find good pastures. ¹⁰ The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. ¹¹ "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. ¹² A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him and he isn't their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money and doesn't really care about the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, ¹⁵ just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. ¹⁷ "The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. ¹⁸ No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded." ¹⁹ When he said these things, the people were again divided in their opinions about him. ²⁰ Some said, "He's demon possessed and out of his mind. Why listen to a man like that?" ²¹ Others said, "This doesn't sound like a man possessed by a demon! Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?"

Reflect: look at verses 14-16. Jesus sacrificed his life for those who accept him as their Saviour. But he looks too to those outside and strives always to bring them in. This is what he asks us to help him do. Our unity as a church family should never lead us to turn inwards. Rather we must always face outwards and look for those whom Jesus wants to bring in.

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