**Holy habits – Worship: Week 1**

Bents Green Church has decided to begin this particular Habit one month before the Circuit generally. The coming week includes the two most important events in the history of Christianity, when Jesus died on the Cross to bring forgiveness to each one of us, then rose again in new life on that first Easter Sunday. These events are so much at the heart of our faith and our worship that it seemed right to turn to the Holy Habit of worship at this time.

Worship is primarily not about singing hymns or songs, it is not about having fellowship with other Christians, it is not about confessing our sins, it is not about any of the things we actually do in our services. It is 100% about our response to God’s love and God’s grace. *God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life* (John chapter 3 verse 16). God loves the world, no exceptions, the world, everyone, whatever their race or status or condition or morality, everyone, including you and me, and He loves us enough to give His Son, Jesus Christ, to experience human life with all its joys and sorrows, all its beauty and suffering, and then to experience what it means to die a cruel, lonely, undeserved death. Why? So that everyone who believes in Him can have eternal life. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the rock-solid guarantee of that.

What is our response to this astounding act of love, this amazing grace? It is awe and wonder, it is gratitude and faith, it is hope and commitment, and more. In a word, it is worship. Our worship is an expression of the awe and wonder we feel at God’s amazing grace. Our worship is an expression of the gratitude and faith inspired in us by God’s astounding love for each one of us. Our worship is an expression of the hope and commitment with which God has enriched our lives.

How and where we worship does not matter to God. He has no preference for hymns or songs or silence, nor for cathedrals or chapels or homes. When faced with the realisation of God’s love and goodness, we are forced to see and confess our unworthiness and our sinfulness, but of course, Jesus has already died on the Cross for us, we are already forgiven, so nothing more than genuine repentance is necessary. God did not create us to be alone (Adam and Eve were companions for each other, and Jesus chose 12 disciples, not one), so worshipping in fellowship is ideal in most circumstances but not essential. Worship is primarily not about any of these things, it is about our response to God’s love and God’s grace. *We love because God first loved us* (1 John 4 verse 19). Our worship begins with God’s love and God’s grace which we reflect back to Him with our hearts and minds, and with our words and deeds. Our worship is primarily our loving response to God’s love and God’s grace.

Yesterday was Palm Sunday, when Jesus entered Jerusalem on the donkey, a king not of this world (John 18 verse 36). The people praised Him by shouting Hosanna, which simply means Save or Saviour. They recognised that Jesus had come in the name of the Lord God to save them, but none of them foresaw how this would happen, not even the disciples. Events moved very quickly that week, with the crucifixion of Jesus on Good (or Holy) Friday appearing to be the end of all their hopes and dreams. Yet, *he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne; the Lord made the punishment*

*fall on him, the punishment all of us deserved* (from Isaiah 53, a chapter worth reading on Good Friday*).* Hosanna indeed. Saviour. The forgiveness already achieved for all who believe, even you and me, especially you and me, because we are all unique and special to God.

We worship because of God’s astounding love and amazing grace in dying on the Cross for you and me. Thank you, Lord. Praise you, Lord. But that is not the end of the story, as we shall see next week.

*Produced by Glenn Evans on behalf of the Bents Green Holy Habits Planning Group (Debs Barnett, Glenn Evans, Martyn Read, Graham Wassell, Daphne and John Wilkins).  All quotations from the Good News Translation. You can find more information on the Circuit Holy Habits Programme on the Sheffield Methodist Circuit website and also the Sheffield Methodist Circuit Facebook page.*