# Worship 18th July 2021

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## Welcome/Call to Worship

Welcome to worship as Weoley Hill and Bournville URC are meeting in church today while Weoley Castle Community Church will meet again next Sunday. In this service we will be thinking about places of worship – from tents to temples, with brief readings from Exodus, 2 Samuel & the 1<sup>st</sup> letter of Peter. So let us begin this worship – wherever we are – with a song of thanksgiving, praise and joy:

**Hymn R & S 386** *I will enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart..* (one verse: sung 3 times)

# **Opening Prayer**

Creator God, we praise you for the beautiful, vast and complex Universe that you brought into being: the sun, blue sky or clouds by day; the moon and stars by night; the oceans, plains, mountains and glaciers. Because you made it possible for life, including the human race, to flourish on our Earth we can marvel at the amazing diversity of plants, fishes, insects, animals and birds that occupy our home planet.

However, we admit that we have often done, or failed to do things that harm all the inhabitants of Earth. They include our fellow human beings, who may be in need of loving concern, food, healthcare or education. We have done this in ways large and small, nearby neighbours or far away, as countries and as individuals. We bring these sins, corporate and individual, before you O God, and rely on your loving Grace to redeem us all. ......Amen.

## **Old Testament Readings**:

Meeting God in the desert of Sinai: Exodus: 33: 7-8

King David wants to build a Temple: 2 Samuel: 7: 1-8, 12-13

#### **New Testament Reading:**

Living stones: 1 Peter: 2: 4-10

Hymn R & S 388 Jesus stand among us..

#### Reflection

King David said to the prophet Nathan: "Here I am living in a palace built of cedar, but God's Covenant Box is kept in a tent!" David was told in response that he was not going to be the one to build a temple for "God to live in" to replace that tent. Did you wonder why I picked this item from the list of readings for the week? It is of course because the pandemic has reminded us that the Church is not just a place of worship.

The tent or "tabernacle" is referred to in the book of Exodus, and it was how the Jews carried their "temple" with them when they wandered in the desert after escaping from slavery in Egypt: on their way to the Promised Land. Mind you, it wasn't a small Glastonbury 2-person tent: it was more like a beautifully-decorated marquee, divided in two with a holy place, and a "holy of holies" separated by a curtain. Over the last year. our "tent" has been video recordings and printed services, and many people are feeling, like David, that the tent is not good enough!

Just over 52 years ago, the 1936 building of Weoley Castle Congregational Church was closed, and half the land was sold to a supermarket to finance the construction of a new and more suitable building. The attenders and members at that time (Meg & I were among their number) became a "Church in a suitcase" (two suitcases actually) containing the hymnbooks etc. for Sunday worship in Princethorpe School hall. This carried on for about a year until the new building was put up. As you can guess, we imagined ourselves re-enacting the story of the Jews in the wilderness, with our temporary worship arrangement - until we reached the Promised Land. I remember not being totally convinced by this vision, as the idea that the Church is the People – not the building didn't necessarily promise a renewed church with a renewed building. In the event, a building designed for Community use, especially combined with the ministry of Ernest Cruchley, was indeed a catalyst for great renewal.

Nowadays, the Weoley Castle building continues to be a Community resource, but like many other churches in the URC, our decreasing membership means that we struggle with its upkeep and to satisfy all the regulatory demands for a public building.

When it comes to maintaining buildings, people's approach can vary widely: some may feel that building can look after itself, so very little contribution is required. At the other extreme is someone for whom the maintenance of the building for worship is the most important part of their

faith. This is Temple versus tent, I guess. This can be particularly true for ancient buildings. We can recognise this idea in the phrase in T.S. Eliot's poem 'Little Gidding': 'to kneel where prayer has been valid'. I can't resist quoting the few lines containing that phrase:

'If you came this way, Taking any route, starting from anywhere, At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.'

It is a very real feeling that many of us will have shared: that particular places are holy and can inspire, or give peace of mind, or bring us closer to God. We can certainly hold on to this truth, while also accepting that what Peter wrote in his first letter is also true: we should each regard our self as a living stone making up God's temple. Note that he didn't envisage the stones piled up motionless next to the big cornerstone: each one of us - a "stone" is also described as a priest and spreader of the Word.

There is another quite different lesson that we can draw out from the reading in Samuel. King David was obviously quite sure that he should build a temple for the Lord, so that God's dwelling place should be appropriately magnificent – better, I guess than David's palace. No doubt David was shocked when told by Nathan, that this was not part of God's plan for him. Bringing this up to date: do we make our plans for the future of the Church (either as a physical building or as a worshipping and serving congregation) – and then ask God to bless our plans? It is always possible that God has other plans than ours: we have always to be open to God's inspiration.....

**Hymn R & S 409** *O God in whom we live and move..* 

Prayers & Lord's Prayer

(Prayer written by Ian Fosten in the 2021 URC Prayer Handbook)

Loving God,

We are rather in the habit of drawing up hopes and plans and strategies – And then asking you to bless the decisions we have already made.

But maybe that is not how you would have us be?

Perhaps you know – as we too realise in our better moments:

- that hopes can be unrealistic and easily dashed;
- that strategies might merely try to replicate past glories
- and even well-laid plans more readily go awry than not.

Maybe you'd prefer us to simply offer you some space in diary, mind and heart?

Maybe it's through listening rather than speaking that we can discern your will?

Maybe the business of tomorrow should not be occupying our thoughts, but instead, your greater call is for us to live fully, graciously and well, today?

Now a period of silence, in which we wait on God, making petitions for people and situations near and far, but also listening to hear what God is calling us to do, to think about, or to refrain from doing. (If listening to a recording, press pause || for as long as you need.)

We sum up our prayers in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray: **Our Father...** 

### **Offering**

O God our Father, we give you thanks for life itself, the gifts you have given us, and the love and purpose in our lives that we have gained through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. In thanks, we bring these offerings to you, and ask you to use them and us in your service. Amen.

**Hymn R & S 547** ... we're a travelling, wandering race; we're the people of God

**Blessing** *Let us say this together:* 

May the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore, **Amen**