



AT HOME SERVICE

Sunday 15th December 2024

compiled by Dean James - Worship Leader

This worship has been prepared using some material from the Methodist Church “Hush The Noise” Advent and Christmas worship resources. The phrase is from the hymn, It came upon a midnight clear, “O hush the noise, you men of strife, and hear the angels sing”.

Presents get wrapped with tape and glue,

Tidy parcels neatly wrapped,

Names on labels with “love from”,

O hush the noise - Let’s hear the angels sing.

We’ve sorted gifts and who needs what,

What will they like, what will be good?

But are there more we need to include?

O hush the noise - Let’s hear the angels sing.

What of those alone, adrift, forgotten and neglected?

What of those whose life’s been hard?

What gift of help needs wrapping too?

O hush the noise - Let’s hear the angels sing.

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!

The Lord has taken away the judgments against you; he has turned away your enemies.

The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem: “Do not fear, O Zion; do not let your hands grow weak.

The Lord, your God, is in your midst, a warrior who gives victory; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will renew you in his love; he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.”

I will remove disaster from you, so that you will not bear reproach for it.

I will deal with all your oppressors at that time. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you home, at the time when I gather you; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes, says the Lord.

Hymn

1] All people that on earth do dwell,
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell;
come ye before him and rejoice.

3] O enter then his gates with praise;
approach with joy his courts unto;
praise, laud, and bless his name always,
for it is seemly so to do.

2] Know that the Lord is God indeed;
without our aid he did us make;
we are his folk, he doth us feed,
and for his sheep he doth us take.

4] For why! the Lord our God is good;
his mercy is forever sure;
his truth at all times firmly stood,
and shall from age to age endure.

Prayer:

Almighty God, provider and giver of life, we await the celebration of your birth. Like the people of long ago, our ancestors in faith, we, too, are in need of light, in need of direction, in need of your Word, to show us the way. Our busy lives and the consumerism that surrounds us make it difficult to recognize your kingdom and to hear your voice. Help us Lord, to focus on you. We thank you for your messenger and witness, John the Baptist. We thank you for all who helped to prepare the way for the birth of your Son; for all who in love, service and suffering have walked in His way ever since; and for all who helped us know for ourselves the assurance of your saving grace. We praise you for the light that came into the world at the birth of your Son. Our hearts are filled with awe and wonder. Amen

Reading: Luke 3:7-18

John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire." And the crowds asked him, "What, then, should we do?" In reply he said to them, "Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none, and whoever has food must do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized, and they asked him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He said to them, "Collect no more than the amount prescribed for you." Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what should we do?" He said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or false accusation and be satisfied with your wages." As the people were filled with expectation and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water, but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the strap of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." So, with many other exhortations he proclaimed the good news to the people.

Hymn

1] We wait in hope for hope to come:
promised of old; the righteous one,
Help us to watch, expect and pray
and then to greet Messiah's day.

2] We read the story of your plan:
this world redeemed by heaven's Son.
Grace breaks upon the present time;
mercy and hope through David's line.

3] We hear the prophet's voice ring clear:
'changed hearts and lives are needed here'.
So, when the Spirit fires your Church,
make us a sign for all who search.

4] We go to share this great Good News:
heirs of the promise – we will choose
to live in hope that all may sing
praises to Christ, the infant king.

Gareth Hill (b. 1956)

Reflection:

Have you ever been in a situation where someone is trying to make you change your mind? Or have you ever been in a situation where you are trying to make someone else change their mind?

Why might we want people to change their minds? I'm sure there are many reasons. Perhaps, we just want people to agree with us. Perhaps we want to be right. Perhaps we want to win, perhaps we enjoy power, perhaps we can't imagine being wrong; perhaps we're frightened of being wrong.

What John the Baptist seemed to know is that human beings often like to make it seem as though they know everything. We don't want to be seen to be changing our minds because that would make it seem like we didn't know stuff. John is saying to the people coming out to see him, and to us, 'Changing your mind is a good thing'. Find the things in your life where you are wrong and be glad to change your mind. Be an expert on this. Look for the situations and attitudes where you can realise that you need to change and ask God to show you His way.

John the Baptist had everybody coming to him. Poor people, powerful people, soldiers, people who were the victims of soldiers. People who were desperate, people who were cynical. He could have been delighted by his appeal. He could have thought, 'Look at all these people coming to hear me talk about repentance, changing their minds because of me'. But instead, he points the way to Jesus: "I am not worthy to untie the sandals of the one who is to come," he says. He cared more about what people did when they went home.

Showing justice and mercy and care to others is what God is interested in and not in any sort of entitlement or power you think you might have. He is saying, "I want you to change your mind, and then, when you get home, change the way you live and act".

Advent is a time where those who follow Jesus are not called out of the world for self-reflection, but into it, and into our own complicities in the fallen world we inhabit. Change your ways, John the Baptist says: this is the way to prepare for the coming of the one we all anticipate. What, on December 26th, will make you happy about how you've lived Christmas? What seeds of repentance, changing our minds to the mind of God can that, after the demands of the season will we be glad we did?

John's preaching is harsh and perhaps surprising; it is jarring, particularly as an approach to the Christmas season; and it is challenging. His preaching of repentance is a direct assault on human living that in any way ignores the appropriate orientation of us towards our neighbours. The question is: "What, then, should we do?" How shall we respond to the Advent of the Messiah? What are the fruits of repentance, which we might bear? How can we meet the promise of the season, with real, meaningful expectation? An encounter with the redemptive grace of God demands a response. The carol has the same broad message: hush the noise, you men of strife and hear the angels sing, then repeat it back. The Christian calling impels us to live differently.

Hymn

1] On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
announces that the Lord is nigh.
Awake and harken, for he brings
glad tidings of the King of kings!

2] Then cleansed be every life from sin:
make straight the way for God within,
and let us all our hearts prepare
for Christ to come and enter there.

3] We hail you as our Savior, Lord,
our refuge and our great reward.
Without your grace we waste away
like flowers that wither and decay.

4] Stretch forth your hand, our health restore,
and make us rise to fall no more.
O let your face upon us shine
and fill the world with love divine.

5] All praise to you, eternal Son,
whose advent has our freedom won,
whom with the Father we adore,
and Holy Spirit, evermore.

John Chandler (1806-1876)

Prayers

Heavenly Father, in a world where so many live in fear and poverty, where lives are blighted by violence and destruction, we pray for those who make their voices heard against injustice and evil: those who refuse to remain silent, those who speak and act for the good of all, and for the sake of the natural world. Give us courage to speak out when we need to, to call the powerful to account, to use the little power we feel we have in the best ways so all your children may live in peace.

We pray for all who live in pain and sadness today; for those in hospital, hospices, and care homes; for those who are ill at home; for all who are lonely and sad. We pray for all who care; for nurses, doctors, care assistants; for relatives who care for their loved ones, and for all those whose work is unseen, but who keep the system going. We pray for those who mourn, especially in these days before Christmas.

We pray for your church. Forgive us when self-love gets in the way. Help us to walk the way of faith with integrity.

Hymn:

1] Make me a channel of your peace:
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love;
where there is injury, your healing power,
and where there's doubt, true faith in you.

2] Make me a channel of your peace:
where there's despair in life let me bring hope;
Where there is darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy.

3] O, Master grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love with all my soul.

4] Make me a channel of your peace:
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving to all that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Sebastian Temple (1928-1997) from the Prayer of St Francis

At Bridestowe on the 1st Sunday of Advent groups wrote poems and prayers using 'Hush The Noise' as an acrostic. Here are a couple.

Help us to trust in the Lord.
Use us to spread your love.
Send us out to show your gospel message.
Help us to think of others.
Teach us to do your will.
Hope.
Engage our minds in what you would have us do.
Never leave us.
O Lord, hear our prayers.
In Jesus name we ask.
Save us O Lord and grant us
Everlasting peace.

Hush the noise
Upon the earth.
Spirit
Hear us
Teach us
How to pray.
Eternal Father
Now
O Lord
In you we trust
Strengthen us
Evermore.

Blessing

The angels are still singing.
Prophets are still speaking.
Hush the noise, hear them sing,
repeat the song, bring harmony.
And the blessing of God,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and always