



Welcome to our Sunday Service (7/02/21)

In Him We Live...

Prepared by Mervyn

We are a moment, You are forever
Lord of the Ages, God before time
We are a vapor, You are eternal
Love everlasting, reigning on high

Chorus

Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty
Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain
Highest praises, honour and glory
Be unto Your name, be unto Your name

We are the broken, You are the healer
Jesus, Redeemer, Mighty to save
You are the love song we'll sing forever
Bowing before You, blessing Your name

By Lynn DeShazo & Gary Sadler

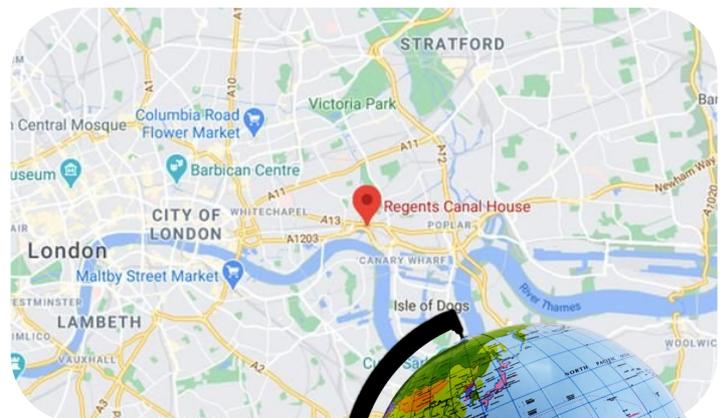


**Happy 18th
Birthday
Grace C
(13th Feb)
Yippee &
God Bless You!**

I enjoy looking at maps. From globes that show us where we are in the world, to ordinance survey maps that give us fine details of a particular location, context and perspective. On a journey, they show us where we've come from, help us identify where we are, and tell us what to expect as we continue on our way. I particularly enjoy Google Maps, as it's Global Positioning System tracks my exact location while I'm moving along. You can zoom right out to see the whole country, then zoom right in to see small country lanes.

The Bible is a bit like a map. It shows us where we started, helps us identify where we're at, and lets us know where we're going. It also zooms in and out! One minute you can be looking at the whole story of humanity, the next you can be zooming in to the minute details of someone's life, their emotions, motives and actions.

Father God we come to you again today with our thanks and praise for all the good things you pour into our lives, we bring you the worship of our hearts. Thank you for the huge value you place on us as human beings, help us to discover more of our worth today, to know it for ourselves and to increasingly value other people. Fill us with your goodness so that we may reflect your beauty in our communities. In Jesus name we pray. **Amen**



Kathryn and I are currently reading through the book of Acts together. This amazing book that tells the story of the early church zooms in and out quite a bit. Today we're going to read a little part from chapter 17 where Paul is taken before the highest governmental council in ancient Athens known as the Areopagus (located near the Acropolis) to tell them about Jesus. He zooms out to show us where we've come from, and to reveal the future, then zooms in to show us God's care for us and our best course of action!

Acts 17:24-31

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you.



24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. 25 And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. 26 From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. 27 God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. 28 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

29 "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. 30 In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. 31 For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead."

I love this little section of the Bible. It shows us where we came from, assures us that God knows exactly where we are right now, and gives a glorious hope for the future. So, let's take those three points as the framework for our message today.

- **Where did we come from?**
- **Where we are right now?**
- **Where are we going?**



1. Where did we come from?

After a clever introduction in which Paul refers to their statue dedicated to an 'Unknown God', he zooms out to explain **that it all started with God!** God made the world and everything in it, and he can't be contained in a man made temple!

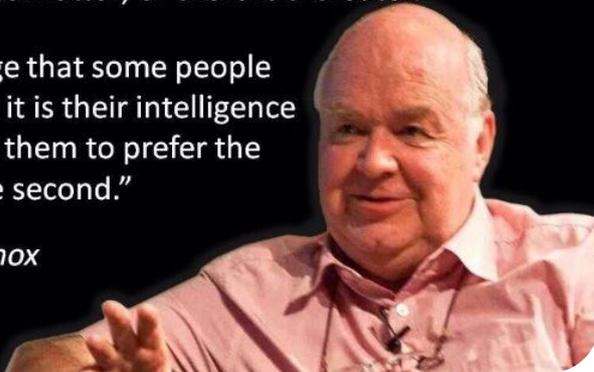
It's important to recognise there are alternative theories about the origins of the world, and much debate about the intelligent design and fine tuning within the universe, which as Christians we marvel at and worship God for. Within the scientific community itself, there is huge debate. The UK's most famous atheist, Richard Dawkins says that people who attribute the existence of the world to an intelligent creator are delusional, whilst other leading scientists present strong evidence for God as the creator and designer of all that has been made, alongside their own personal faith as followers of Jesus.

Here are a couple of quotes!

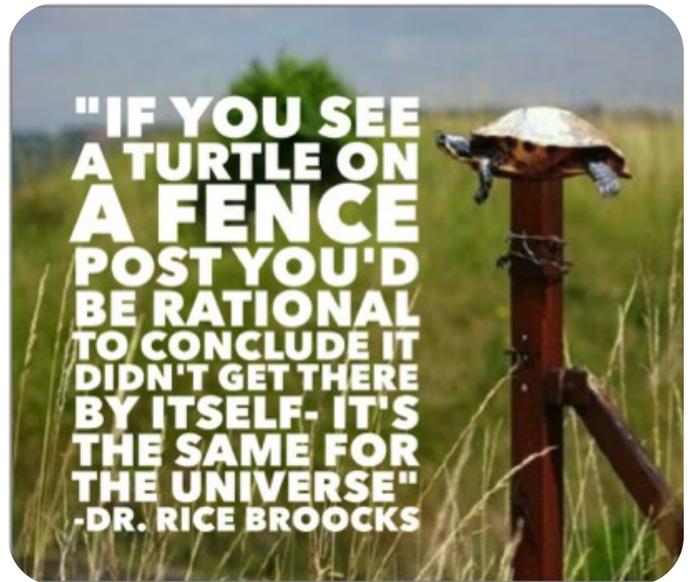
"There are not many options, -essentially just two. Either human intelligence ultimately owes its origin to mindless matter; or there is a Creator.

It is strange that some people claim that it is their intelligence that leads them to prefer the first to the second."

-John Lennox



"IF YOU SEE
A TURTLE ON
A FENCE
POST YOU'D
BE RATIONAL
TO CONCLUDE IT
DIDN'T GET THERE
BY ITSELF- IT'S
THE SAME FOR
THE UNIVERSE"
-DR. RICE BROOKS



For me personally, as I see the beauty and wonder in the natural world, I find it impossible to believe that there is no designer or creator involved! Also, the evidence from the fossil records can be convincingly used to support the concept of a world wide flood.

So, Paul establishes that we came from God! I was struck by the phrase in verse 25 that says **"God is not served by human hands, as if he needed something."** This led me to ask... if God doesn't need anything from us, why did he make us? God is complete in his own right, a community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in perfect love and unity. If he needed something, he wouldn't be God! So, why did he make the world and us?

The short answer that resounds through the whole Bible is: **God created the world for his glory.** There are many Bible verses to support this view, here are a couple

In Isaiah 43:6 -7 "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

"The heavens declare the glory of God" Psalm 19:1

All things ultimately exist for the glory of God and we, very specifically are an overflow and expression of his Glory... **God said, "Let Us (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) make man in Our image, according to Our likeness [not physical, but a spiritual personality and moral likeness]; and let them have complete authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, and over the entire earth, and over everything that creeps and crawls on the earth." Genesis 1;26 amp**

He didn't just create us, but he made us in his image. **"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27)**

What is the point of us being an image? Images are erected to display the original, to point to the original and glorify the original. God made humans in his image so that the world would be filled with image bearers, reflectors of God - knowing, loving, showing God.

The famous quote from St Irenaeus, the Bishop of Lyons in the 2nd century says ..."The glory of God is a man fully alive!" The more we look, this theme leaps out from the pages of the Bible.

I like to think of it this way... a squirrel being a squirrel gives glory to God, whereas a squirrel trying to be a mole does not! In the same way, as I pursue being who God made me to be rather than trying to be someone else, I reflect his glory.



He not only made us, but he sustains us; verse 25 goes on to say that, **"...he gives all men life and breath and everything else."** We spring from, and are an expression of the glory of God. As verse 29 says... **"We are God's offspring."**

Although God does not need us in any-way to complete him, we **are** needed to fulfil his purposes on earth as part of his body, the church. Remember within the body of Christ, "...the eye can't say to finger, 'I don't need you'..." Every part of the body is needed and has a part to play in building God's kingdom. I find it helpful to think of myself as a note in his symphony, a pixel in his picture, a stitch in his tapestry or a tile in his mosaic!

2. Where are we right now?

Verses 27&28 say that... **'God is not far from each of us and that in him we live and move and have our being'**. He doesn't force himself on us, but longs that we may reach out for him and find him. So, where are we now? We are now very close to God! We may have closed our hearts to him, or even deliberately moved away from his plans for our lives, perhaps feeling dis-illusioned or ashamed. He has never abandoned us and he calls us back into his arms of love and his plan, in order that we may experience becoming gloriously, fully alive as his image bearer.



I love the concept that he knows exactly the places where we live and the times set for us. None of us are here by chance, but our story is woven into his bigger story, spanning times, geographical places and generations. Five years ago I had no idea that we would move to Cumbria, (we'd never even heard of Ulverston), but God did and here we are! I also find this verse comforting in this season of pandemic that my times and circumstances are in his hands and nothing takes God by surprise.

Does this mean that God determines for a person to be homeless and live in a cardboard box? No, we know from other parts of the bible that God's heart is for people to have shelter and be part of family and community. God does know every detail of their circumstances and situation. His intention and heart is that we, the church who bear his name and his image are motivated to care for the hungry and the homeless.

We also need to allow space here for the difference between God's perfect will and God's permissive will. God's perfect will is always good, his permissive will sometimes allows evil to touch us, even scar us, knowing that he can do something with those scars that is even more glorious than a scar-free life.

When I think of the concept of... ***"in him we live and move and have our being"***, these pictures come to mind! I imagine being surrounded by God, like a Zorb Ball or a Ready Brek glow! Then I imagine different labels that Jesus qualifies me to stick on the Zorb ball: Loved, Forgiven, Chosen, Protected, Child of God, Freedom, Holy, Accepted, Wanted, Grace, Restoration...



We are also now in the season of repentance

Verse 30 says that ***"God commands all people everywhere to repent."*** Jesus often said... ***"Repent for the kingdom of God is near."***

Ever since the fall, our image bearing capacity to reflect the glory of God has been distorted and broken. Sickness and death entered the world and by default, we chose to go our own way rather than God's way. We cause pain to ourselves, and others as we pursue a route of independence from God that ultimately devalues us.



Into this situation God calls us to repent, to turn away from sin, to be honest about our condition, and truthfully tell him about the things in our lives that we know are wrong. I love the fact that God offers us this route to freedom, restoration and a clear conscience. An attitude of ongoing repentance is life giving for our spirits, as it requires humility and by default keeps us closer to God, permitting us to confidently enter his presence where we grow into becoming fully alive. Isaiah 1:18 is one of my favourite verses. ***"Come let us reason together says the Lord, your sins though red as scarlet, shall be as white as snow."***

3. Where are we going

In verse 31, it says that... ***“God has set a day when Jesus will judge the world with Justice.”*** This is where history is headed. What a glorious outlook for those who have been truthful with Jesus, and received his forgiveness, and what a great hope for the planet!

The verse, ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever” Heb 13:8*** has really blessed me recently. The ‘Jesus’ who will judge the world will be the same compassionate Jesus who cared for the sick, lifted up the humble, fed the hungry and loved the unlovable while he lived among us. Only this time he will come with absolute power. At the name of Jesus every knee will bow and ... ***“the earth will be filled with the knowledge of God as the waters cover the sea.” Habakkuk 2:14***

This will be a post democracy era! Democracy has proved to be a very successful form of governance, for which we are very grateful, but it has many flaws and shortcomings. Jesus will establish the ultimate theocracy. He will judge with truth and justice and will not need to be endorsed by a vote or be swayed by popular opinion. Remember the beautiful way he dealt with the woman caught in adultery? He defused the pompous, self righteousness of the baying mob by making them face up to their heart attitudes, and loved the woman, directing and enabling her to live in a new level of self worth. So many times he silenced his critics by asking them questions that exposed their unloving motives. Can you imagine the world being ruled with such wisdom and grace?



The words we read from Isaiah ch 9 at Christmas will be fulfilled....

The government will be upon His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish and sustain it with justice and righteousness from that time and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of Hosts will accomplish this.

I find the idea of Jesus reigning and ruling on earth absolutely thrilling, for the world to have her true and rightful king. We have a part to play in preparing for his return by embracing his kingship in our lives and letting it impact our sphere of influence. I remember hearing someone say... “If you don’t like the idea of the rule and reign of Jesus, what makes you think you’ll like heaven!”



Paul ends his talk by talking about the resurrection of Jesus, reminding us that those who die in Jesus can look forward to the resurrection. You can put on your gravestone “I’ll be back!”

I bumped into a friend in the parish church grave yard last week, who was doing some clearing in the graveyard. She pointed out that all the graves face east in line with the daily rising sun in anticipation of the resurrection. She then led me to the most easterly part of the graveyard where a long serving vicar at the church asked to be buried, so he could lead his congregation on resurrection day! What a lovely hope filled story.



In conclusion, when we zoom out, we see that we are part of God’s enormous “glory story” that spans all eternity, and when we zoom in we see that he is right here with us in the smallest details of our lives. In him we live and move and have our being! Amen

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of
The Holy Spirit be with us all now, and evermore. Amen**