



Sunday 5th July 2020

Welcome to our Sunday Service

Prepared by Angela Guntrip

*Dress to Sing!*

No one ever cared for me like Jesus,  
There's no other friend so kind as he.  
No one else can take the sin  
and darkness from me,  
Oh how much he cares for me.

### Heavenly Father

Thank you that you are the source of all love  
and care, and thank you Jesus that you  
modelled that wonderful love and care when  
you lived among us. Help us to follow you and  
we invite you to build your kingdom in and  
through our lives.

Thank you for all the different people and  
groups in our community that show the love of  
God and bless us in so many different ways;  
from the health workers, and people who run  
local business to people who volunteer to fill  
the town with flowers and maintain the canal.  
We ask again that you would bless and protect  
all the key workers during this time and as we  
start to emerge from lockdown we ask for a  
special blessing for those who feel particularly  
vulnerable. We also pray for those who may be  
facing unemployment that you would give them  
your peace and lead them into new  
opportunities.

Lead many people to come to know you  
in a deeper way at this time.

**In Jesus name, Amen.**

**Happy Birthday**  
to Jack (for yesterday)  
and Edith on Saturday.



## Dress to Sing

At one of our lockdown Zoom home group meetings a few weeks ago, Sheila shared the following observation: “Why is it that I have a wardrobe full of clothes yet during lockdown I’ve been wearing the same things day in, day out?” We had a laugh but agreed with the sentiment and concluded that perhaps we don’t really need all the clothes we’ve acquired.



ONE SIZE FITS ALL.  
EXCEPT FOR YOU,  
OF COURSE.



That got me thinking about types of clothes, various styles, different shapes and sizes etc. And in particular about a couple of items I have which have the label “one size”, implying one-size-fits-all.

Really?

Whether your small, medium, large, XL, XXXL. How? Well, it does work to some degree, but surely there must come a time when that it just doesn’t! We’ll return to that thought later.

Fitting into things. Making adjustments to fit better. Not just our clothes but life in general, My mind momentarily went to a young girl following a white rabbit who was in a great hurry – Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland. I remember playing the Queen of Hearts in a school production of this story, and had great fun yelling the instruction “Off with their heads”! Anyway, the bit that came to mind is when Alice needs the key to get through a small door into a beautiful garden, drinks a liquid labelled DRINK ME which causes her to shrink. Small enough to get through the door; but it’s locked & the key is on the table which she can no longer reach. Then she eats a cake with the instruction EAT ME, which causes her to grow so much, she hardly fits into the room at all. Let’s reflect on Alice’s physical scenario and its implications spiritually. Us in our “spaces”. There are times in our lives when we may feel as uncomfortable as Alice did when she was too big to fit or when she was too small to achieve anything. But our discomfort is not physical. Rather it’s about feeling that we don’t fit in with what’s going on around us. Or feeling too insignificant to have anything to offer.

For all sorts of reasons, eg our personalities & mindsets, a recent situation or something from our past, or maybe things going on in the world which grieve us and will most certainly grieve God. But in all these things, as we've been reminded in some of our recent homegroup Bible studies, God is still on His throne and in the midst of all the storms of life. Some years ago I was challenged by words from **Psalm 137**, when the Jewish people were taken captive into Babylon some 600 years BC. They sprang to mind again:

***By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.....  
.....How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?....***

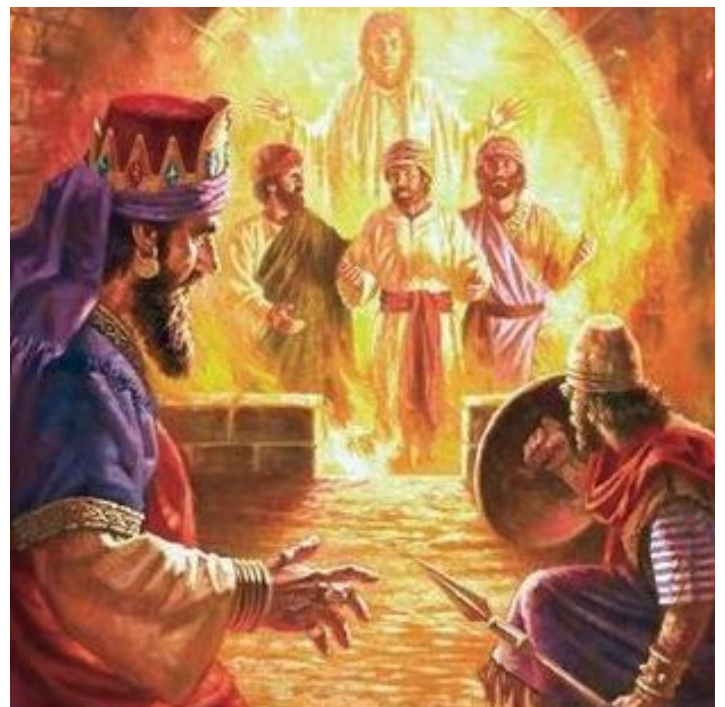
Sometimes we can feel like that, too, when we are reminded of ungodliness within our society, in our country, in our locality and feeling our impact is miniscule. But the Psalm continues:

***May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you.....***

In other words, we **MUST** keep singing "the Lord's song" ie speaking His word, sharing our hope, spreading the good news....however "strange" our own land might sometimes seem or how worthless we may feel.

You will, I'm sure, be familiar with 4 young Hebrew men who were some of these same Jews taken captive into Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and Daniel. Their story unfolds in the first half of the book of Daniel. One of their first "***how can we sing the Lord's song***" challenges was when they were selected by the court official of King Nebuchadnezzar to be trained for 3 years to serve in the king's palace. The aim was for them to be taught "***the language and the literature of the Babylonians***".

Just think about that for a second: they were to be immersed into the Babylonian culture through its language and its writings, probably with the intention of them embracing it, forgetting their own heritage and in turn influencing their fellow captives to do the same. How often are we challenged in similar ways today: the influences of TV programmes and social media, of celebrity lifestyle, of immorality and "anything goes", of the watering down of God's standards and His holy name.....and so on?





How do we deal with such things? How did Daniel and his friends deal with them? They recalled “the Lord’s song” and applied it. When offered food & wine from the king’s table, they declined:

***Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way (ch 1:8)***

The official was concerned that this might cause the young men to look less healthy. At this point we have a big thumbs up for all us vegetarians, for Daniel persuades the official to give them a 10-day trial of just vegetables and water & see how they look. Outcome 1 – they thrive, looking healthier and better nourished than those who ate the royal food! Outcome 2 – God blesses their faithfulness (**v17**).



Daniel and his friends would undoubtedly have struggled to fit into their new way of life but rather than succumbing they remained faithful to God, even facing a fiery furnace and a lion’s den! God was with them all the way.

We, too, may find ourselves in uncomfortable situations on occasions, in places or with people where we just don’t fit. Or maybe we feel so small and insignificant at times, that we have nothing to offer, and even if we had, no-one would listen to us anyway, so we might as well go down the garden and eat worms! Ever felt like that? Well, we’re not alone. There are some quite inspirational Bible characters who felt daunted by what God entrusted them to do. We might find we’ve had similar responses to theirs at times!

Jonah ran away and tried to hide. And later, after repenting and doing God’s will, he went into a massive sulking session because he didn’t understand God’s ways!

Gideon, in disbelief, asked  
“Who? Me? Give me some signs!!”

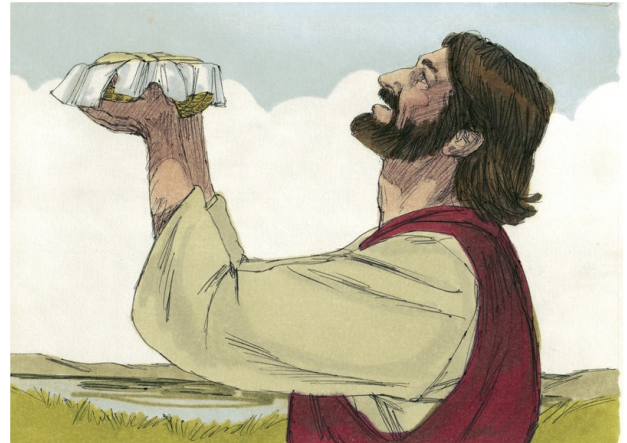
And Moses resisted God so much –

***“O Lord, please send someone else to do it” (Exodus 4:13)***

- that God included his brother, Aaron, to go with him!



But God also knew more about Moses than he did himself. And he asked him a key question: “***What is that in your hand?***” (***Exodus 4:2***). It was his staff. And with this staff, an ordinary but familiar everyday object, God allowed Moses to perform some amazing miracles as he led the children of Israel out of Egypt. There are other Bible stories - Elijah with the widow of Zarephath & her dwindling supplies & Jesus with the young boy & his small bread & fish lunch to name but two - whose seemingly insignificant offerings were blessed abundantly. And us? Yes, at times we may feel insignificantly small, but take heart. God knows us and He uses us and what we offer in all sorts of ways. During lockdown, as well as being thankful to Mervyn & Kathryn for their hard work, I've been so blessed and encouraged by the bible studies, prepared by a number of different people, as well as so many folks contributing in some way to the recorded Sunday services, notices, keeping in touch and so on. God delights in using our offerings to bless His name.



Recently we celebrated Father's Day and part of the service referred to the heartbeat of Father God and us beating in time with it. How do we do that; how do we march in time to the beating of God's drum and His rhythm, when there's so much pulling us to follow a different rhythm, a different song? During Covid19 we have been saddened and disturbed by the increasing number of deaths and relieved when the death toll started to decrease. It was recorded that 362,091 had died globally from Covid by the end of May. A shocking statistic. Here's another shocking statistic that made my heart sink: during the same time period there were over 17 million abortions worldwide. 17 million! It's so hard to grasp. And it didn't make the news headlines. Then there was the upsetting news about George Floyd, which served as a catalyst to highlight racial prejudice and social injustice. There are so many other current situations we could name.



**But our aim is not to be overwhelmed by such problems, but rather stand firm, call on the Lord and share His song wherever we can.**

So let's contemplate briefly the one-size-fits-all garment I mentioned at the beginning. Although each of us is unique, with our own personalities, strengths and weaknesses, the Bible tells us we have spiritual clothes to wear that are made to fit all of us. Unlike the cartoon caption, God doesn't say "**but not you!**" So, let's put them on!

**OFF WITH THE OLD, ON WITH THE NEW** **Ephesians 4:22-24** When we are born again in Christ, we become like new creations. We have put on Christ

**PUT ON GOD'S ARMOUR** **Ephesians 6:10-18** This is a passage we enjoyed studying together in our Sunday services some months ago. It tells us so much about how to be equipped and stand firm, applying God's word and praying.

**PUT ON LOVE** **Colossians 3:12-14** This passage defines the true Christian nature; it is a reflection of Christ's own character. It highlights the greatest virtue, which is love. God is love. We are called to wear love.

**There are 3 distinct enemies we face as Christians:**

**OUTER ENEMY: THE WORLD**

ie all its influences, some subtle others blatantly ungodly; John describes it as "***the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life***" (**1John 2:16-17**)

**INNER ENEMY: THE FLESH**

ie our fallen, self-centred nature which is inclined towards sin and pleasing ourselves and our desires.

**SPIRITUAL ENEMY: THE DEVIL**

ie the one who seeks to destroy us with lies & deception.





The garments we choose to wear are a reflection of God's character. In the same way that we read in **Hebrews 1** that "***The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being....***", so, too, does Jesus pray in **John 17**:

***"I pray also for those who will believe in me through their (the disciples) message, that all of them may be ONE Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."***

This is the essence of singing the Lord's song. The disciples were called to do it so that others, like you and me, might hear the message. That we might respond in faith, through repentance and forgiveness, to sing the same song in unity and truth to a world that's dying because it hasn't responded to the song's message. Wearing our one-size-fits-all garments enables and empowers us to sing, even when we feel uncomfortable and don't fit or are too small to make a difference.

Finally, back to Alice. When she ate and drank what was in front of her, she was able to retrieve the key which opened the door so she could move on in her journey. Think about that scenario with regards to our spiritual journey. Jesus declares in John's gospel:

***I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry,  
and he who believes in me will never be thirsty....  
.....if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.***

Jesus is the word made flesh. His words are truth and life because HE IS truth and life revealed to us. And it is he who has the key to eternal life:

***These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no-one can shut, and what he shuts no-one can open. (Revelation 3:7)***



And so, to sum up the overall message of today's theme, here's a final, short reminder. Perhaps you could sing it when you wake up each morning!

