

Sunday 21st March 2021

4pm, Arborfield Green Community Centre



Welcome to Church@TheGreen, a new church for the new community of Arborfield Green established by the existing Churches of Arborfield and Barkham. At the heart of our church family life is a trust in the living God who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ and who still speaks to us through his Word, the Bible. If you are visiting us, please fill in a visitor form (for the purposes of track and trace) and do introduce yourself to Piers (Minister) or Phil (Ministry Trainee).

Today we conclude our series in Ezra with chapters 9 and 10 and Andy is once again joining us to preach. We will still have the musicians providing us music which we can use as a time of reflection and quiet worship. In line with guidance, we are still unable to provide children's groups, but will continue our series with Ben focusing on God's creation

Welcome – Piers Bickersteth

Song

You made the starry hosts
You traced the mountain peaks
You paint the evening sky with wonders
The earth, it is Your throne
From desert to the sea
All nature testifies Your splendor

*Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord
Sing His greatness
All creation
Praise the Lord, Raise your voice
You heights and all you depths
From furthest east to west
Let everything that has breath
Praise the Lord*

You reached into the dust
In love, Your Spirit breathed
You formed us in Your very likeness
To know Your wondrous works
To tell Your mighty deeds
To join the everlasting chorus

Praise the Lord...

Let symphonies resound
Let drums and choirs ring out
All heaven hear the sound of worship
Let every nation bring
Its honors to the King
A roar of harmonies eternal

*Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord
Sing His greatness
All creation
Praise the Lord, Raise your voice
You heights and all you depths
From furthest east to west
You distant burning stars
All creatures near and far
From sky to sea to shore
Sing out forevermore
Let everything that has breath
Praise the Lord*

Creed

**Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles;
this we have received, and this we believe.
Amen**

Reading – *Ezra 9:1-10:4*

9 After these things had been done, the leaders came to me and said, ‘The people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the neighbouring peoples with their detestable practices, like those of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites. **2** They have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and their sons, and have mingled the holy race with the peoples around them. And the leaders and officials have led the way in this unfaithfulness.’

3 When I heard this, I tore my tunic and cloak, pulled hair from my head and beard and sat down appalled. **4** Then everyone who trembled at the words of the God of Israel gathered round me because of this unfaithfulness of the exiles. And I sat there appalled until the evening sacrifice.

5 Then, at the evening sacrifice, I rose from my self-abasement, with my tunic and cloak torn, and fell on my knees with my hands spread out to the LORD my God **6** and prayed:

‘I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens. **7** From the days of our ancestors until now, our guilt has been great. Because of our sins, we and our kings and our priests have been subjected to the sword and captivity, to pillage and humiliation at the hand of foreign kings, as it is today.

8 ‘But now, for a brief moment, the LORD our God has been gracious in leaving us a remnant and giving us a firm place in his sanctuary, and so our God gives light to our eyes and a little relief in our bondage. **9** Though we are slaves, our God has not forsaken us in our bondage. He has shown us kindness in the sight of the kings of Persia: he has granted us new life to rebuild the house of our God and repair its ruins, and he has given us a wall of protection in Judah and Jerusalem.

10 ‘But now, our God, what can we say after this? For we have forsaken the commands **11** you gave through your servants the prophets when you said: “The land you are entering to possess is a land polluted by the corruption of its peoples. By their detestable practices they have filled it with their impurity from one end to the other. **12** Therefore, do not give your daughters in marriage to their sons or take their daughters for your sons. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them at any time, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it to your children as an everlasting inheritance.”

¹³ ‘What has happened to us is a result of our evil deeds and our great guilt, and yet, our God, you have punished us less than our sins have deserved and have given us a remnant like this. ¹⁴ Shall we then break your commands again and intermarry with the peoples who commit such detestable practices? Would you not be angry enough with us to destroy us, leaving us no remnant or survivor? ¹⁵ LORD, the God of Israel, you are righteous! We are left this day as a remnant. Here we are before you in our guilt, though because of it not one of us can stand in your presence.’

10 While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites – men, women and children – gathered round him. They too wept bitterly. ² Then Shekariah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam, said to Ezra, ‘We have been unfaithful to our God by marrying foreign women from the peoples around us. But in spite of this, there is still hope for Israel. ³ Now let us make a covenant before our God to send away all these women and their children, in accordance with the counsel of my lord and of those who fear the commands of our God. Let it be done according to the Law. ⁴ Rise up; this matter is in your hands. We will support you, so take courage and do it.’

Sermon – *Andy Kearns*

Confession

Lord, we cry to you
from the depths of our being:
let your ears be open
as we plead for mercy.
If you kept a record of our sins
none of us could stand before you;
but you alone can forgive us,
therefore we come to you in awe.
Lord, we wait for you
and in your promise we put our hope;
through our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

Prayers

Bible Time with Ben

Song

What is our hope in life and death?
Christ alone, Christ alone
What is our only confidence?
That our souls to Him belong

Who holds our days within His hand?
What comes, apart from His command?
And what will keep us to the end?
The love of Christ, in which we stand

O sing hallelujah!
Our hope springs eternal
O sing hallelujah!
Now and ever we confess
Christ our hope in life and death

What truth can calm the troubled soul?
God is good, God is good
Where is His grace and goodness known?
In our great Redeemer's blood

Who holds our faith when fears arise?
Who stands above the stormy trial?
Who sends the waves that bring us nigh
Unto the shore, the rock of Christ?

O sing hallelujah!...

Unto the grave, what shall we sing?
"Christ, He lives; Christ, He lives!"
And what reward will heaven bring?
Everlasting life with Him.

There we will rise to meet the Lord,
Then sin and death will be destroyed,
And we will feast in endless joy,
When Christ is ours forevermore

O sing hallelujah!...

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SERMON NOTES