

## 31<sup>st</sup> May 2020 10am Pentecost – From the Valley to the High Hills

Service led by Andrew Attwood, talk by Karen Mills,

Bible reading by Lindsey Attwood

Notices.....	1
Introductory Prayer.....	2
Song: What a Beautiful Name.....	3
Habakkuk 3:17-19 [NIVUK].....	4
Talk.....	4
Prayerful Response.....	8
Intercessions.....	9
Conclusion and Blessing.....	10

### Notices

[Andrew Attwood:]

Good morning everybody. It's good to see you on yet another sunny day. Welcome to St John's Church. Welcome if you're not necessarily a regular part of our church community – we welcome all those watching today. Morning Karen!

[Karen Mills:]

Morning Andrew. Are you well?

[Andrew:]

I'm fine, I'm fine. I'm still enjoying the weather, although I think the gardens probably do need a drop of rain, don't they?

Just so folks know what we're going to be doing today, the basic shape of the day is going to include a talk from Karen later. Thank you for that, Karen. Today is Pentecost, and so there will be an encouragement to be open to God's Spirit today. If I could encourage people not only to have the glass of water to hand, which was in the notices as you waited to go live, so if you can have a glass of water that'd be great, but also if you could put your finger in your Bible in Habakkuk 3? Habakkuk 3 is towards the end of the Old Testament if that's a clue, if you're not sure where to find it. So Habakkuk 3 is going to be where the reading comes from today and Lindsey will be reading that to us in a moment.

Couple more notices: Taizé is the service that's happening this evening. It's not going to be at 6pm, we're going to be joining with the other churches in the town, moving our time of service to 6:30, and you will find the URL, the link to where that service is, in the newsletter that Denise kindly circulated as well. We will be having on Wednesday our usual live-streamed Bible study: the likes of Karen and myself and Michelle and Denise, and Lindsey sometimes, are working our way through the Sermon on the Mount. You're very welcome to join us on Wednesday at 12 o'clock at lunchtime. Bring a sandwich. I'm the only one who brings a sandwich so far. And we also have plenty of children's activities for during this service. If you have the newsletter that has been sent out you will have been able to print off hopefully a handful of different things relating to today's theme, different activities that are going to be useful for your children while we do other things, so that'll be something you can concentrate on.

## **Introductory Prayer**

So, let's begin now with a moment of focus. Let's focus on God now. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, would you give us grace, would you give us grace now to be open to you, to be ready to receive your Spirit.  
Amen.

I encourage you to take up your glass, if you have a glass with you. If you have a glass with you lift up your glass, and just be aware of it, just be aware of the wonder of water. I'm guessing in these hot days we've been drinking a bit more water than usual. Maybe put a drop of water on the palm of your hand. And just feel the sensation of water on your hand, cooling your hand. Just let the water be a coolant to your hand. Let's just pray for a moment:

Lord Jesus, we thank you that water refreshes us. We thank you that water sustains us. Would you cool us with your love? Would you calm us with your presence?

Maybe take your glass again and just put two fingers in the water, hold them there. And feel how cold it is. Maybe even put your fingers, your wet fingers on your cheek. Let it properly cool you like you need it on a hot day. Just hold it there. Just be aware of the restoring effect of water when we're overheated.

Lord Jesus, we pray that you would refresh us, that you would refresh us when we're stressed and tired and worn out and feeling dry. Would you refresh us Lord?

And take your glass now, and have a sip, just a small sip and just be very conscious of your sip going down your throat. Just be conscious of that.

I just wanted to read a verse to you from John's Gospel to help us focus on what Jesus said, and Jesus promised. John 7:37-39 says this:

<sup>37</sup> On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. <sup>38</sup> Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' <sup>39</sup> By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

So on this Pentecost Sunday, when we remember the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, we celebrate with God the receiving of the Spirit, so have a good swig. So let's just be open again to the promise of God's Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit and set us in the right place with you today. Come, Holy Spirit, quench our deepest thirst.

Come Holy Spirit.

Prepare us, Holy Spirit to hear, to receive you.

And now Holy Spirit would you help us to worship you, and to praise you.

**Song: What a Beautiful Name**

*Verse 1:*

You were the Word at the beginning  
One with God the Lord Most High  
Your hidden glory in creation  
Now revealed in You our Christ

*Chorus 1:*

What a beautiful Name it is  
What a beautiful Name it is  
The Name of Jesus Christ my King  
What a beautiful Name it is  
Nothing compares to this  
What a beautiful Name it is  
The Name of Jesus

*Verse 2:*

You didn't want heaven without us  
So Jesus You brought heaven down  
My sin was great Your love was greater  
What could separate us now

*Chorus 2:*

What a wonderful Name it is  
What a wonderful Name it is  
The Name of Jesus Christ my King  
What a wonderful Name it is  
Nothing compares to this  
What a wonderful Name it is  
The Name of Jesus  
What a wonderful Name it is  
The Name of Jesus

*Bridge 1:*

Death could not hold You  
The veil tore before You  
You silence the boast of sin and grave  
The heavens are roaring  
The praise of Your glory  
For You are raised to life again

*Bridge 2:*

You have no rival  
You have no equal  
Now and forever God You reign  
Yours is the kingdom

Yours is the glory  
Yours is the Name above all names

*Chorus 3:*

What a powerful Name it is  
What a powerful Name it is  
The Name of Jesus Christ my King  
What a powerful Name it is  
Nothing can stand against  
What a powerful Name it is  
The Name of Jesus

*Bridge 2 again*

*Chorus 3 again*

*Tag:*

What a powerful Name it is The Name of Jesus

*Tag twice more*

### ***Habakkuk 3:17-19 [NIVUK]***

[Lindsey Attwood:]

<sup>17</sup> Though the fig-tree does not bud  
and there are no grapes on the vines,  
though the olive crop fails  
and the fields produce no food,  
though there are no sheep in the sheepfold  
and no cattle in the stalls,  
<sup>18</sup> yet I will rejoice in the LORD,  
I will be joyful in God my Saviour.  
<sup>19</sup> The Sovereign LORD is my strength;  
he makes my feet like the feet of a deer,  
he enables me to tread on the heights.

### ***Talk***

Karen is now going to come and talk to us.

[Karen Mills:]

Good morning, everybody. And it's really lovely to be with you on this beautiful day. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Karen, and I'm part of the community at St. John's, and one of the church wardens.

Quite near the beginning of lockdown I happen to mention to Andrew that I had been struck by this passage that Lindsey had read. So here I am today, and I've given my talk a title, and it's "From the Valley to the High Hills." Not quite

sure how that links into Pentecost, except that none of us can set off to the high hills without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The person in this passage seems to be able to acknowledge the situation around them, yet still chooses to praise God. This passage comes from the book of Habakkuk. Now Habakkuk was one of the Old Testament prophets, an extraordinary bunch of people really. And Eugene Peterson<sup>1</sup> describes most of the prophets as "in your face", assertive, not given to tact and certainly not diplomatic and almost always insistent that we pay attention to God. They mostly spoke God's words to the people. And most of the time, God's words were not so comfortable to hear. And maybe that's why they had to be a little bit hard-nosed. But Habakkuk seems to be on a different tack. I expect like me in these extraordinary times in which we are currently living, it has given rise to some questions. Perhaps subconsciously, we live most of the time thinking that if we're God's children and God loves us, then mostly we will be exempt from the challenging aspects of life, but from our experience, we know that that's not true. And we're often perplexed by the things that happen to us and around us. I like to go on bike rides, and we have a little device that we can plot a route on. But it only has a small screen. So as we ride, we can only see a small fraction of the route, the bit where we are, and our lives are a bit like that: we don't know what's around the corner. But God has a big map, and he can see the full route, the full picture. And in Habakkuk's world, about 600 BC, all is not well, overwhelmed by the injustice he sees around him, he's having a bit of a rant. "Oh, Lord," he says, "How long shall I cry and you will not hear?" He seems to think that God has left, and the wicked have been left in charge. Like us, bewildered by our current circumstances, do we cry out? "Where are you, God, in all of this? What are you doing?" It is as if the prophet is not speaking God's words to us at all, but our words to God, our questions to God. It is faith that is asking the questions: Habakkuk believes in God and believes he has the answers to his questions.

But when God speaks, it didn't make any sense at all – not the answer he was expecting or wanting. "A foreign power who will invade and seize power? God, you must be mad!" How refreshingly honest Habakkuk is. How many times have we assumed that God will answer our questions and prayers in our way? But we do not see the big picture. God has all eternity to work out his perfect plan. Habakkuk is on a journey, as are we. What happens to us and around us is not about us. It is all about God. Many people I've spoken to recently in this time of isolation and restriction have said something to the effect that God is calling them to go deeper with him, and it's something I felt myself. But what does that mean and what does it look like? And how do we do that? Does Habakkuk, as we follow his journey, have something profound to teach us? He moves from complaining to God and even doubting that God has a handle on the situation, to this passage at the end of the book: he's no longer anxious. He's gone from complaining to real confidence in God, from doubt to trust, from wanting to be in control of the situation himself to being at home in God's presence, from the valley to the high hills.

So how did Habakkuk get from wallowing in the dire situation he finds himself in and his frustrations with God and his self-focus to a place of praise? Well, the fruit of the Spirit is patience, and Habakkuk decides that he will stand his watch. "I will stand my watch and set myself on the rampart, and watch and see what He will say to me." This is an act of will. Habakkuk says, "I will wait and see." And for those of us who've dealt with children, small children or even bigger children, "wait" is not a word in their vocabulary. Usually everything has to happen right now. And I know that I can be a bit childlike in that respect as well. Perhaps we limit the scope of God's answers because we are in too much of a hurry. And we choose not to see that there is so much more beyond the boundaries of what we know.

---

1 Author of The Message Bible (example on the next page)

Waiting is hard work. The job of a watchman is to make sure that he does not miss a thing, usually to avoid disaster of some kind. There is a persistence and a perseverance in waiting. In 1 Kings 18 <sup>2</sup>, Elijah goes to pray. He bows down on the ground and puts his face between his knees, almost as a woman in childbirth. He says to his servant, "Go, look towards the sea." Nothing. Seven times he says, "Go," and then almost imperceptibly at first an easy-to-miss cloud, small as a man's hand rising up. It is as if we have to engage the whole of ourselves in order to give birth to what God would have us be. As Habakkuk waits, something changes: his sights have been raised, his thinking changed, no longer focused on him himself or his circumstances, but on God. He is beginning to dare to believe that God knows what he's doing.

As a friend of mine said to me this week, referring to the current situation, "God has got this." Why could she say that? Because she was looking at the beautiful creation around her, and remembering just who God is, that he created it all, every fine detail, and realising that of course, God is God because of who he is, the Almighty, the sovereign God.

As God speaks, Habakkuk is on his knees. This is what he says, and I'm quoting this from The Message Bible [MSG, Habakkuk 3:1-2].

GOD, I've heard what our ancestors say about you,  
and I'm stopped in my tracks, down on my knees.  
Do among us what you did among them.  
Work among us as you worked among them.  
And as you bring judgement, as you surely must,  
remember mercy.

His eye is on God. He sees from God's perspective. He believes in God's answer to his question. Habakkuk remembers that God is sovereign, and He will accomplish His purposes. "You were out to save your people, to save your special and chosen people." <sup>3</sup> Who are we, then, to know what God will do? The earth will be full of God's glory and not ours.

So can we shed any light on that call to go deeper? Going deeper: a refocusing and a repositioning, from short-sighted vision on our situation and our knees, heads down in the valley, to long-sighted vision, where sometimes that which is close may become a bit blurred, but God comes into sharp focus.

<sup>17</sup>[NKJV] Though the fig tree may not blossom,  
Nor fruit be on the vines;  
Though the labour of the olive may fail,  
And the fields yield no food;  
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,  
And there be no herd in the stalls—

And yet, this does portray a truly disastrous time, because in Habakkuk's time the agriculture would have been really important to the economy and people's survival. Yet Habakkuk could say, "yet I *will* rejoice in the Lord, I *will* praise God."

And as Habakkuk chooses to stand his watch and wait, so he chooses to praise God, and oh, what a most joyful place he finds himself in, "I *will* joy in the

---

2 Verses 41 to 46

3 Chapter 3 verse 13, The Message Bible

God of my salvation." Yet it's another choice. "I will, I will choose to be joyful."

Going deeper, knowing God, really knowing him. This year, I'll be celebrating my 40th wedding anniversary. But I know for certain that there are things that I don't still know about my husband. But actually there's a joy and excitement in discovering, and this time of lockdown does seem to be a time where we're discovering a lot more about each other, and it's like unearthing hidden treasure. And we unearth treasure as we go deeper into God's heart. Going deeper, to praise God, to choose to praise God. Bringing praise really brings us into the presence of God.

And it's been extraordinary, standing on the streets every Thursday evening and praising our frontline staff, having a sense of being something part of something that is so much bigger. And although we can't be with them, we're encouraging them and cheering them on. I'd have thought that in our praise of God, not only do we thank Him, but we encourage Him and cheer him on.

Going deeper, being truly free to discover that you are not meant to stay in the valley where there are shadows, but you are made to walk in the high hills to step into the Kingdom of the King.

<sup>19</sup>[NKJV] The LORD God is my strength;  
He will make my feet like deer's *feet*,  
And He will make me walk on my high hills.

So as I finish, let us praise God. I'm going to read Psalm 138 [GNT]. Please use this time as a personal time of praise and a time to reflect on just who God is.

<sup>1</sup> I thank you, LORD, with all my heart;  
I sing praise to you before the gods.

<sup>2</sup> I face your holy Temple,  
bow down, and praise your name  
because of your constant love and faithfulness,  
because you have shown that your name and your commands are supreme.

<sup>3</sup> You answered me when I called to you;  
with your strength you strengthened me.

<sup>4</sup> All the kings in the world will praise you, LORD,  
because they have heard your promises.

<sup>5</sup> They will sing about what you have done  
and about your great glory.

<sup>6</sup> Even though you are so high above,  
you care for the lowly,  
and the proud cannot hide from you.

<sup>7</sup> When I am surrounded by troubles,  
you keep me safe.

You oppose my angry enemies  
and save me by your power.

<sup>8</sup> You will do everything you have promised;  
LORD, your love is eternal.  
Complete the work that you have begun.

## ***Prayerful Response***

[Andrew Attwood:]

Thank you, Karen. Thank you very much for those helpful words, drawing us deeper into God. And so in response to that, shall we have a time of quiet? Let's pray. Just a moment of stillness, just to let those words sink in. Let's just be still for a moment.

Maybe use this quiet as an opportunity to be honest with God, like Habakkuk was honest.

And if you do carry questions, "Where are you God? What are you doing?" Pray them, say them, speak them out from your heart, whether you're on your own or with others. Speak out your heart to God.

Lord Jesus, in this time where there are mysteries as to what is going on, as to what your rôle in all of this might be, would you meet us now, in the valley if that is where we are.

If we carry concerns, if we carry confusion, meet us where we are by your Holy Spirit.

And Lord God, would you lift our heads to remember what Habakkuk remembered? You are the suffering God and you are good.

We thank you, Lord, that you understand our frailty. But Lord, as you call us to wait and to stand, would you pour out your Spirit so that we can become more patient and more trusting. Come Holy Spirit and do a work that is deep in us. Move us from doubt, move us towards trusting.

And Lord, as we remember Habakkuk's honesty about how empty the barns were and how the land wasn't yielding like it should, would you help us now to be honest about ourselves? Jesus, you said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." Would you help us to be transparent with you about our own lack of maturity or lack of depth about the areas of lack inside us?

Help us to recognise our need, our hunger, our thirst for something that would truly fill us.

And Holy Spirit now, would you begin to lead us by our own will up and out of some of these valleys,

Lord, if we've chosen to be there, we lift our heads and walk now towards you. Make our feet like the feet of the deer that is nimble and able to meet with you higher up. Come Holy Spirit.

And Lord, would you take us into these places often, not just on Sundays or in other quiet moments, would you cause us to live in a place where we exercise trust and faith and waiting, waiting on our sovereign God?

Lord, would you embed in us true trust, trusting you to know what you're doing?

So we ask this Jesus' Holy Name.  
Amen.



## **Intercessions**

[Andrew continues:]

We're now going to continue with some intercessory prayer. So let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we pray for the nations of the world. We hear daily the different approaches that different governments and different leaders are taking with regards to the softening or ending of lockdown in different contexts. We pray again for your wisdom and your grace to rest on all those who have authority. Lord, would you cause them to be attentive to those who know things, or even in our own context in the UK there appears to be some lack of clarity now between politicians and scientists as to how fast the easing of lockdown should happen. We pray for your Spirit to guide our leaders,

Lord in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Lord at this time, we lift to you the United States, the many states now that appear to be experiencing riots in the light of this recent killing, with a police officer involved killing a black man. Lord Jesus, we pray in a general sense for your peace and your grace to rest on all these situations. But we do pray that you would help fully reveal what is behind all of this. Lord, there is frustration, there is fear, there is anger. Perhaps there is concern over job losses, over what life is going to be like after lockdown, over inherited long-term racist problems in society in America. Lord would you speak to that big nation? Would you speak to leadership, would you speak to local leadership across the states? Would you lay your loving hand on all those who are involved in what is going on on the streets, and would you give them your wisdom? Lord Jesus, it is right to be angry at wrong things. And it is also right to be peacemakers. We pray for the United States that there would be wisdom, and a productive way through this that brings justice.

Lord in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

We pray at this time for our own country, for the UK as a whole. Lord, we are just completing today ten days of intercession and prayer, waiting on you. There have been literally thousands and thousands of Christians praying earnestly for our land over these ten days and we join with that again. And we say, Lord God, pour out your Holy Spirit on the United Kingdom, pour out your Holy Spirit on towns and villages and cities, pour out your Holy Spirit and soften hearts to be responsive to you, to be open to hear your Good News.

And we pray, Lord, that your church would be ready and available to attend to anyone, or many, who want to know more. We pray, Holy Spirit, for your grace in our land.

Lord, in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Lord, we pray, just over this weekend with regards to schools that are going to attempt to go back in a phased return. We pray, Lord, for the little ones, for the year sixes. For the staff in various schools, for the organisation. We pray Lord, for discernment and clarity as to how to structure school life, in the light of COVID-19. We pray for your safety and protection on all those who are going to be sharing premises now. We pray for wisdom for parents, to know whether or not to feel they can send their children back. We pray for your insight and guidance to them as they begin perhaps to explore how to cooperate with this change. Lord, we pray that there would be learning and understanding, as this week and as weeks ahead continue.

Lord in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

And Lord we bring to you, our economy. People who are fearing issues around finance, people who are concerned about their futures, about the stability of their employment, whether they're going to lose their jobs. We pray, Lord Jesus, that you would pour out grace on all those who are part of what is going on. We pray, Lord, that they would know that you care, and that you can provide. Lord, give grace to neighbours and friends, so that we pull together through this, and that no one is left behind.

So we bring all of these prayers to you, Lord Jesus, in Your holy name.  
Amen.

### ***Conclusion and Blessing***

We've reached pretty much the end of our service today. On this day of Pentecost, I would really want to encourage you to seek God's face. That encouraging word from Karen to wait, that's exactly what the disciples were doing for ten whole days leading up to this day of Pentecost. They waited, and they waited, and they waited, and they waited for God to come. And as Jesus had promised, they were clothed with power from on high. So I just want to finish now with a word of blessing. And after this word of blessing as the music plays, can I encourage you, stay where you are, wait again, and receive the blessing of God, as you receive His Spirit.

So let me bless you.

Father in heaven, would you pour out all that is needed.  
Jesus, Son of God, would you pour out grace upon grace.  
Holy Spirit, would you give us true fellowship with you.  
And may the blessing of God rest on all those who have listened and watched this morning and that they would know your touch, right here, right now.

In Jesus name,  
Amen.

God bless you all. Thank you for listening.

[Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> with help from Hamish Blair]

[NIVUK] Extracts from the Holy Bible, New International Version Anglicised, copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 Biblica, formerly International Bible Society. [Used by permission](#) of Hodder & Stoughton Publishing, an Hachette UK company. All rights reserved. 'NIV' is a registered trademark of Biblica. UK trademark number 1448790

[MSG] Extract from The Message Bible Copyright © 1993, 2002, 2018 by Eugene H. Peterson. [Used by permission](#) of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries.

[NKJV] Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. [Used by permission](#). All rights reserved.

[GNT] Scripture taken from the Good News Translation in Today's English Version- Second Edition Copyright © 1992 by American Bible Society. [Used by Permission](#).

What a Beautiful Name by Ben Fielding & Brooke Ligertwood Copyright © 2015 Hillsong Worship. Used by permission.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5L6QIAH3L4>