**COVENANT COMMUNITY ONLINE SERVICE**

**Presenter: Revd Dr Calvin T Samuel**

**Fathers’ Day Service**

**Sunday 21st June 2020**

**~ Confident Discipleship ~**

**WELCOME & INTRODUCTION**

Good Morning. My name is Calvin Samuel and I’m Methodist minister for the towns of Rochford and Rayleigh in the County of Essex.

Welcome to this covenant community online service on Fathers’ Day. We are internationally dispersed, and socially distant but we come together in worship as a covenant community.

So how will you be spending this Fathers’ Day? You might be making a fuss over the Fathers in your life. If like me your Father is no longer with you, you might spend a moment thinking of them whilst also giving thanks for those father figures who are still in your life. For me that’s my father-in-law, Desmond. When I grow up, I wanna be Desmond. I’m also grateful for my Grandfather, Hezekiah Samuel. He’s been dead for nearly 2 decades now, but he was, and continues to be, a huge influence on his grandchildren because of his vison, determination and tenacity. He wasn’t a man to be trifled with either. Heze could be a formidable enemy if you got on his wrong side.

Whoever it is that you’ll be honouring today, biological fathers, adopted fathers, grandfathers, and father figures, I pray that it will be a special day for you and for them. God bless you.

For those who are navigating the realities of absent fathers today I pray that you will experience something of the perfect fatherhood of God today. God bless you. I thank God that in him we’ve a good, good Father.

**Hymn : I've heard a thousand stories of what they think you're like**

I've heard a thousand stories of what they think you're like

But I've heard the tender whispers of love in the dead of night
And you tell me that you're pleased
And that I'm never alone

*You're a good good father
It's who you are, it's who you are, it's who you are
And I'm loved by you
It's who I am, it's who I am, it's who I am*

I've seen many searching for answers far and wide
But I know we're all searching
For answers only you provide
'Cause you know just what we need
Before we say a word

*You're a good good father…*

You are perfect in all of your ways
You are perfect in all of your ways
You are perfect in all of your ways to us

Oh, it's love so undeniable
I, I can hardly speak
Peace so unexplainable
I, I can hardly think
As you call me deeper still
As you call me deeper still
As you call me deeper still
Into love, love, love

*You're a good good father…*

*Anthony Brown & Pat Barrett*

**PRAYERS**

As we come to our prayers I invite you to respond using the words in yellow which appear on your screen, or the text in bold type if you’re listening on audio and working from a hard copy.

Let us pray.

Holy God,

faithful and unchanging:

enlarge our minds with the knowledge of your truth,

and draw us more deeply into the mystery of your love,

that we may truly worship you,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

**Amen.**

**Prayers of Confession**

Let us make our confession to God.

**Lord you are steadfast in your love and infinite in your mercy;**

**you welcome sinners and invite them to be your guests.**

**In silence we confess our sins, trusting in you to forgive us.**

*Silence*

We have yielded to temptation and sinned:

Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

We have turned from our neighbour in their need.

Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

We have resisted your word in our hearts:

Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

May almighty God have mercy on us,

forgive us our sins and keep us in life eternal. **Amen.**

**SCRIPTURE**

Today we’re going to be continuing our journey into the Book of Acts. Last week we looked at Acts chapter 2 exploring the question, ‘*Why do people join the Church?’* This week we’ll be talking about Confident Discipleship. Some of you have heard me talk about this before. It feels like a good topic to be exploring on Fathers’ Day because there’s research which seems to indicate that Fathers who are well engaged with their children help them to develop healthy self–confidence.

Our scripture lesson today picks up where we left off last week at the beginning of Acts chapter 3, a story in which we see the disciples at their most confident.

**Acts 3.1–11a**

*One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o’clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”*

*And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.*

*Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

*While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon’s Portico, utterly astonished. When Peter saw it, he addressed the people….*

**Acts 4.1–13**

*While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.*

*The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.*

*Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus.*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

**Hymn : Father of kindness you have poured out grace**

Father of kindness you have poured out grace

You brought me out of darkness, You have filled me with peace

Giver of mercy, You're my help in time of need
Lord I can't help but sing

*Faithful, You are.*

*Faithful, forever, You will be
Faithful, You are.
All Your promises are Yes and Amen
All Your promises are Yes and Amen*

Beautiful Saviour, You have brought me here
You pulled me from the ashes, You have broken every curse

Blessed Redeemer, You have set this captive free
Lord I can't help but sing

*Faithful, You are…*

I will rest in Your promises
My confidence is Your faithfulness (x2)

*Faithful, You are…*

*Katie Torwalt & Bryan Torwalt*

**The Sermon**

Acts 3-4, following the events of Pentecost portray the disciples, possibly at their most confident. ‘Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give to you; in the name of Jesus rise up and walk.’ That has to be one of the most confident responses anywhere in the New Testament.

Where does that kind of Christ shaped confident discipleship come from? I want to suggest that there are 5 foundations for quiet confidence in God, the bedrock upon which this kind of confident discipleship is built.

## Christ shaped Confidence is rooted in divine grace

Christ-shaped confidence is rooted in divine grace, the decisive act of God in Christ. It’s worth noting that this encounter between Peter and the lame man happens in the aftermath of Easter and Ascension. In light of God’s decisive act in Christ at Easter Peter has confidence to say, what I have I will share with you. He’s confident that he has something worth giving away. So many of us are timid about sharing our faith because we doubt anyone is interested in what we have. The most profound theological insight that we have to share is this: that God in love has chosen us in Christ. That God should love a sinner such as I how wonderful is love like this! Christ-like confidence is rooted in divine grace.

## Confidence is initiated by the Spirit’s power

If Christ-shaped confidence is rooted in divine grace, it’s sustained by the Spirit’s power. Acts 3 and 4 are bookmarked by the outpouring of the Spirit. It’s the true that this event takes place after Easter and Ascension but it would be disingenuous not to note that it occurs in the season of Pentecost, as the disciples full of the Spirit translate the events of Easter into their own witness.

It’s difficult to overestimate the importance of the empowering Spirit. It’s by the Spirit that we have the confidence to say with Paul, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me; to assert, if God be for us who can be against us? Greater is he that is in me than he that is in the world. This is not naiveté. Nor is it clichéd over spirituality. Rather this is faithful and confident discipleship. Much of what we do does not presume the Spirit’s activity. Yet, Confidence is initiated by Christ’s empowering Spirit. So let us remain open to the Spirit.

## Christ-shaped confidence is Sustained within the Church

Third, Christ-like confidence is sustained within the Church. Peter and John were the ones arrested but they took their concerns back to the church where they were prayed for and supported by the whole church. This is not group psychology, or safety in numbers. Rather it is a profound theological truth. The Church is the mystical body of Christ, we are sustained because we are in Christ, empowered in Christ, for we are redeemed in Christ, adopted in Christ and sent out in Christ’s name. Note what Peter says: in the name of Jesus rise up and walk. Christ-shaped confidence has a sustaining context, that of Christ’s Church.

Christ-shaped confidence is one of the outcomes of prayer. So fervent were their prayers that the building shook and they were filled with the Spirit and spoke the Word of God with boldness, Acts 4.31.

## Christ-like Confidence is SHAPED BY scripture

Fourthly, Confidence is shaped by Scripture. How do know and learn of the Spirit’s power and activity? From Scripture. How do we assess our own discipleship? By the plumb line of Scripture. How do we figure out how best to respond to our contemporary challenges, by reading the times through the lens of Scripture. In Acts 4 we see the believers turn to Scripture as a way of interpreting what was happening in their society, and . to build up confidence to face their fears.

Friends we live at a fearful time, marked by Covid–19 and systemic racism. What will be the outcomes for us, our children, our children’s children? Like the Church in Acts we too need to turn to scripture to help us make sense of what’s happening in our society. Christ-like confidence is shaped by Scripture.

## Christ-like Confidence is built up by experience

Ultimately, however, Christ-like confidence is built up by experience, experience of God’s grace. Peter & John had encountered the risen Christ for themselves, and known his love, and particularly in the case of Peter, his unconditional forgiveness. This experience of God’s grace enabled them to have a Christ-shaped confidence. They knew Jesus, they knew what Jesus had done for them, in them and through them. They could then in confidence say, what I have I give to you.

One of the reasons that I think we Methodists sometimes lack confidence is that we lack that vivid experience of God’s grace, or that our experience is so dated we no longer trust that it is still valid and current. We need to rediscover the grace of God in our own lives, not just a theological truth and doctrinal statement but a lived experience.

So how do we encourage and embody confident discipleship? I believe it’s possible if we are refreshed in our experience of God, open to the enabling Spirit, and reminded of our rootedness in divine grace. My prayer for us and for all God’s people is that we will be drawn into the love and life of God and rediscover anew our first love, God himself. Amen.

**Hymn : When I survey the Wondrous Cross** (StF 287)

When I survey the Wondrous Cross

On which the Prince of glory died
My richest gain I count but loss
And pour contempt on all my pride

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ my God
All the vain things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet
Sorrow and love flow mingled down
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of Nature mine
That were an offering far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my soul, my life, my all!

*Isaac Watts 1674 – 1748*

**Prayers of Intercession**

Gracious God, fountain of all wisdom,

we pray for all Christian people everywhere;

and for all who teach and guard the faith …

May the word of Christ dwell richly in our hearts,

and knit us together in the bond of your love.

Hear us. **Hear us, good Lord.**

We pray for the leaders of nations,

and for those in authority under them …

Give them the gift of your wisdom,

and a right discernment in all things.

We pray for an end to systemic racism

and injustice in all its forms.

Hear us. **Hear us, good Lord.**

We pray for the cities and towns,

villages and communities in which we live and work,

and for all who seek the common good.

Speak your word of peace in our midst,

and help us to serve one another

as Christ has served us.

Hear us. **Hear us, good Lord.**

We pray for those who do not believe,

and for those of hesitant belief.

Open their ears to hear your voice,

and open their hearts to receive you, the very Word of life.

Hear us. **Hear us, good Lord.**

We pray for those bowed down with grief, fear or sickness …

May Christ your living Word bring them comfort and healing.

Hear us. **Hear us, good Lord.**

We give thanks for all who have died in the faith of Christ,

and we rejoice with all your saints,

trusting in the promise of your word fulfilled.

**Lord of the Church,**

**hear our prayer,**

**and make us one in heart and mind**

**to serve you with joy forever. Amen.**

*In silence bring more personal intercessions to God….*

We draw all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus gave us in its modern form. The words will appear on screen:

**Our Father in heaven,**

**hallowed be your Name,**

**your kingdom come, your will be done,**

**on earth as in heaven.**

**Give us today our daily bread.**

**Forgive us our sins,**

**as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial**

**and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,**

**now and forever. Amen.**

Our Final hymn is a prayer asking God’s help us to face our giants with Confidence.

**Hymn : I'm not a warrior, I'm too afraid to lose**

I'm not a warrior, I'm too afraid to lose

I feel unqualified for what you're calling me to
But Lord with your strength, I've got no excuse
'Cause broken people are exactly who you use

*So give me faith like Daniel in the lion's den
Give me hope like Moses in the wilderness
Give me a heart like David, Lord be my defence
So I can face my giants with confidence*

You took a shepherd boy and made him a King
So I'm gonna trust you and give you everything
I'll be a conqueror, ‘cause you fight for me
I'll be a champion claiming your victory

*Give me faith like Daniel in the lion's den…*

*I'm gonna sing and shout and shake the walls
I won't stop until I see them fall
Gonna stand up, step out when you call
Jesus, Jesus*

*Give me faith like Daniel in the lion's den… x2*

*Matthew Armstrong, Jordan Bailey & Tony Wood*

**THE BLESSING**

Go now in peace,

knowing that you have been born again,

not of perishable seed, but of imperishable,

through the living and enduring word of God;

And the blessing of God,

the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

abide with you this day and always. **Amen.**

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