

Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit Service
Service at Home 21st September
Disability Awareness Sunday

Prepared by Pat Fry
including some resources supplied by
Through the Roof

In many churches Disability Awareness Sunday will be observed in late September. It's an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the many ways people coping with disabilities contribute to their communities and to the life of their churches. We are reminded that every person is made in the image of God, and disabilities do not detract from that God-given value. We are reminded of the responsibility to make worship as accessible as possible to people with many different needs. This service at home sheet is one contribution to this. I have drawn some resources from worship materials prepared by "Through the roof", marked *, compiled by a Christian author, Emily Owen, who suddenly lost her hearing at the age 21.

Approach

We begin by focusing our thoughts on God. When I was a young child in Sunday School we often sang:

Jesus loves me this I know
for the Bible tells me so....
....Yes Jesus loves me,
the Bible tells me so.

Simple words, but with profound meaning. Take a moment to rest on God's love shown to us in Jesus.

Take a moment to say, "Yes the Spirit is here, around me and within me", and be thankful.

Hymn 480 <https://youtu.be/kbGsIVeKU> E

The Lords my Shepherd, I'll not want,
He makes me down to lie;
in pastures green He leadeth me
the quiet waters by.

My soul he doth restore again
and me to walk doth make
within the paths of righteousness,
e'en for his own name's sake.

Yea though I walk through death's dark vale
yet will I fear no ill.

for thou art with me and thy rod
and staff me comfort still.

My table thou has furnished
in presence of my foes,
my head thou dost with oil anoint
and my cup overflows.

Goodness and mercy all my life
shall surely follow me.
And in God's house for evermore
my dwelling place shall be.

Psalm 23 Scottish Psalter 1929

Prayer for today* written by a young woman who has Downes Syndrome and severe hearing loss, but takes an active part in the life of her local church

Made In God's Image

Thank you God for people –
who are tall or small,
who are fast or slow,
who like exercise or just like sitting,
who like different styles of music,
who have different hobbies,
who want to learn, and others who explain,
who we get along with,
and others who we don't
Everyone is made in your image
and we are all different.
Everything you make is good including us.
Help us to get along with each other
and look for the good in everyone
just like you do.

Amen

Bible reading

The Bible passage chosen for Disability Sunday is an Old Testament story I remember from Sunday School days but have seldom heard in church in recent years.

The setting is this: The Hebrew people wanted to be like their neighbours and have a King instead of just prophets or judges. So the prophet Samuel was told by God to appoint Saul as King. But Saul proved to be a great disappointment; (there's some suggestion he may have suffered from a serious mental health problem, but we have no way of knowing if this was the case). Samuel grieves, for Saul's failure to become the King they had hoped for, grieves for the unhappy situation of his country, and for his own part in this disaster.

We take up the story

Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Reflection part 1

I have reflected on the notes for preachers prepared for disability awareness Sunday* which bring out 4 thoughts from this story.

Firstly, God did not say to Samuel "Pull yourself together, get a grip!" God allowed Samuel time to grieve, then later, gave him a specific task. We all need time to come to terms with disappointment, time to grieve for lost opportunities, to come to terms with bad experiences, time to mourn the loss of loved ones. And then, we need something practical that we can engage with to help us get back on track. One of the good ways we can demonstrate friendship is to recognise when it's time for someone to move on, and enable them to do so by engaging with them appropriately. And that will be unique to each person and each situation.

Secondly, when the challenge is given, Samuel's reaction is "How?" At first, he is overwhelmed, daunted by the task, but seeks God's help and finds the guidance he needs.

Sometimes we need to be willing to ask for help, sometimes we find strength through prayer.

The children's riddle contains words of wisdom: "How do you eat an elephant?" "A bite at a time."

Perhaps that was in the hymn writer's mind when he wrote our next hymn.

A few years ago, we sang it so often we perhaps lost something of its deep meaning. But set here it gives us plenty to think about.

Hymn 476 <https://youtu.be/5jhAzbdKq6U>

*One more step along the world I go
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you.
and it's from the old I travel to the new
keep me travelling along with you*

*Round the corners of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn;
all the new things that I see,
you'll be looking at along with me. and it's....*

*As I travel through the bad and good
keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go,
you'll be telling me the way, I know. and it's...*

*Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving when the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you. and it's...*

*You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you. and it's...*

Sydney Carter 1915-2004

Reflection part 2

Thirdly, when Samuel sees Jesse's sons, both Samuel and Jesse start by looking at the most obvious candidates, the eldest, the strongest. The youngest is overlooked, but is now regarded by the Jewish people as one of the greatest kings they ever had. Sometimes it's

the quiet person, the least obvious who has the gifts for the job that needs doing. I have a good Christian friend who was seriously injured in a road accident many years ago. She has very little vision, limited mobility, and other physical problems. But her perceptiveness, wisdom and wonderful sense of humour give insight, and brighten many people's days.

Finally, the most famous text from this passage is "The Lord looks on the heart."

Sometimes we make hasty judgements, we fail to see the best in the people around us, though we always hope others will see the best in each of us, and turn a blind eye to our many faults. The good news is that God knows our potential, he knows our failures, he knows each of us through and through, and yet still welcomes us into his kingdom, longing to enable us to be the best that we can be, longing for his image in us to shine through.

A prayer *, from a retired Anglican priest (originally from South Africa) who lost eyesight through a rare genetic condition. He is registered blind, with some peripheral vision, and uses technology for leading worship.

Wondrous God
You discern our deepest thoughts
and are acquainted with all our ways;
yet you love us in our brokenness
with a love we cannot imagine.

May we never judge others by outer
appearance, for your great love looks on the
heart

May we not turn from the One with no form
or majesty.

The One despised and rejected, and held of
no account.

For He bears our infirmities and carries our
diseases;

in His presence we find wholeness. Amen

Gospel Reading: Mark1:29-34

Reflection part 3

The early chapters of Mark's gospel are full of stories of Jesus seeing the value in people society rejected and bringing healing. At that time the Jewish people (like people in many cultures of their day) saw illness or disability as divine punishment, or fate, so saw no reason to sympathise, or empathise. Jesus overturns that view: everyone has worth; it's not punishment at all, it's just part of life, and we should all respond with compassion and active kindness.

I particularly love verse 31. The old lady who had been so ill, as soon as she is healed, is straight back to her role, caring for her family by serving a meal. You can sense her self-respect restored as she is back in her normal place in the family.

So we come to a **time of prayer**

We will bring to God our own concerns, and our concerns for people we know, and then use the words of a hymn that is completely new to me, but I found when preparing this service, and felt appropriate.

Gracious God, you know our deepest needs, and we bring to you now the things that trouble us.....

We know people among our own circle of family, friends and neighbours, who are going through difficult times, perhaps struggling with disabilities, or illness or painful circumstances.

In quiet we name them before you

May we and all we have prayed for find strength and comfort through the care shown by others, and through the deep peace of God's presence. Amen

Hymn 647

God grant us words to speak
when words are all we bear
to ease the pain that others feel,
and show our loving care.

And grant us words to weave
an armour of the mind,
to keep us sane within the hurts
that torment humankind.

And help us lean upon
the only perfect Word,
whose tears and anger showed his love
for sinners whom he cured.

Even upon the cross
his thoughts amid death's strife
were for the ones whose pain he healed
by words of love and life.

Now may we grasp that sign
that is above all speech,
and struggle through the pain we feel
to own the hope we teach.

Alan Luff b.1928

So we draw our prayers together saying the
prayer that Jesu taught us.

Wherever you are, though you may be alone,
at the same moment there will many people
throughout the world , using different
languages to pray these same words:

Our Father.....

Let's draw this thoughtful time to a close with
a well-known strong hymn affirming our faith.

Hymn 67 <https://youtu.be/5jhAzbdKq6U>

This, this is the God we adore,
our faithful, unchangeable friend.
Whose love is as great as his power,
and neither knows measure nor end.

'Tis Jesus the first and the last,
whose Spirit shall guide us safe home.
We'll thank Him for all that is past,
and trust Him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart 1712-1767

Blessing Hymn StF 648

God to enfold you
Christ to uphold you
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight.
So may God grace you,
heal and embrace you,
lead you through darkness
into his light.

John Bell b,1949

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