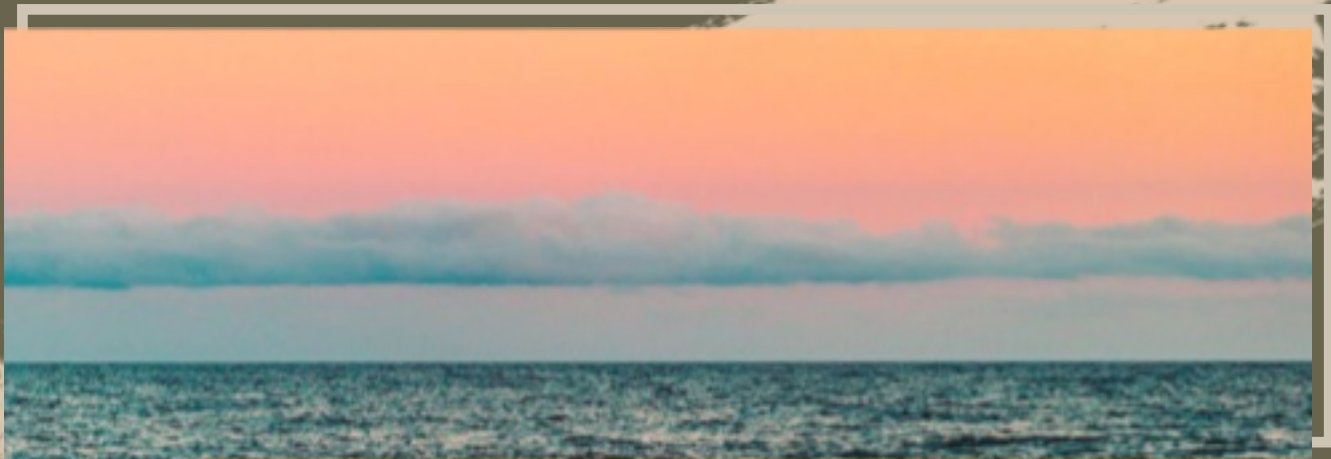




Church In Transition

The Presence Of God
18th April 2021



**YOU CAN NEVER
FORFEIT THE
PRESENCE OF GOD**



Welcome

We are now back worshipping at Church in our in-person services, but have decided that for the foreseeable future we will be continuing with our flexible worship patterns which will still blend online services, home deliveries and emailed copies of Church In Transition.

Today's service will be looking at: **Daniel**

1 v. 1 – 21

The theme for today's service is: **The Presence Of God**



Today's service that is set out in this edition of **Church In Transition** will include **Communion**. If you are still following us on the Church Website then please have your communion ready with you in order to share at the appropriate time. We hope that you will enjoy what we have produced for this **Sunday Service** and that you would indeed **Know The Presence of God Today**.

Call To Worship

Psalm 150 v. 1 – 6

Praise the Lord!

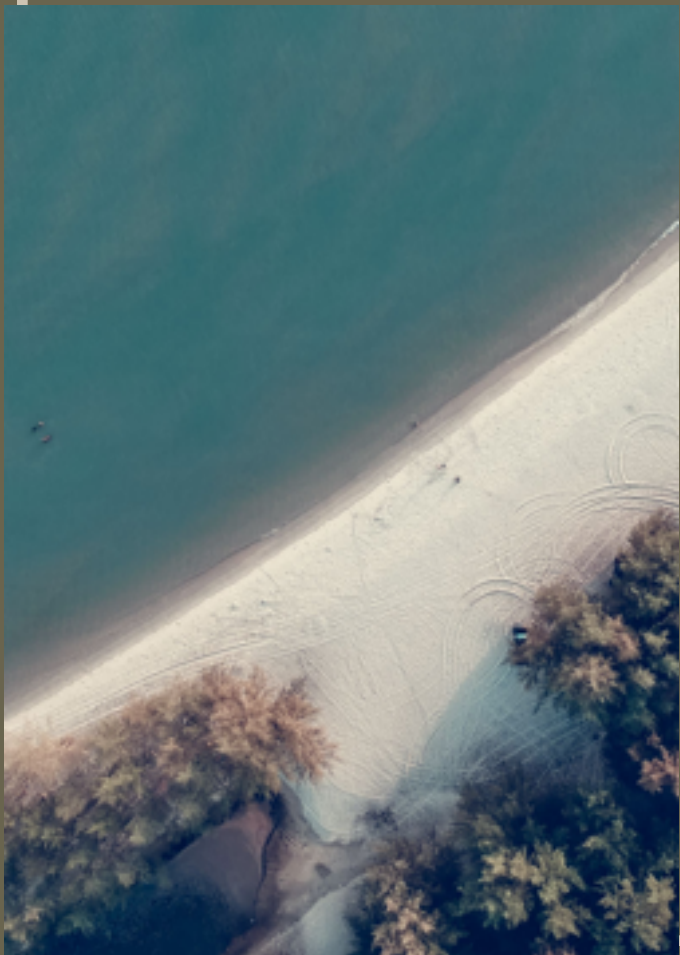
Praise God in his heavenly dwelling;
Praise him in his mighty heaven!
Praise him for his mighty works;
Praise his unequalled greatness!
Praise him with a blast on the trumpet;
Praise him with the lyre and harp!
Praise him with the tambourine and
dancing;
Praise him with stringed instruments and
flutes!
Praise him with a clash of cymbals.
Let everything that lives sing praises to
the Lord!

Praise the Lord!



Song Suggestion

Come Now Is The Time To Worship



All My Days (Beautiful Saviour)

Opening Prayer

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His love is everlasting and extends to all creation.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

Bringing wholeness, and peace beyond understanding.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His arms open wide welcoming home the prodigals.

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good!

His promises are sure, His kingdom shall last forever.

Thank you Lord God for the opportunity of being able to worship you today. Thank you for the freedom to be amongst your family here today, meeting together in the warmth of your embrace.

Thank you that in worship we can put aside, the uncertainties of this world and rest upon the certainties of the Kingdom, for your promises are not changeable as those of the world might be, but immovable and eternal.

Thank you that we can bring to your feet all the hurts and fears that rouble us, and leave them there, knowing that your strength and assurance are all that we require.

Thank you that as we draw near in worship, we are transported from a world of concerns and fears, to a place where we can be at peace in your presence, find healing, wholeness and refreshment. Thank you Lord God for the opportunity of being with you today.

Amen

Communion

Today is a Sunday when we would normally share communion together. We come together today remembering the love and sacrifice that Jesus made on the Cross for our sins and for our forgiveness. We gather together here in Church or at home as the body of Christ in order to share the bread and the cup together.

We are able to do this by getting a small glass of red juice **(fruit juice, squash etc.)** and a small piece of bread and 'sharing these elements' at a time that is convenient to you.

(Normally as a church we will do this during the morning service at about 11.30 am)

Our normal practice is to say these words:

For I receive from the Lord what I pass on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, **(you might like to pray at this point)** he broke it and said 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' **(This is the time to eat the bread)**. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.' **(Now is the time to drink the cup)**. For whenever you eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 Corinthians 11 v. 22 – 26

If you would like to do this today with us, if you are at home, then please do so, and may the Lord's richest blessings be with you today.



Bible

Reading

Daniel 1 v. 1 – 21

New International Version

Daniel's Training in Babylon

1 In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

2 And the Lord delivered Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the articles from the temple of God. These he carried off to the temple of his god in Babylonia[a] and put in the treasure house of his god.

3 Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, chief of his court officials, to bring into the king's service some of the Israelites from the royal family and the nobility— 4 young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king's palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians. [b] 5 The king assigned them a daily amount of food and wine from the king's table. They were to be trained for three years, and after

that they were to enter the king's service.

6 Among those who were chosen were some from Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 7 The chief official gave them new names: to Daniel, the name Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abednego.

8 But 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. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your^[c] food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. 20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

What does it mean to be in the
presence of God?



Church In Transition Thought

As we begin to emerge out of Lockdown 3, we may have different aspirations of what the future might hold for us. We may be looking forward to good times that we have planned, or we may be wondering if this will be the time when something we dread will actually happen. Yet, whatever our feelings and expectations, we can with assurance move forward with serenity, courage and hope, if we are prepared to hold on to what we know God is like.

In this mini – series from the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament we will be looking at and considering four great truths about God and his dealings with us. Each one is an expression of God's love for us and each can transform our lives.

From beginning to end, the Bible reveals to us God's great desire for his people to experience his presence. In **Genesis 3 v. 8, 9**

God is **'walking in the garden'**, calling to Adam and Eve because they are hiding, shrinking away from his presence. Among the closing words of the New Testament, we find that **'the Spirit and the bride say "Come!" (Revelation 22 v. 17)**. Every covenant agreement that God makes with his people shows that he wants us to experience his presence.

The **'new covenant'** of **Jeremiah 31 v. 31 – 34** includes the promise, **'I will be their God, and they will be my people ... all of them will obey me, ordinary people and rulers alike'**. When Christ gives his followers the great commission to continue his work on earth (**Matthew 28 v. 16 – 20**), he ends with the promise, **'I am with you always, even until the end of the world'**. Always? Even when we experience a **'dark night of the soul'**?

I wonder if there has ever been a time in your life when you have cried out, 'Where are you, God?' maybe you want to spend a moment or two in bringing that memory – or that present experience – to him now.

To sharpen our focus as we look at the subject of God's presence, we are going to consider one person, that is Daniel, who could have wondered whether God was with him anymore.

Imagine being a teenager when your home city is besieged and captured by a foreign power (**Daniel 1 v. 1, 2**). How might Daniel have reacted to the carrying away of the temple treasures? Did he hear, even utter to himself, the cry, 'Where are you, God?'. How he must have felt that God had abandoned his people when he marched them away into exile in Babylon?

How do you hold on to faith in God when you are being brainwashed?

The four young Hebrews had names which were a constant reminder of God: Daniel (**'God is my judge'**), Hananiah (**'God is gracious'**), Mishael (**'Who is like God'**) and Azariah (**'God has helped'**). The syllables 'el' and 'iah' were names of God. Now even their names were taken from the four young men. It was to be total indoctrination for three years, until they talked and thought as Babylonians. Even their food and drink were meant to compromise their Jewish convictions. Yet God had not abandoned them, and they held on to their certainty that God was as much there with them in Babylon as he had been in Judah.

The date recorded in **Daniel 1 v. 1** is 605 BC, the first of three occasions when Nebuchadnezzar, the young king of the new empire of Babylon, stormed Jerusalem and took captives. Twenty or so years later, on the third occasion, he razed both city and temple and returned with much of the population in chains. For the Jews, who believed that God dwelt in a unique way in the temple on Mount Zion, it was a devastating experience. Not only had they lost their homeland, it would seem that they had lost their God.

One can imagine the questions which must have burnt in the minds of the four young men whose story dominates the book of Daniel. How could they preserve their faith when living in the heart of a pagan world power? Should they cooperate with the new leaders or resist? Was God out of reach?

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah all faced troubled times. Their city, as we have said, was conquered, and they were captured by the enemy and marched across the desert to Babylon. Life must have seemed over for these four young friends. But then their fortune changed. After a three – year training period they were chosen to be Nebuchadnezzar's counsellors. No one knows what the future holds.

Our current bad times that we may be going through at the moment, may be temporary; God's blessings may be just around the corner. God may even use our hard times to prepare us for greater service for him.

Daniel 1 v. 1 – 21 shows some of the things they were beginning to discover about their God and ours. They found out that . . .

GOD WAS ALREADY THERE

The Babylonians transferred treasures of Zion to the pagan temple of their God, as a sign of victory over the God of Israel (**Daniel 1 v. 2**). But God was and is bigger and greater than they could have conceived. He refuses to be tied down to any place, any plan, any picture we have of him. He is not only present in our churches, he is present throughout the world – almighty, dangerous, full of grace and utterly good.

ILLUSTRATION

Peter Graystone, who was editor of Scripture Union in the late 1990's once wrote these words:

Some time ago I went on a preaching and training tour of Australia. One of the events was a family camp some two hours' drive out of town, at which I was the speaker. The setting was a collection of shacks in a clearing deep within a forest. The politest description of it is '**primitive**'.

No electricity, basic sanitation, and my reward for travelling half – way round the world was a semi – detached shack instead of a terraced shack!

Swarthy Australian teenagers kept slapping me on the back and

saying, **'Isn't this beaut, cobber! Bet you haven't got anything like this back in Surrey!'** I was able to answer, **'No, we haven't,'** with unhesitating honesty! I'm making fun of what was actually a terrific event!

On the Saturday evening the lads came and asked me, **'Do you want to come out bivvying with us under the stars tonight?'** Mishearing, and imagining that I had been invited to go bevvying, I said yes. I found myself a few hours later lying under a blanket in the middle of nowhere wondering how I managed to get myself into this position, and wishing that my bed was twelve thousand miles nearer.

I had very little sleep that night, but I do remember being shaken awake just before dawn and sitting up with a start wondering what had happened to the ceiling. The reason they had woken me was that a family of kangaroos was standing closer to us than I had ever been to wild animals except in a zoo.

We stood there looking at each other – a little line of men and a little line of kangaroos. And the sun came up red behind them. And it was sensational! I wondered who would be the first to try to put into words the awe we were all feeling. A sermon from me seemed the last thing that was needed! I was so surprised by what happened.

A fourteen year – old boy who had been aggressively uninterested in the spiritual part of the programme whispered, **'It looks like God's been here already.'** I thought he was joking, so I smiled and turned to join in the joke. But catching sight of his face I realised that he was absolutely serious.

And I had one of those wonderful moments when you think you are standing next to a teenager, and you suddenly realise you are

standing next to a believer. God had indeed been there already – in more ways than one!

It was here in exile from the temple that the Jews developed synagogue worship. Over the coming years, Daniel would learn that when he studied and prayed to God, even in a foreign land, God would hear and respond (**Daniel 1 v. 17**). And so he will today – in the workplace, school and home of a Monday, as well as the worship – place of a Sunday.

GOD WAS ALREADY AT WORK

Far from treating every Babylonian as his enemy, God was already working within those whom Daniel met. That is how an official came to sympathise with his position (**Daniel 1 v. 9**). He was prepared to risk his life putting faith in these people who worshipped a God whose name he might not even have known, but whom he sensed was there (**Daniel 1 v. 10, 14**).

Do we sometimes assume that those outside the church have no concept of the God whom we love? Some two – thirds of the population confess to a belief in 'Someone out there'. When we speak of God to unchurched people, we are not working in a vacuum. Perhaps we should go more humbly and with a greater desire to listen than sometimes we do.

GOD HAD PLANS TO FULFIL

Daniel was under pressure to forget his past culture and loyalties – pressures not unlike those which seductively urge us to compromise in the way we are assimilated into our surrounding culture. He set a boundary!

In the ancient world, sharing a meal could sometimes have a symbolic meaning about allegiance. Daniel declared that he was at peace living in a pagan culture, but that did not mean he would participate in every aspect of it (**Daniel 1 v. 8**).

He would serve Nebuchadnezzar and serve him well, but he would not give him the allegiance that belonged to God alone. This is the delicate line we are called to tread – engaging fully with our culture, but not surrendering our distinctiveness as Christians. Difficult, but this is the path that God honours (**Daniel 1 v. 15**).

What does it mean in your culture – in the nightclubs, in the offices, at the parties, in the sport centres, in the shops? The answer probably is that God is already there and wants us to be there as well – but how will our distinctive commitment to Christ show when we are there?



Part of King Nebuchadnezzar’s mind games with his captives was to rip away their heritage, even to the point of changing their names to something more Babylonian. Daniel and his friends, however, never gave up their deep faith in the God of Israel.



Names of Daniel and His Friends

Hebrew Name	Meaning	Babylonian Name	Meaning (Not as Certain)
Daniel	“God is my Judge.”	Belteshazzar	“May Bel protect his life.”
Hananiah	“Yahweh is gracious.”	Shadrach	Possibly “Command of Aku”
Mishael	“Who is what God is?”	Meshach	Possibly “Who is what Aku is?”
Azariah	“Yahweh has helped.”	Abed-nego	“Servant of Nego” (May be a corrupted spelling; “Nebo” was a well-known god.

Song Suggestion

What A Friend We Have Jesus



In Christ Alone (My Hope Is Found)

Prayers of Intercession

Loving Heavenly Father, it gives us joy and delight to be in your presence this day. Father, you know all there is to know about us. You share our joy in health and you understand our weakness in illness. You know us through and through, and in Jesus you have shared human joy and sorrow, human companionship and loneliness. You know our thoughts before we think them, and understand what we are trying to say better than we do.

As you know us so well. Be a comfort and a guide, a strength and a challenge, so that we may serve you in wholeness of body and spirit. Heal us, Lord. Transform us. Renew us. Draw us closer to you in this journey of this coming week, empower us with strength and courage and with the assurance that you are with us, world without end.

There are still many in need of your grace in our world. There are still many in need of your love in our world. And there are still many in need of salvation in our world. Lord, today we pray that you would enter our lives,



our churches, our cities, our countries once again.

We give thanks that we can turn to you in prayer and in faith, lifting all those who are on our hearts to you this day that they may find comfort and strength in you today.

We pray for our own Government and Governments around the world, that you will guide them in the difficult decisions they are having to make concerning the Pandemic within their own countries.

We give thanks for all those in the health service, for carers, for the porters in hospital and many others on the front line, for those who minister to the sick and dying, who are giving so much of themselves to help others. Give them strength, we pray, to keep going in difficult and stressful times.

Lord we pray for all those who do not know you, especially in their time of need, and pray that their eyes will be opened to the love of Jesus Christ.

And finally, Lord we pray for ourselves. Help us Lord to follow your example in all that we do and say as we journey with you. We place ourselves, this Church and all your people into your loving care. Please accept these our prayers, in Jesus name.

*How great are His signs,
how powerful His wonders!*

*His kingdom will last
forever, His rule through
all generations.*



Offering



Now that we find ourselves once again holding in-person services in church, we are able to give of our finances to the work of the Lord when we are in church.

However, if you feel that you are not ready to return to in-person services yet, please keep on giving with a cheerful and grateful heart, praising God for all that he has given to you until the time arises when you feel that you can physically meet with us again and share in the finances of the church.

A Poem Of Praise

Father God, I love you so;
You care for me even when I don't know.
I often question Your intent,
Despite those promises You've already kept.
I try to make sense of all around,
Yet my eyes focus narrowly on my own.
You forgive my impatience,
And my self-righteous thoughts;
And securely salvation through Your Son's
death on the cross.
He redeemed all my sins and gave me new
life;
An act that cost a most precious price.
With your help, dear Lord,
I will trust in the perfect plan
That is a gift from Your great hand.
Thank You for each day's new mercies,
And the grace that wipes away all my
iniquities.
To You, Adonai, is my praise for always;
May my last breath be a whisper
Giving you all the glory.



The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
On Earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
The power, and the glory,
For ever and ever.

Amen



A scenic view of a rocky coastline with waves crashing against the shore under a sunset sky. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box.

May I not lose
sight of You,
You're the One
who'll get
me through

Song Suggestion

King Of Kings, Majesty



It Is Well With My Soul



Blessing

Lord, let us go from here in peace,
May your Word be fulfilled with us.
May your blessing be ever with us,
As we seek to be your witness in the
world.

May your grace, love and fellowship,
Be with us until we meet again.

Amen