

## Service Sheet for AWE Circuit ZOOM Service 19<sup>th</sup> July 10.30am

### “Life is a rollercoaster”

#### Welcome & opening prayer

Heavenly Father,

As we gather together in this AWE worship for the first time in so many months, we come with excitement in our hearts and a sense of reawakening. But as we share this joyful moment together, we remember that life has changed so much for so many and there will be those today whose lives are touched by sadness, anxiety, loneliness and doubt.

Father, help us never to lose sight of the fact that you are with us at every stage of life. Thank You that You have given us an opportunity through Jesus to have ultimate satisfaction, to be able to see the truth, to be able to have purpose, to be at peace with You whatever our circumstances. Lord, we pray that as we continue to move forward and walk by the Spirit that You would guide our words, thoughts and actions. Help us Lord to be content in You and in You alone. We thank You, we love You, and we pray that You would bless us in this time of worship and in our walk with You. Amen.

**Song:**            [Come, now is the time to worship](#)

**Reading:**        [Philippians 4: 10-13](#)

**Story:**            *Horatio Spafford*

According to St Paul we should “live a life of contentment, whatever the circumstance”. Easier said than done, you might say. Well, for a short moment, let me share with you a story of a very brave man whose life was very much like a rollercoaster, full of ups and downs. His name was Horatio Spafford and he was a prosperous lawyer and a devout Christian who lived very comfortably in Chicago with his wife, Anna.

Their home was always open to visitors and they counted the world-famous evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, among their best friends. They were blest with five young children and considerable wealth. Horatio was a lawyer, and he owned a great deal of property in his home city.

However, in 1870 they were struck by tragedy when their four-year-old son died of scarlet fever and then, just one year later in 1871 a massive fire swept

through downtown Chicago, devastating the city, including many properties owned by Spafford.

That day, almost 300 people lost their lives, and around 100,000 more were made homeless. Despite their own substantial financial loss, the Spafford's sought to demonstrate their love of Christ, by assisting those who were grief-stricken and in great need.

Just two years later, in 1873, Spafford decided his family should take a holiday in England, knowing that his friend, the evangelist D. L. Moody, would be preaching there in the autumn. Horatio was delayed because of business, so he sent his family ahead: his wife and their four remaining daughters.

On 22nd November 1873, while crossing the Atlantic on a steamship, their vessel was struck by an iron sailing ship. 226 people lost their lives as the steamship sank to the bottom of the sea in just 12 minutes. All four of Horatio Spafford's daughters perished, but remarkably Anna Spafford survived the tragedy. She was found unconscious, floating on a single plank of wood.

Subsequently, after her rescue ship eventually arrived in Cardiff docks, she immediately sent a telegram to her husband, which included the words, "I was saved alone". However, despite being overcome with grief and despair, she had a strong feeling that she had been saved for a purpose.

Setting off to bring Anna home, Horatio crossed the Atlantic and the watery grave of his four daughters and, moved by the experience, he wrote a hymn entitled, 'IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL', which expressed his Christian faith, and his trust and contentment in God.

**Song:** [It is well with my soul](#) - Matt Redman

### **Dave Hopwood reflection on Philippians 4:6 The Message**

*'It's wonderful what happens when Jesus displaces worry at the centre of your life.'*

So many things take their place in the centre of our lives, so many things put a stranglehold on us, calling the shots, demanding our attention, steering our course. Forcing our thoughts to run away with each other, turning our heads into a cul-de-sac full of litter blasted around by an unforgiving wind. Please displace these tyrants today. Centre us and our world on you. And keep doing this whenever we are held to ransom by our own fears.

## Hymn & Her Puppets ([The best of all, God is with us](#))

### Talk

What does a dentist do on a roller coaster?

He braces himself!

Maybe in some sense that is what many of us have been doing over the last few months as we have followed the daily news updates on the spread of the virus. Bracing ourselves.

Paul writes this letter to the church at Philippi from a prison in response to a visit from Epaphroditus who had brought news of the Philippian church along with a gift of money for Paul. The news of the church was that although they were facing various difficulties, they were still faithful to Jesus and grateful to Paul for bringing the message of the gospel to them.

Paul is grateful for the gift sent by the church, but he is quick to point out that his gratitude does not mean that he is the sort of person to grumble to God if he was not able to live in comfort. He says on the contrary, that he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances (v11)

Tom Wright in his commentary on Philippians says that ‘Many other philosophers of the time spoke of contentment. They usually, though, developed the idea in terms of self-sufficiency. You should find resources within yourself, they said, so that you can smile at the fluctuating fortunes which life threw at you.’

Paul has different ideas!

For Paul it is not about self sufficiency! It is not about his own strength.

Paul says ‘I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (v13)  
I have the strength to face anything because of the one who gives me strength.  
The is a repeated theme throughout Pauls writing.

Ephesians 3:16

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being.

There is an anonymous quote regarding roller coasters:-

'Life is like a rollercoaster. You can either scream every time there is a bump or you can throw your hands up and enjoy the ride.'

In Paul we see someone who has faced the ups and downs of life. Someone who has ridden the same roller coaster of life that we are on. A man who has had to face being shipwrecked, disabled and in prison. Paul who had given up a life of privilege having met with Jesus on the road to Damascus says that he has a third way to ride the roller coaster of life:-

'I have learned to be content', he says, and 'I can do everything through him who gives me strength'.

Stephen has shared with us the story of Horatio Spafford who in the midst of great personal tragedy was able to write the Hymn 'It is well with my soul,' expressing a level of contentment with God in that situation which I feel very few of us would be able to match.

I think the first verse is interesting in relation to the language of Paul in this passage from Philippians.

Spafford writes:-

When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea bills roll  
Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say  
It is well, it is well with my soul.

There is the clear suggestion in the hymn that contentment is a learned behaviour. 'Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say', it is well it is well with my soul.'

Paul in his letter says that he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances.

If that is the case, then this is something that we need to work on. It is not a given. We need to spend time with God, reading his word talking with him, walking with him so that we too can learn that deep contentment that Paul and Horatio Spafford display in their respective writing. The sort of contentment that means that whatever we face in the ups and downs of life we are able to say It is well with my soul, and to know the assurance of the love of God for ourselves.

John Wesley on his death bed expressed his contentment with the words. 'The best of all. God is with us.' A truth that he had been taught and learned through his life.

'I have learned to be content' says Paul.

In the current pandemic that we are going through, there are ups and downs for all of us. There are stories of great sadness, of the loss of loved ones, of not being able to share special occasions together, of plans put on hold or abandoned altogether. There are worries about the future both for ourselves and for those we love. There will be people sharing in this service who have found the last few months particularly difficult

There have also been stories of hope. Stories of recovery, stories of self sacrifice.

For many people the crisis has had an impact on their mental health and well being. Probably if we are honest most of us would say that has affected us mentally in some way or other.

Over the last few weeks mainly working from home I have spent a lot of time on the phone speaking with colleagues and find that most conversations take longer, because we are not just talking about the work issue at hand, but also catching up.

As the crisis has gone on, through these conversations, I have become more aware of the number of people who are on this roller coaster of emotional ups and downs. People that you wouldn't normally expect, admitting that they have had a bad day or two. Some a lot more than that.

As the world around us changes and offers us new challenges each day, there is little the we can be sure of, but we have a God who never changes, a God who loves us, and a God , says Paul, who provides the strength that means we can have the strength for anything.

There is a kids song by Doug Horley Which says 'God can do anything, Anything at all.' But the verse says:-

God can do anything, Anything at all.  
Nothing his to big for him and nothing is too small.  
God can do anything, Anything at all.

Don't put him in a box  
Don't shove him in a corner  
Don't you limit what he can do

Paul says he's learnt to be content in both the bad times and the good. Through the bad and the good times, we need to keep finding ways to remind ourselves and each other of the love that God has for us, the contentment that that can bring, and the strength that he will provide.

The Africa Bible commentary says this:-

'He (Paul) has learned to be content whatever the circumstances (v11) We have much to learn from him. As individuals, we experience gain and loss; communally we experience social upheaval, epidemics, poverty, natural disasters, and both internal and external strife. To live contentedly in the good times as well as the bad times, we need the Lord who always remains the same and continually gives us strength.'

Near the start of this talk I used the quote saying 'Life is like a rollercoaster. You can either scream every time there is a bump or you can throw your hands up and enjoy the ride.'

Perhaps a more helpful quote comes from Ana Ortega

"Life can be like a roller coaster with its ups and downs. What matters is whether you are keeping your eyes open or closed during the ride and who is next to you."

As we ride the roller coaster of life we have a God who is next to us. We like Paul need to continually learn contentment whatever we face, whether heading up or down, and to draw on the inner strength that only comes from the one who rides with us.

**Song: "I am with you" (based on Isaiah 43)**

**Intercessions:**

Lord Jesus,

As we come to you in prayer, we are reminded again of how we need to learn to trust and know

You in our lives. This is our peace: that in the depths of our adversities we find a God who shares our pain and life's cruel miseries.

And so it is Lord this morning that we pray for the ill and the lonely, the frightened and the anxious -

give them your peace and give them a glimpse of a brighter morning.  
And for those who continue to serve others with courage, skill and care  
we ask your strength. You alone know the loads they bear – let them know they  
walk with you beside them.

And Father, as we emerge blinking into the light and survey a new landscape  
around us, help us to grasp the eternal truths of justice and equal opportunities  
for all, irrespective of race or creed. May this new dawn commit to the past the  
politics of hate, the powers of selfishness and the rampant urges of greed. Show  
us how we can build your kingdom here and now.

And Father, may we learn again that there is nothing in Heaven or Earth that  
can separate us from your unending love. Hear our prayers, release us from our  
fears and our doubts and grant to us and your world your never-ending love and  
peace.

Amen

### **Lord's prayer**

**Song:** Cornerstone (AWE Band and Song Group)

**Blessing:** Philippians 4: 6-7

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious but in everything make your requests  
known to God in prayer and petition, with thanksgiving. Then the peace of God,  
which is beyond all understanding, will guard your hearts and your thoughts in  
Christ Jesus. **Amen**

**Song:** [Oceans](#)