

Text: Psalm 78 (International Children's Bible)

Sunday 17th May 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Boys and girls, one of our activities this morning was to make this: a paper chain! Have you started yours? If you do make one, please share your pictures with us in our Facebook groups so we can see all your hard work.

Now, when you are making the paper chain, one of the things we'd like you to write on the links are the things you think we should remember about God and Jesus. You might write about the amazing things God has done, or what Jesus was like. For all of us, young and young at heart, what would you include on the links? What deeds or attributes of God would you remember?...

I'll give you 30 seconds to think or discuss at home!

(PAUSE)

Boys and girls, if you haven't already started, I hope you'll take some time during the service or this afternoon to make your own memory chain at home. Now, if I decided to cut this link what would happen? Can you guess? (CUT) The chain falls apart! Or say, someone passed me a new link for the chain (PASS – THANKS!), but then I just put it to the side and forget to use the link, what would happen then? The chain would stay broken! It's only when we use the links that we keep the chain whole and it works as it should, because a broken chain is not a very pretty thing.

So, why are we talking about chains and remembering things? Well, in our psalm today, we are given a challenge...

to remember, to remember what God has done, and pass that on to the next generation.

The psalmist said:

'...I will tell things that have been secret since long ago.

We have heard them and know them.

Our fathers told them to us.

We will not keep them from our children.

**We will tell those who come later
about the praises of the Lord.**

We will tell about his power
and the miracles he has done.' (v2-4)

Like an unbroken chain we are meant to pass on the stories, the testimony, of what God has done and what He is like, so that a community of faith continues.

I was really encouraged on Tuesday night to hear people from Brightons Church share their stories of faith, talking about the difference Jesus has made to their lives. It was so powerful – and if you’ve not listened to them yet, I encourage you to check out our YouTube channel, for these stories remind us that God is at work today, changing people’s lives and that we can all know this God.

But what do we mean by the “next generation”? Are we simply thinking of children and young people? Equally, could it also be people who are in their 20s, 30s, 40s or older and know nothing of what God has done? So, whether child or adult, how do we enable this whole generation to know our incredible God?

Well, broadly speaking, we need to be that link in the chain – actively passing on the faith, some way, some how – so that we put the words of Jesus into practice, He said: ‘go and make disciples of all nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.’ (Matthew 28:19-20) How we do that, what that looks like, we still need to figure out a bit and equip one another to do it in Brightons, and in the Braes area. But let me flag up two things with you.

Firstly, this passing on of the deeds and character of God, has never simply been about head knowledge – the goal is not for children or adults to be super knowledgeable about the Bible. No, God’s goal has always been that the next generation should experience, should meet and know the Creator and Saviour of all as they are told...

about Him, responding to Him for themselves.

Now, we might find that a bit uncomfortable, because that's not necessarily what was taught to us – we were maybe taught stories and good morals, and to fulfil religious duty – but that's not what God is ultimately seeking. He is seeking a people, a family who know Him, and actively love and follow Him. So, as we seek to be a link in the chain, to pass on the testimony of what God has done, we might need to step out of what we find comfortable, if we truly want to help the next generation love God with their heart, by experiencing Him, knowing Him, not just knowing about Him.

And to achieve that, there's a second thing I want to flag up, which has its roots in an **old proverb which says:**

“it takes a village to raise a child”. Similarly, it takes a whole church, even a family of churches, to reach and raise the next generation in the knowledge of the Lord. And so, we really do, even in lockdown, need to learn how to pull together across the Braes area, across the generations in Brightons Church, because research suggests that for a child to grow towards a healthy faith, they need five adults, outside of their family, investing in them. And for one adult to come to faith, they may need to hear the Good News of Jesus up to 30 times.

I think of the many children involved in our Sunday School, or our Boys and Girls Brigades, and I wonder: who are the five investing in each of them? I see the adults in our community, and I wonder: who’s sharing the Good News with them? So, this a big ask, a huge investment...

of time and energy, and to make this possible we need to be intentional about it, this doesn't just happen. So, I hope that in the coming months we might see ideas come out of the various teams within the church to facilitate this, to equip us in this calling to be a link in the chain.

Now sadly, as the psalm remind us, too often God's people allowed the chain to break. **The first generation who were rescued from Egypt:**

'...turned against God so often in the desert!

There they made him very sad.

Again and again they tested God.

They brought pain to the Holy One of Israel.' (v40-41)

And yet despite God being grieved so badly, future generations did not learn the lesson, indeed those who settled in the new land:

‘...turned away and sinned just like their ancestors...

They made God angry by building places to worship false gods.

They made him jealous with their idols.’ (v57-58)

Both generations forgot – they forgot what God had done, and so they grieved God, with their forgetfulness and then with their adultery, paining the heart of God by spurning Him and breaking the chain.

Yet, the psalm not only calls us to learn from their mistakes, this prayer also reminds us of God’s faithfulness, that He made promises and He will keep them...

And so, the psalmist talks about someone – boys and girls, can you remember who is named at the end of this psalm? **If I gave you a clue,** could you fill in the blanks? It's...**David! That's right,** the person who wrote this prayer remembers that God brought David, from being a what? Can you remember what David's first job was? He was a...**shepherd, he looked after** sheep and so God brought David to look after His people instead; David was to lead them and care for them as their King but like a shepherd.

What we're supposed to see here, is that God is faithful to His people and to His promises, even despite His people, because God is full of love and grace and forgiveness. He will keep His promises, even if that looks very different from what His people expect.

Jesus also made several promises. **For example, He said,** ‘...I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:20) **But He also said,** ‘I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.’ (Matthew 16:18) Jesus will build His church, His universal church. He will remain faithful to that promise, and the degree to which we give ourselves to our role, as a link in the chain, to go make disciples, that will affect the likelihood of our local churches continuing for future generations by helping those generations know and follow the Lord.

Jesus said of Himself: ‘I have come that [you] may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.’ (John 10:10-11) Jesus came to fulfil the promise of God and the hopes of His people. Jesus came to offer us life by...

laying down His own life. Yet He rose again victorious over the grave, to be our eternal Shepherd, then, now and for all the days to come. A shepherd who would never leave us nor forsake us, a shepherd who would fulfil His promise, build His church, and ensure the gates of Hades never prevail.

Friends, I pray that we may know the Good Shepherd, know Him close in these difficult days, and as we remember His deeds and character, especially His love shown on the cross, may we find new hope and new conviction so that we resolve to be that link in the chain, and enable the next generation to know Him for themselves. May it be so. Amen.

We close with our final hymn, “To God be the glory”.