

Good evening everyone, welcome to Tuesday evening sermon, it's great to have you join with us as we dig deeper into God's Word. After tonight we will have our discussion time in our Jitsi room and there will be questions to download from our website, so you just need to go to the sermons page or website and you can get the questions there and if you need the login details for the Jitsi room then just put something in the live chat at the side or drop us an e-mail or message us on Facebook and we'll get you the details so you can join us tonight. This is the last Tuesday evening sermon of this file format probably until after the summer break and so this is the last time to engage in this sort of format. Beginning from next week we'll be having a program of different events over the summer on a Tuesday evening, giving space for us to be built up in our faith but also time to have some social time together some prayer time together, a variety of different things and we'll get that information out to you in due course, so tonight - last time for the Jitsi discussion room, join us if you are able or get the questions from the website afterwards so that you can reflect on the passage and its application for your life afterwards. So, let us open our Bibles, open our Bible Apps, turn to Psalm 148 and we hear it read for us once more by Erin Lang. Let us come to God in prayer, 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. Holy Spirit draw close; be the spirit of wisdom and revelation for us tonight, that our eyes, our ears, our minds, our hearts, would be opened to what you would have us see and hear and do and be from this night on and forevermore, and all to the glory our God and Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, for we ask it in His name. Amen So, Psalm 148 - it's one of the five final Hallelujah! Psalms that makes up the end of the book of Psalms, drawing to that crescendo of praise to God, as we saw on Sunday morning. And so, we saw that there is that clear invitation to all creation to join in the praise of the Lord, Yahweh, as we saw in earlier Psalms, and so that was the focus of where we drew our attention on Sunday morning. But this Psalm is laced with relationships, relationships to one another and relationships to God and, you know, it's really interesting that Jesus had such a balance of his relationships, He was the only individual ever to live in perfect balance of all His relationships and, let me just take you over into Luke chapter 6 where, in verses 12 to 19, we see these relationships, that are laced there throughout Jesus' ministry and life, and so we open in verse 12 that Jesus goes up the mountain to pray and spend the night praying to his Heavenly Father, to Father God, and so we see that He has that relationship with His Father and this defines so much of His life, it is His principal relationship, that up relationship, to Father God - but then moving on in chapter 6 to verses 13 to 16, Jesus calls a group of individuals to be close to Him, to have relationship with Him, He has the twelve - He also has the 72 later on in Luke chapter 10, and He also has the three that He spends a principal amount of time with, but He has these relationships, these 'in' relationships, we might say, that He invested time in these relationships. And then there is the crowd, there is the world, there are those beyond his circle of close followers and He invests time in those relationships as well - verses 17 to 19 - He goes down from the hill with His disciples and there's a great number of people needing His help and so Jesus heals them, He spends time with them, He brings the kingdom of God in their midst. He has not only an upward focus and relationship with God, He not only has an inward focus and relationship with His followers, He has an outward focus and relationship with the wider world, and He has them all in perfect balance throughout His life, and one writer helpfully gave this the picture of a triangle, and of the three sides of a triangle being in perfect balance, the 'up' at the top of the triangle and in the two sides 'in' and 'out', and we

all need to be in balance just as Jesus lived. We need to have that balance of 'up', 'in' and 'out' but so often, we don't live that way, we often have an imbalance and, as churches, we often have an imbalance as well. So why am I even talking about this in relation to Psalm 148? Well, as I say, there's a principle invitation for all creation to praise God - that upward relationship, but there is that wider context of relationship as well, all defining our relationship from God, and if you kind of juxtapose that example of Jesus' life in the triangle against the Psalm, for me it just opened up the Psalm so very powerfully and so I wanted to bring that for you tonight in this sermon. So let's start with the upward relationship, the top of the triangle. Clearly that the Psalm is calling us, calling all creation, to turn its attention to God, to give God the praise that is due His name alone, because, as the Psalmist reminds us in verse 5, 'Let them praise the name of the Lord, for at His command they were created', at His spoken word of creation everything has come into being, and that includes you and me - as we saw in verses 11 and 12 - but as we saw also on Sunday that He has raised up for His people a horn - a deliverer, a strong deliverer, and for us, now, we see a prophetic word of reference to Jesus, even though at the time it would have been understood in the context of who God had raised up as a king for his people. And so, we have these reasons to glorify God as we saw on Sunday, to praise the Lord, but we've to praise Him alone, in verse 13, 'For His name alone is exalted', we've to praise the name of the Lord, we've to praise Yahweh alone, and so we've to have Him and give Him His rightful place as King, that the fundamental claim of this Psalm is that God alone is King, the Lord Yahweh alone is King, and what's striking about that for us human beings is that, so often we imagine ourselves kind of above all creation alongside God because we are very creative beings, we are very powerful beings, as one of the Psalms says, we've been made a little lower than the heavenly beings, and so we often get ourselves kind of confused, we have a false perception of ourselves, and this Psalm calls us to orientate our lives rightly - to worship God alone, yes with our words, but praise is so much more than just what we say, as we saw in the Psalm, that the created order doesn't utter a word really, but with their lives, praises God, glorifies His name. So, words are important but they are not the whole way in which we praise God. And so, the Psalm calls us to orientate our lives such that our lives, our worship, to the Lord. But what does that look like? What does that look like? How does that affect our time? - how does that affect what we use our money on? - how does that affect the manner in which we live? - the choices that we make? And so, I think that's where I find that the triangle quite helpful again, because in the triangle there is the 'out' and the 'in' corners as well, that they've all to be in relationship but, in balance, but they are in relationship to one another and so, we define how we live 'out' by what God says, because it's in relationship, it's a triangle: likewise, with the 'in' corner, it's that idea of what does it mean to tell love our neighbour, to love our brother and sister, to invest and then, again defined by what God says, it's all in relationship. And when we allow God to be God and have that proper relationship upwards to Him, we heed what He says about these other areas because we are allowing God to be God, and we realize that we are not God, that only He is over creation. So, let's go first to the 'out' corner; and what's striking about this Psalm, like much of the Old Testament when we dig into it deeper, is that it radically challenges that the wider philosophies, mythologies, traditions, that would have been prevalent around Israel at the time; and so ancient Near Eastern mythologies and traditions, argued, portrayed, had a theology which said that the Sun and Moon were divined, that the great sea beasts were was just as powerful as God, that even the ocean depths were a form of chaos, kind of fighting against God

in some way, and yet this Psalm, like all the Old Testament, challenges that theology, and it says that only God alone is divine, that everything else has been created to praise Him, that He is not in a battle of wills, there is no contest here, He alone is exalted - that's what we see in verse 13, 'for His name alone is exalted, His splendour is above the earth and the heavens', His splendour - it's a picture of His glory, of His Kingship, and what the Psalm is helping us see is that God is not on the same level as everything else, that everything else is under Him, He rules alone, He alone is sovereign, He reigns on high as King, and so the name of the Lord, Yahweh, His name alone is exalted and is to be exalted, His name alone is to be praised. So, what's the application of all that? Well, two ideas here in the outward area; on the one hand is just as relevant today as it was then, that challenge to the wider plethora of religions (?), worldviews (?), which say that everything is equal, that there are many ways to God, and the Psalm, as with the whole theology of the Bible, says differently; that the Lord Yahweh alone is exalted, that He alone is God over all, and I guess the question comes about how do we share that? - how do we make that known? - and again, that will come down to, how do we go about evangelism?- that evangelism is still just as needed today as ever, and in our culture increasingly so, we are beyond Christendom where it can be assumed that everybody is a Christian or has a Christian worldview. That can no longer be assumed, it is long gone, it is no longer here. Now, I am not someone who is in favour of street evangelism, I actually did that in my teenage years so - not my teenage years, my student years - I know how disastrously it goes often and so that's not what I'm talking about, I'm not talking about ramming religion down people's throat, I'm not talking about any number of different ideas of evangelism that we might have, but when we live in a culture that really drowns out and at times seems to just push the Lord to the side, there comes a time when the church needs to say, as it should always have said, how do we make God known in our context, in our place, here? - and it's not enough just for the minister to do it, it's not just enough for the minister to be the one calling people to follow God, to turn from their ways - and that's the basic meaning of repent - because such a small proportion of our congregation, of our parish, come to church on a Sunday, might ever come to church on a Sunday, and so there's that calling, that invitation, that challenge, for us all to be involved in that in some way, somehow. In some way, somehow, we need to figure out how to be equipped in that, how to go about that, how to do that in our context, in our parish, now in 2020, that people might know the Lord alone is Yahweh, that He alone is exalted. But also in the area of 'out' is something around what we quite often call creation care, creation care, because, it's really striking that this Psalm references so much of the wider creation, as I said on Sunday, it's almost like the Psalmist is looking out on everything he can see and imagine and he's astounded by it all and he sees that it's all there to glorify God and all called to participate in the glorifying of God; and creation alone, the wider creation, excluding humanity, sings in perfect unison and tune, it's us who are out of tune, but there's that relationship within the wider creation and it gets me thinking about how we might be getting in the way of what creation is to do, because if everything belongs to God, and He alone is Lord of it all, then we have to look after that because, as his stewards, we were given the responsibility to do that and what is important and valuable to God should be important and valuable to us. And I know that in our kind of branch of Christian theology, we can sometimes struggle with that, we get so focused on the word, and we get so focused on evangelism, that basically that's all mission ends up being; but there are so many really strong arguments in favour of the need to look after the wider creation, and if you're not convinced about that - that

that's important for Christians to do nowadays - then can I encourage you to maybe pick up this sizable tome, you can borrow mine if you don't want to borrow it. It's 'The Mission of God' by a gentleman with the title 'Wright', this is one of the books I had to read during my training, Christopher Wright, 'Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative', and he has a whole chapter on mission and God's earth. I just want to read you a small, kind of summary paragraph that he says, 'To love God means to value what God values. Conversely therefore, to contribute to or collude in the abuse, pollution, and destruction of the natural order, is to trample on the goodness of God reflected in creation; it is to devalue what God values; to mute, to mute, God's praise and to diminish His glory'. And he goes on to give many more reasons why care of creation is seen as one of the hallmarks of mission, a very challenging, thought-provoking chapter and so if you want to delve into that a bit more, then think come speak with me if you want a bit of broader theology on why creation care should be seen within the mission of God. And just get to get really practical on that, I think in the first year I was here in Brighton, I had that all-age talk where I got chatting with the children about how we look after the wider creation. I wonder if any of you have done anything about that. I'm pretty sure I talked with them about biodegradable toothbrushes - anybody got their toothbrush yet? - shampoo? - shampoo as a soap bar instead of having a plastic bottle, plastic not being as recyclable as you might think. Likewise, because of the plastic issue, investing in safety razors - using this for about a year now and cutting myself a lot less, though hopefully that doesn't change just because I've mentioned that now, or what about even in the kitchen instead of cling film and tinfoil getting a reusable beeswax wrap which, when it might eventually -and we've had this one for a good wee while now, but when it might eventually no longer become usable is completely biodegradable as well. Just really simple quick practical ways that we can put this into practice but we can embody and partner with the mission of God which includes care and redemption of the wider creation, so as not to mute the voice of creation as it sings its praise to God; and so that's the other part of the 'out' relationship that I wanted to bring today - as we look out and we think about mission, do we think about creation care? - and do we think about evangelism? So, let's go to the other corner of our triangle, the inward relationship, and at the end of the Psalm, the psalmist is calling the people of God to their place of praising the name of Yahweh. He says, 'He has raised up for His people a horn, the praise of all His faithful servants of Israel, the people close to his heart'. But, of course, this is all situated within that earlier context of 'praise the Lord, let them praise the name of the Lord'. There is that call, 'let them', it has a bit of an unfortunate, English phrasing, it doesn't sound - it's like - well, just let them kind of get on with it, or something quite kind of tame, just slightly permissive, but really the idea is real exhortation! When God said, 'let there be light', it wasn't just a nice - well it would be kind of nice if that happened - type thing, it was 'let there be light' It was a kind of - it was a command, clearly. Now, it's different here, but you get that idea that it's more than just a nice permissiveness, it is a real calling to say, 'this should come into being', that the praise of Yahweh should be core to His people for who He is, that He alone is exalted, that He alone is Lord over all, that He has raised up for His people a horn, a strong deliverer, a saviour, and that his people are close to his heart. And in that inward part of the triangle, the idea there is around how we care for one another? - it is around how we challenge and encourage one another? - it is how do we spur one another on in our faith and towards love and good deeds? - and a couple of thoughts come to mind. Clearly, as I've said - there's that call to praise the Lord, the psalmist is crying out and this would be used in the context of praise

and worship and, it would be clear, in the Old Testament about how to go about doing that - in our context, how do we do that? - how do we spur one another on? - what is the means that we have to do that? - because it's not just the minister's job, it's not just the elders' job, what are the means that we reach out to other and we spur one another on in our faith? I'm having some really great discussions just now with the Discipleship Team about looking at different models for how we spur one another on in our faith, because as it stands, quite a small proportion of our Sunday congregation engage in Fellowship Groups and maybe that's not for everyone, maybe Fellowship Groups aren't intentional enough to be expanding and growing - at one point in recent church history there was the 'cell movement', the idea that cells multiply and grow, and so we're bouncing around some ideas just now within Discipleship Team about, well, what models are there? - and what models might we try? So over the summer we're going to try, as a Discipleship Team, one particular model and see - does this have anything that might be of benefit to have Brightons? - that might encourage one another and provide a means by which we can be drawn alongside our people and saying, 'Come on! worship the Lord, worship Him not only, as I say, in what we say but in our very lives and orientate much more of our lives around Him and for Him and for His praise and glory. I don't know how that'll go over the summer and if we have anything to share you'll hear about it in due course. But I'm struck by those words 'the people close to His heart'. It's striking, isn't it, that the psalmist comes back to that? - that he describes and he paints this picture of all creation, the great depths of the ocean to the very heights of creation and the heavens itself, with the angelic beings and the Sun and Moon and stars in outer space, the animals on the land, the vegetation, the great sea creatures, and yet he comes down to the people and he describes them and reminds them of this, that they are the people close to His heart. I'm reminded of that lovely story in the Gospels where the Apostle John is resting with Jesus and his head is on the chest of Jesus, and he hears - I can just imagine him hearing the Heart of Jesus beating, the heart of God beating, that he was close to Jesus, he could hear its rhythm, and he knew the wider heart of Jesus, the wider character of Jesus, the wider love of Jesus, and I wonder, 'Do we know that? - do our people know that? - does our wider parish know that? - that there is that invitation to know the heart - to hear the heart of God beating for you and from me. There's a part of the 'in' of the triangle is enabling that, is facilitating that, facilitating that experience of Jesus that we know His heart beats for us, beats with the rhythm of love for you and for me, because we are near to his heart as the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 13, 'but now in Christ Jesus you, who were once far away, have been brought near by the blood of Christ'. We've been brought back into that relationship with God, that God might not just be the old man in the sky, but we know that the living Jesus walks with us now, today, that we are near to Him and He is near to us, and we have that invitation, as I was saying just last week, to hear the voice of God for ourselves - once more and every day. Again, how are we enabling that? - how are we leaning into that for ourselves? - we've looked at, in this series on the Psalms, of digging into God's Word, for example, what have you done about that? - how are you creating space for the Lord to speak to you? But how can we enable that for others? - and again, that's part of the question I have with the Discipleship Team is, how else can we be equipping people? - and so that's part of this testing of a model, because this particular model that we're looking, its principal focus at times, is what is God saying to you now? - inviting us into that dynamic experience with God because we are the people who are close to His heart. I pray that we may know that God close and as we give Him His rightful place, as we

look up - that, yes, praise would flow from our lips, that praise would be seen in our lives in the 'out' and how we share our faith with others and how we care for creation and see that as an equal part of mission, and how we spur one another on and look out for one another and get beyond the weather and how are you doing and get into the the real gritty issues of faith and life, and help our brothers and sisters to experience God and to hear his voice for themselves. May we live in praise of God and with these relationships in balance. To Him be all glory, now and forever. Amen. Let us take a moment to pray before we finish up for this evening. Our God and Heavenly Father, You are the Lord, Your name alone is exalted, You alone are in splendour above the heavens and the earth – to Your name alone, the Lord, Yahweh, our Father in heaven, we bring You our praise, we bring it in the name of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit, to glorify You and adore You and not only to see that, but to live it out in our lives as well. Father, lead us on, we pray, individually and as a congregation, in how we might live these relationships in balance, that we might live 'out' well, that we would be active in the sharing of our faith, that we might grow in confidence in this, that we would yearn for it more, Lord, that we'd overcome fear because we yearn for people to know that You alone are the Lord, that You are there for them, but Lord too, may we be a witness, may we be good ambassadors and stewards of Your creation, to care for what You care for. Lord, show us how we can take those practical steps, but Lord equally, be with us as we seek to draw alongside one another, to spur one another on in faith and help one another know that You are near and we are near to You - that we are dear to You, and that You invite us into much more than just ticking the box and following rules, that You invite us into a life of faith with You which, as we were thinking about, is meant to be full of dangerous wonder. We are meant to experience You, God, and know Your voice for ourselves. Lead us in this Lord, equip us for it better, but may all of it Lord, be to Your praise, be to Your glory, to point to You, to delight and revel in You, our God and heavenly Father; and so hear us as we draw this prayer, this series in the Psalms, and indeed our Tuesday evening sermons to a close for now, as we say together that prayer which Jesus taught His disciples: 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory forever. Amen. Thanks for being with us tonight everyone for Tuesday evening sermon. We do have the Jitsi discussion room starting quite shortly after this, so get in there if you're able to join with us or download the discussion questions for your own reflection from the website. Next Tuesday evening we have our question-and-answer evening with our group of local scientists, so if you've got a question about science and how it relates to our faith, then get a question in, drop us an e-mail, post on facebook even in the live chat just now. Get it in, we'd love to have any number of questions and try and engage with those. So, if you've got something that you want answered, something that maybe you're unsure - how does this relate to my faith? - how do I understand God about this? - how do I understand this in relation to the Scriptures? – then get in touch, drop us a message, we need it by Friday so that we've got enough time to record things in advance of next Tuesday, so, I hope to see maybe on Thursday evening with our Thursday evening live prayer, if not Sunday morning either in our pre-service Zoom cuppa or afterwards in the service at 11 o'clock. And as you go from here, may you, your family and loved one, know the blessing of God Almighty, the Lord whose splendour is above the heavens and the earth, this night and for evermore. Amen.