



## Who Has Got Hold Of You? - 21st June 2020

**Rev Kim Ratcliffe**

### **Transcript**

Good morning and welcome to the Salford Methodist Circuit on Sunday 21st June 2020. We'll begin our service this morning with the Lord's Prayer. Let us pray

*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.*

Our first hymn this morning is number 513 in Singing the Faith book and it is 'Take this Moment, sign and space,' let us sing:

### **Hymn: Take this Moment, Sign and Space**

*Take this moment, sign, and space;  
take my friends around;  
here among us make the place  
where your love is found.*

*Take the time to call my name,  
take the time to mend  
who I am and what I've been,  
all I've failed to tend.*

*Take the tiredness of my days,  
take my past regret,  
letting your forgiveness touch  
all I can't forget.*

*Take the little child in me,  
scared of growing old;  
help me here to find my worth  
made in Christ's own mould.*



*Take my talents, take my skills,  
take what's yet to be;  
let my life be yours, and yet,  
let it still be me.*

The Bible Reading is taken from Genesis chapter 21, verses 8 to 21: Hagar and Ishmael Sent Away

*The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son Isaac." The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring." So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. And she departed, and wandered about in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.*

*When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes. Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; for she said, "Do not let me look on the death of the child." And as she sat opposite him, she lifted up her voice and wept. And God heard the voice of the boy; and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven, and said to her, "What troubles you, Hagar? Do not be afraid; for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him." Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went, and filled the skin with water, and gave the boy a drink.*

*God was with the boy, and he grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with the bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran; and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt.*

Thanks be to God, Amen

Our next reading is taken from Matthew chapter 10 verses 24 to 39, but before that we will sing number 394, Spirit of God, unseen as the wind

## **Hymn: Spirit of God, unseen as the wind**

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,  
gentle as is the dove,*

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*teach us the truth and help us believe,  
show us the Saviour's love.*

*You spoke to us long, long ago,  
gave us the written word;  
we read it still, needing its truth,  
through it God's voice is heard.*

*Without your help we fail our Lord,  
we cannot live his way;  
we need your power, we need your strength,  
following Christ each day.*

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,  
gentle as is the dove,  
teach us the truth and help us believe,  
show us the Saviour's love.*

A reading from the Gospel of Matthew chapter 10 verses 24-39

*"A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!"*

*"So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

*"Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.*

*Not Peace, but a Sword*

*"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.  
For I have come to set a man against his father,  
and a daughter against her mother,  
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;  
and one's foes will be members of one's own household.*

*Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and*

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*whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me.  
Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my  
sake will find it.*

Thanks be to God for that word. Amen

Let us pray.

Lord, we come to you in prayer  
You send us into the wilderness and yet you hear us still.  
When we need shelter away from the heat of the day, you provide it.  
When we are thirsty for your word, you speak to us.  
We listen for your voice today, Lord.  
We seek only to do what you ask of us.  
We need to hear you clearly,  
not within the clutter of our minds  
but fresh and anew.

You give us hope in a mixed-up world  
You bring us peace in a peaceless world  
You stay with us when we dare to be different  
'Have no fear' you say to us, 'have no fear, I am with you.'  
We thank you Lord. Amen,

We're now doing to sing Jesus is the name we honour, hymn number 354 from  
Singing the Faith.

## **Hymn: Jesus is the Name we Honour**

*Jesus is the name we honour;  
Jesus is the name we praise.  
Majestic name above all other names,  
the highest heav'n and earth proclaim  
that Jesus is our God.*

*We will glorify,  
we will lift him high,  
we will give him honour and praise.  
We will glorify,  
we will lift him high,  
we will give him honour and praise.*

*Jesus is the name we worship;  
Jesus is the name we trust.  
He is the King above all other kings,  
let all creation stand and sing  
that Jesus is our God*

*We will glorify,*

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*Jesus is the Father's splendour;  
Jesus is the Father's joy.  
He will return to reign in majesty,  
and every eye at last will see  
that Jesus is our God.*

*We will glorify,*

Both the Old Testament Reading and the Gospel Reading that I have focused on for my sermon today filled me with dread when I looked at them initially. You know when you think, how on earth am I going to put something together, it looked complicated, it looked at first instance really depressing, it gave the feeling of needing to fear and yet to have no fear in Matthew. In Matthew, we are told not to have fear for the teacher nor master, we are told "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul", and "do not to be afraid because you are of more value than many sparrows". But then we are also told to "fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell". We see a different Jesus here to, from what we are used to. He says "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." But within the words there is sense to be made. To me, and forgive me if you think I am wrong, we are all on a learning curve, we learn from each other, we begin our learning the moment we are born but every day we are learning new things. At different stages of our lives and when faced with different situations we may have to go back into education to gain the qualifications that we need for a new or existing job. We have certainly been on a learning curve, haven't we, during the pandemic that we have been facing and some people have had their lives changed in a way that we cannot possibly imagine because we have not had to live their experiences; we are living our own experiences. We can show empathy and sympathy, praise and joy, relief we can all feelings, and show these feelings. But sometimes there are no words that we can say. Learning new ways of being and doing, trying to listen and to see and to learn more so that we have a clearer understanding and maybe even share with others what we have ourselves learned. When we are afraid of something there are different ways of approaching it. We can either wait, stop where we are, figure out for ourselves all the logical reasons why and even force ourselves to go into a situation that we are afraid of and try to deal with it on our own. We do have the opportunity to walk away from our fears without addressing the matter and when or if the time comes, we need to we face that fear again further along in our lives and we can again walk away. We can also choose to share that fear with others, maybe close friends, maybe work colleagues, maybe someone who has experienced a similar fear or who has the professional qualifications to be able to help you figure out where that fear is coming from and help you to understand why and help you to try different way of alleviating some if not all of that feeling. The time it takes for an individual person or a community of people to come to a place that they feel safe again, we need to try to believe and trust that someone is there with us, holding us. We need to know that God has a hold of us and I

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believe that He has. We are hearing all the time at the moment that we are 'all together in this' and we need to know that God is with us 'in this' whatever situation we are facing.

When someone's soul has been 'killed' because of the control that someone or something has over their life then it needs to be understood and allowed time to heal. When someone's soul has been broken it needs as much time as it does to heal to the point where people maybe see a little bit of light breaking gradually into the darkness that has so overwhelming and overshadowing for them. We need to know that God hears our cry and there is no limit to His mercy.

Jesus faced and came through difficult times as we know and we see this throughout scripture. It didn't stop him to stand for injustices but he gathered his strength from God and was able to stand for justice in all situations. In our weakness God is more than capable of giving us the strength that we need. Jesus was dependent of God; He knew all the time that God had hold of Him.

Do we depend on God in our lives? Sometimes we get a little bit waylaid. We are going about life and then it becomes apparent that we have actually been dependent on other things that have taken over our lives – you will know what these things are, you don't need me to tell you. When we have become more dependent on 'other things' and less dependent on God we can begin to juggle the priorities in life and very soon we see that God has been squeezed into 10<sup>th</sup> maybe even 100<sup>th</sup> place instead of 1<sup>st</sup> place in our lives. The people in our lives, our family and friends are so important to us and rightly so. God is important too.

I love it when our Tesco vouchers come through the post because we have been loyal to shopping there, but then we get loyalty vouchers for shopping at Morrisons too, then you can collect Nectar points at Sainsbury's for your loyalty. When you have them you then gather them together and then there is the choice to make isn't there – now which one will I go to shop at this week having faith there are bound to be better choices this one or that one this week? Because of our faith, faith in God that is, we have a need to be loyal to Him, He is loyal to us. Try not to be tempted to place other things in your lives and push God to the back of your priorities. Who are you dependent on and who has got hold of you?

Thinking about our Old Testament reading from Genesis. We know from our Old Testament reading that God was with Sarah and Abraham and Isaac and we know that God was with Hagar and Ishmael, He gave instructions - clear instructions - He even encouraged them to believe and trust that their lives, although more than a bit traumatic at times, in the end it would be all ok, it would turn out ok in the end. Both Isaac and Ishmael would be a big part of the future of their world. Sarai and Abram in those days had power over Hagar who was Sarah's servant. In Chapter 16, if you read that please, we see the fuller story which is hard to read. In chapter 16 because Sarah was without child she had gifted Hagar to Abraham and all sorts of feelings rang out from that. Hagar we are told in Chapter 16 looked on Sarah with contempt, was beaten and ran



away into the wilderness, I certainly wouldn't have hung around in that situation but that's me. Then the angel appeared and reassured Hagar that God was with her and gave her the name she was to give her son Ishmael. So, I am guessing gaining all of the strength that she needed within her she went back to live there with them, perhaps even reluctantly. In this part of the story we are told that Abram was 86 years old. Now in today's Chapter 21 our reading shows that Sarah gave birth to Isaac when Abraham was 100 years old making Ishmael 14 years old than his brother. Life certainly wasn't a bed of roses. Sarah saw something rightly or wrongly that was happening between the two children, she may have seen something we don't know anything about or she may have been extremely jealous of Ishmael. She had the power to dismiss Hagar and the child, the child by this time would have been approximately 16/17 which confuses us, when we hear that Abraham put the bread and water over her shoulder to carry and the 'child' too, in the reading. Even although Ishmael was Abraham's son Sarah had taken control of the situation and this time Hagar didn't flee to the wilderness for her safety but she was sent out into the wilderness this time. Here we have a woman and her son being made homeless, sent on their way to fend for themselves, to find their own way to survive. Sent into the dryness of the wilderness with only what she was able to carry and we see her sorrow and her fear unfold. Yet God was with her, God was holding her and heard the voice of her child when no-one else could and God got hold of him too. We need to trust that God has hold of us today and God will have hold of us always. God had hold of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael who are a part of our history, the history of our world. God had hold of Jesus as he brought justice into the most unjust situations, He said "do not be afraid", but be afraid. Do not be afraid of the person who can kill you physically but be afraid of the person who kills your soul. There are sadly situations we may face and people we face who may attempt to kill our soul and it may be that we feel that our soul has been broken or even shattered. But God has hold of us and places into our lives people who are holding us too. Those people who we know when they speak of us they speak only with words of kindness, words of love and words of care and not of impatience or grumbling all the time. And we know that our name is safe in their mouths.

From the book of Joyce Landorf's 'Balcony People' we see where she describes 'basement people' as those people who pull us down and we may have experienced people like this in our lives, no matter how hard we try doing something to the best of our ability there may be someone just waiting for an opportunity to pull us down. This and sadly this can happen from a very young age, in school, sometimes in the workplace. And then we see Basement people try to pull us down at every opportunity. But then Joyce also describes 'Balcony people' as those who lift us up and inspire us, those who go out of their way to help us throughout our lives, those people who will go one step further, those people who almost hang on by their toes to try to give us a lift up when we fall, hold onto us and help us every way that they can and have walked beside us during the worst time in our lives. And this can be for only for a short period of our lives or a much, much longer period of our lives. Joyce says.

"Balcony people love from the heart.



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Balcony people listen from the heart.

Balcony people care from the heart."

Take this moment, time and place to think of your balcony people now.

We come before God in prayer now, our prayers of concern. Let us pray.

Let us pray for all people, everywhere according to their need.

We pray:

For the Church of Christ throughout the world,

For its unity in Christ,

For the fulfilment of its mission,

For all ministers of the Gospel,

For all Christians here in Salford and beyond,

For people of every faith and those with no faith.

Strengthen our Church

In the service of Christ;

That we and all who confess your name

May be united in your truth,

Live together in your love,

And reveal your glory in the world.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Let us pray:

For all nations and peoples of the world,

For all who serve the common good,

For our own country and our government,

For all in authority,

For all those involved in responsibilities for

the wellbeing of humankind at this difficult time

in the history of our world.

Give wisdom to all in authority;

Direct this and every nation

In the ways of justice and of peace;

That we may honour one another,

And seek the common good.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer

Let us pray:

For those we know and love



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For the local community  
For our families and friends

Give grace to us,  
To our families and friends,  
And to all our neighbours,  
That we may serve Christ in one another,  
And love as he loves us.

Lord, in your mercy  
Hear our prayer

Let us pray:  
For all who suffer  
We pray for the sick  
For those who mourn  
For those who serve the needy.

Comfort and heal all those who suffer  
In body, mind or spirit;  
Give them courage and hope in their troubles;  
And bring them the joy of your salvation.

Lord in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Let us remember all who have died,

We commend all people to your unfailing love,  
That in them your will may be fulfilled;  
And we praise and rejoice at the faithful witness  
Of your saints in every age,  
Praying that we may share with them  
In your eternal kingdom.

Lord in your mercy,  
Hear our prayer.

Merciful Father,  
Accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,  
Our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We now have our final hymn, which is When I needed a neighbour, were you there

## **Hymn: When I needed a neighbour**

*When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?*

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*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
were you there?*

*I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there?  
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?  
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
were you there?*

*I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?  
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?  
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
were you there?*

*When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a shelter, were you there?  
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
were you there?*

*When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?  
When I needed a healer, were you there?  
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
were you there?*

*Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there,  
wherever you travel I'll be there.  
And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,  
I'll be there.*

As we go our separate ways, I leave you with this blessing:

May God bless us and hold us  
during this coming week  
whatever may lie ahead of us.  
Amen and thanks be to God.

Amen

Take This Moment - John L. Bell and Graharn Maule  
Words and Music: From Love From Below 1989, WGRG, Iona Community, Glasgow G2 3DH Scotland.  
[www.wrg.co.uk](http://www.wrg.co.uk)

Spirit Of God, Unseen As The Wind - Margaret V Old  
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