

Sunday 24th May 2020

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God is love, let us adore God by sharing God's love.

God is ever present, around us and within us, though separate let us worship together in God.

Hymn In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear;
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here:
the storm may roar without me,
my heart may low be laid,
but God is round about me,
and can I be dismayed?

Wherever he may guide me,
no want shall turn me back;
my Shepherd is beside me,
and nothing can I lack:
his wisdom ever waketh,
his sight is never dim;
he knows the way he taketh,
and I will walk with him.

Green pastures are before me,
which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will soon be o'er me,
where darkening clouds have been:
my hope I cannot measure,
my path to life is free;
my Saviour has my treasure,
and he will walk with me.

ANNA L. WARING (1823-1910)*

Prayer

Praise to you, God of creation, let all the earth sing your praises.

From the heights to the depths, from the smallest to the mightiest creation joins in your song;

from the beating of a butterfly's wings, to the soaring song of the lark,

from the chatter of a dolphin to the mighty roar of a lion,

from the quiet whisper of grass in the wind to clatter of rain on a roof, creation joins in your song.

You are always with us, your love surrounds us in the beauty of creation,

your presence enfolds us through the caress of creation, your creation encourages us in our journey of discovery as we explore you in all the wonders of the world.

As we join in worship we bring our hearts and minds and voices to praise you.

As we lift our eyes to your glory may we feel you lifting us in our worship.

As we rest together in your love may our love radiate into the world.

The Lord's prayer

Readings 1 Peter 4:12-14 & 5:6-11

John 17:1-11

Hymn

Holy Spirit, ever dwelling
in the glorious realms of light;
Holy Spirit, ever brooding
o'er a world of gloom and night;
Holy Spirit, ever forming
in the Church the mind of Christ;
thee we praise with endless worship
for thy fruit and gifts unpriced.

Holy Spirit, ever working
through the Church's ministry;
quick'ning, strength'ning, and absolving,
setting captive sinners free;
Holy Spirit, ever binding
age to age, and soul to soul,
in a fellowship unending
thee we worship and extol.

TIMOTHY REES (1874-1939)

Reflection

Countless books and films have explored the search for the secret of eternal life, from Indiana Jones to Pirates of the Caribbean. In some it is a search for the Holy Grail whilst in others it is the search for the Elixir of Life, what they all seem to have in common is the theme of staying young in our physical body. Indeed, eternal life in the physical body without some magic that keeps us young seems more like hell than heaven. If only all these people had looked in the bible!

In John 17, Jesus shares the secret of eternal life – it is to know God, and, as John is a story about Jesus, to know Jesus. What does it mean to Know God? Last week I shared the story about God hiding in our hearts, and how the journey to find God was important to our formation. Is then eternal life about knowing our true selves, knowing our hearts rather than anything to do with our physical bodies? In the ancient biblical world 'heart' was often used to express our concept of mind, that is, you think from your heart. Heart is about feelings, so it is the feelings associated with knowing God which should guide our choices, we need to know our hearts. In Peter's first letter he asks the question 'why do you do what you do', what is your motive, and what is your motivation? Is your motivation God, that which connects and forms all that is, or is it self?

There are some Christians who are very sure that they can tell when someone knows God, they measure a person's relationship with God by either the person's attitude to life or their circumstances. These Christians believe it is wrong to have doubts and wrong to question, they also believe only good things happen to those whose relationship with God is right. I struggle with this, which probably means they would consider I do not have a relationship with God, but I know that life can be tough for Christians and bad things do happen, and I also believe God invites us to question, for that is what exploring God is all about. Peter talks about when things go wrong, for Peter knew only too well that bad things happen. He himself had denied knowing Jesus, he had seen Jesus killed in the most brutal fashion, he had heard the stories of Stephen's brutal murder, he was friends with Thomas who questioned everything, Peter knew life was not plain sailing even when you 'knew God'.

Jesus knew all about tough times, he knew how in those tough times it could feel as if God had abandoned you but he also knew that we are one with God and therefore God is always with us, through the good times and the bad, we simply have to believe and look for God. God gives free will, God does not coerce, love is only love when there are no strings attached. Free will means we

make our own choices and live the consequences, but the more we come to know God the wiser those choices will be, the more we are guided by our hearts the more loving those choices will be. Peter says, be humble in all your dealings, do not judge others and do what you do willingly rather than for gain, do it as a servant rather than a Lord. This is the way of Jesus. Spiritual journeying is about listening for God, listening for best course of action we can possibly take, knowing that our choices will influence the life the others. We are only too aware of that at the moment, it is believed that this pandemic began because of illegal animal trading, someone's desire to have an unusual, and possibly inappropriate pet, has caused a pandemic which has brought the world to a halt. An extreme example but it demonstrates that everything is connected, and our choices are significant.

Jesus offers a prayer for the disciples – Father, guide them as they pursue this life that you conferred as a gift through me, so that they can be one heart and mind, as we are one heart and mind. It is the knowledge of our oneness that is at the heart of Jesus' message to the world. It is a theme which is at the heart of the film *Nanny McPhee*, in which a group of unruly children, whose mother has died leaving them in the loving but hapless care of their father, find themselves under the care of a very strange nanny. At the beginning of the relationship Nanny McPhee is a grotesque figure and the children loathe her and all she stands for, but as the story unfolds and the children are taught about choices and consequences they are drawn into a unity and slowly their motivation is changed, and as it is so the appearance of Nanny McPhee changes, her more grotesque characteristics disappearing. The question is does Nanny McPhee change or is it the children's perception which changes, as they become more aware of others, and more compassionate in nature does it also change how they see people? I think I know how Jesus would answer.

So how should we measure our relationship with God, how well do I know God? It is all about how we allow our heart to guide our path. In the film *Chocolat*, on Easter Sunday the priest, having torn up the sermon prepared for him by the Mayor, speaks from his heart –

"I want to talk about Christ's humanity, I mean how he lived on earth: his kindness, his tolerance. We must measure our goodness not by what we don't do, what we deny ourselves, what we resist and who we exclude. Instead we should measure ourselves by what we embrace, what we create and who we include."

We talk about the guidance of the Spirit, that which connects us with God and with each other. When we are open to our connectedness, aware of the consequences of our choices and filled with the love that is God, then the way we live changes. We become more tolerant, more compassionate, more creative in our thinking, we see things differently and we do things for different reasons. During our current situation many are discovering a different way to live, a different focus; discovering that it is better to work to live than to live to work, that relationships are more important than possessions. Most probably do not realise it but this is discovering the message of Jesus, it is a step on the journey to know God, and collectively each step may change the world.

Next Sunday is Pentecost, when we celebrate the change in the disciple's awareness which is to have far reaching consequences in their lives and in our lives: the awareness of the Spirit. I remember the coming of the Star Wars films, and the wisdom of the Jedi masters, in particular Yoda. In the second of the original films, *The Empire Strikes Back*, Yoda is struggling to teach Luke Skywalker the ways of the Force and the power of the Force – *"Size matters not. Look at me. Judge me by my size do you? And well you should not. For my ally is the Force and a powerful ally it is. Life creates it, makes it grow, its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings we are, not this crude matter. You must feel the force around you, between you, me, the tree, the rock, everywhere."* When we feel the Spirit we act as one, mind and heart, then we are at one with God, no longer confined by the physicality of our being but free to live life in all its wonder. Free to imagine God's kingdom of peace and justice and humility and in the Spirit to create that world by the actions of our hearts. Free to be the church, a people of God, living as God, loving as God and creating in God's image the new world. Free to be. Amen.

Prayer

Eternal God, source of all being, in you is eternal life, help us to understand ourselves in you.

Loving God, we give thanks for the message of Jesus and its power to change lives. We give thanks for the Spirit which surrounds us and enfolds and through which we can explore life in all its fullness. We are called to be a people of love, compassion and justice, called to think with our hearts as well as our minds and to listen for your voice in every aspect of our lives.

All around us we see people acting out of love, people who care deeply for other people and offer their lives to make a difference. May we to speak out for justice when these people face financial struggles because their work is rewarded less than others.

All around us we see people imagining creatively, exploring new ideas to enable others to live life more fully, charity workers, scientists, engineers, and teachers who use their life skills to make a difference in the world. May we imagine creatively and use our life skills to make a difference, and our generosity to share your love more freely.

All around us we sense injustice, people judged for their circumstances, race or colour, people denied access to resources because of where they live or don't live, people caught in poverty and ill health. May we speak out for tolerance, fairness and a sharing of the world's treasures, and may we speak by example.

All around us we feel creation groaning as humanity fails to care for the world and its resources, grabbing rather than sharing, plundering rather than valuing, breaking rather than nurturing. May we learn from this time that our choices make a difference, our decisions have consequences beyond our locale and our relationships matter more than any possession.

May we discover the oneness of heart and mind that is knowing you and being fully human. Amen.

Our offering to God.

As we continue to worship apart but together, let us pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church by continuing to send our offering and exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know God's blessing on all we do. Amen

Hymn

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
be thou for ever near me,
my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me;
the world is ever near,
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will.

O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised,
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be;
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Saviour and my Friend.
O give me grace to follow,
my Saviour and my Friend.

J. E. BODE (1816-74)*

Blessing

May the blessing that is the knowledge of God, source of all being, the love of God discovered through Jesus and the inspiration of the Spirit which binds us together be with us on our journey this day and every day. Amen.