

Sunday 14th June 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 New every morning is the love (sing to: The lord is King lift up your voice)
our waking and uprising prove;
through sleep and darkness safely brought
restored to life and power and thought.

New mercies each returning day,
hover around us while we pray;
new perils past, new sins forgiven,
new thoughts of God, new hopes of heaven

If on our daily course our mind
be set to hallow all we find,
new treasures still, of countless price,
God will provide for sacrifice.

Old friends, old scenes, will lovelier be,
as more of heaven in each we see;
some softening gleam of love and prayer
shall dawn on every cross and care.

The trivial round, the common task
will furnish all we ought to ask.
Lord, help us, this and every day,
to live more nearly as we pray.

JOHN KEBLE (1792-1866) altd. *

Prayer (based on Psalm 116)

Eternal God, to you I offer my praise, in you I am one with all creation and in oneness my voice is heard, my fears are listened to and with love they are borne away, my concerns are shared and with love solutions are found. In you I am free, sorrows are of this time, but joy is eternal, and following the way of love I am following the path of life in all its fullness.

In response I offer all that I am.

In love I will bear others gently.

In love I will share my story as an offering to you.

In love I will speak of you, even though it may be hard.

In love I will fulfil my promise as a follower of Jesus.

In love I will honour all creation.

In love I will offer you my days and my nights, and in all that I do I will seek to honour you.

The Lord's prayer

Readings Genesis 18:1-15
Matthew 9:35 – 10:8, 16-20

Hymn

Give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
give me joy in my heart, I pray;
give me joy in my heart, keep me praising,
keep me praising till the break of day.

Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King of kings!
Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!
Sing hosanna to the King!

Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving ...
Give me peace in my heart, I pray;
Give me peace in my heart, keep me loving ...
keep me loving till the break of day.

Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!

Give me love in my heart, keep me serving ...
Give me love in my heart, I pray;
Give me love in my heart, keep me serving ...
keep me serving till the break of day.

Sing hosanna! Sing hosanna!

Reflection

I wonder if you have ever ridden a rollercoaster. I quite like moderate roller coasters, and I really like water-based rides, but I am not really a fan of the massive, spectacular roller coaster rides. I have two memories of trying such a ride, one in Blackpool where I was persuaded to go on the Grand National ride, one of the original wooden roller coaster rides where two tracks run side by side and the carriages on each appear to race each other. The other experience was at Drayton Manor where I was somehow persuaded to go on a ride that corkscrewed and on which you stood up. Never again, it took me over half an hour to get over the experience and the adrenaline rush made me feel quite ill. What these rides have in common is that, generally, they take quite a while to get you to the 'top', the point at which the real ride begins, usually hurtling downward at a steep angle and at great speed. The ride on which I stood up took 90 seconds to climb and then a mere 30 seconds to travel the ride which included two revolutions of a corkscrew. To this day I have no idea why I said yes, I think it is a bit like Blue Cheese, I want to like it, but I just cannot!

Now what has this to do with our readings? Well, Tom Wright points out that in this passage from Matthew something similar has happened to the disciples in that life has been going along quite normally, they have witnessed some amazing things done by Jesus and they have been listening. Then the mood switches as they realise Jesus is expecting them to do similar things and suddenly, they are not sure. As Jesus talks about what they are going to do it must have been a bit like that long slow climb to the top of the roller coaster, the ride had started, they were on the track and there was no turning back and the anticipation was building. They knew what was going to happen, but they were not at all sure they wanted it to happen, then suddenly they were at the top and facing a long, long drop. It was a bit like standing on a precipice and being asked to jump off.

That is what discipleship is about, taking a risk. We have to trust God that in the power of the Spirit and the reality of oneness we will have all we need for this great adventure called life, whatever life throws at us. Jesus is going to send his disciples to preach to the Jewish people, or as he puts it the lost sheep of Israel, and his instructions are clear '*As you go, proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'* *Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons.*' Just a little task then. As I read this passage again I was struck afresh by the fact that they were only to go to the Jewish people, Matthew is quite explicit in this, and I wondered if that would be easier or more difficult for the twelve. We must assume that the disciples were Jewish by birth as there is no evidence to say otherwise and their names are all as would be expected for Jewish people of the

time and place. In Luke's gospel we have the passage where Jesus asks, 'is anyone ever accepted in their own town?', so I wonder if the disciples were relieved or worried at Jesus instruction. I know that it is far more intimidating to work with your peers that with people you do not know so well, so maybe the disciples would have rather gone to the gentiles. I wonder who you prefer talking about God with, family or strangers? The passage in Matthew does not get any easier with Jesus saying, "*See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves;*". Discipleship is no gentle ride! How we respond to God's call is always the challenge.

Sarah, overhearing 'God' speaking to Abraham about her having a baby, laughs. She finds her response challenged and yet we can understand her surprise for we are told she is passed child-bearing age. I imagine that too would have been a roller coaster ride, certainly living with Abraham was never straightforward! In Psalm 116, we read of the psalmists response to God's love, which reminds us that we are called to respond to God's love by changing the way we live and that is a part of our discipleship, but discipleship is more, is also requires us to jump off the cliff, to take the plunge and actively seek to change the world. That may mean talking to people we would not normally talk with, but, like the disciples of Jesus, we believe we should not '*worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you*'. I know that there are times when I have drawn a deep breath and then relied on some inner wisdom to answer a question, and many of you will have similar experiences. The disciples were also given some other advice, which on the face of it appears quite strange, they are to '*be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.*' This is Matthew drawing on some deep biblical imagery, serpents are often depicted as beautiful, crafty and wise, some of which derives from the hypnotic effect of their movement which can place people and animals in a trance, snake charming is another middle eastern image and yet it is known that some snakes can make themselves deaf to the music, and this is often used symbolically for those who choose to be deaf to the good news. The other serpent attribute which is symbolic is their ability to shed their skin, creating the illusion of re-birth. Is Matthew suggesting that the disciples need to tune out those who would persecute them, and use all their guile to change people's minds? Doves, on the other hand are symbolically gentle, they are sacrificial birds, Noah sent out a dove from the ark, and they have a reputation of not being particularly bright, they are also mentioned in the baptismal stories perhaps symbolic of where people of the time saw heaven, above, where birds fly, and the Spirit is often depicted as like a dove. This could all be quite confusing if we miss the vital word in the passage – wise as serpents AND innocent as doves, not one or the other but both. Without innocence the shrewdness of wisdom can become manipulative, and without wisdom innocence can become naivety. Disciples need both attributes, we need to be wise but gentle, committed but humble, clear but compassionate.

As we stand on the precipice it can all seem a bit too much but we are not alone, there were twelve disciples, and we are church, we are here for one another, encouraging and supporting one another and being wise for each other when we need to be. In the book, 'The boy, the mole, the fox and the horse, there is much wisdom on which to draw.

When the dark clouds come – keep going.

When the big things seem out of control – focus on what you love right under your nose.

This storm will pass.

I imagine there were moments in the lives of the disciples when there appeared to be big storm clouds, but they kept going. They had moments when they withdrew and focussed on the little things for a while but with the encouragement of the risen Jesus, they buckled in again and set off on the roller coaster. That is what disciples do and if the pandemic feels like a big storm cloud we have also had time to focus down on what is really important – people and our planet, and those who serve us in so many different ways. There has never been a more important time to talk about the Kingdom and all that it stands for, are you ready for the ride? How will you respond to God's call?

Prayers – we will use the words of Fred Kaan’s hymn ‘For ourselves no longer living’ to focus our prayers.

For ourselves no longer living, let us live for Christ alone; of ourselves more strongly giving, go as far as he has gone: one with God who chose to be one with us to set us free.

Loving God, in you we are one, in you we are free to find our true selves and free to respond in love. Through the example of Jesus and the disciples we discover your love for all people and hear your call to love others as ourselves. You call us to respond to your grace in love, to step out onto the roller coaster of life and live fearlessly and love generously, to be as Christ for friends and strangers.

If we are to live for others, share, as equals, human worth, join the round of sisters, brothers, that encircles all the earth! All the fullness earth affords, is the people's, is the Lord's.

Loving God you call us to live out our oneness with creation, to recognise the diversity and unity that exists in all we know, and which is the image of you. The world is not always loving, and many are not treated as equals, our systems conspire against too many and injustice stalks in the shadows of our world. You call us to speak out against injustice, to challenge the systems that are unfair. Creation provides more than we need, five loaves and two fish can go a really long way when we learn how to share. We pray for an end to inequality; we pray for your kingdom where all have equal opportunity and enough food to live comfortably. Today, we pray for all those in our world who feel separate through race or creed or colour, may their voices be heard without the need for violence, and may we demonstrate in our lives the reality that we are one.

Fighting fear and exploitation is our daily common call; finding selfhood, building nations, sharing what we have with all. As the birds that soar in flight, let us rise towards the light.

It can be easy to find ourselves on the opposite side through no fault of our own, systems can create inequality. Loving God, when this happens may we have the courage to speak out, to speak in solidarity with the oppressed. We are called to share your love, a love which can overcome fear and change the world, may we be generous in supporting those who seek to change the world through creatively supporting those in need. We recognise that slavery is not a thing of the past, but very real in our modern world, we recognise that children are hurt by systems that abuse them, physically and mentally, young girls forced into situations that are not loving, in your Spirit may we find the courage to make a difference, may we be committed and humble, and as doves rise to the light of the kingdom. In our current situation we have seen bridges being built and communities supporting one another, we have experienced a taste of the Kingdom in the midst of confusion, may we find ways to nurture that experience as we move forward in our life together.

Let us rise and join the forces that combine to do God's will, wisely using earth's resources, human energy and skill. Let us now, by love released, celebrate the future's feast!

Eternal God, we are one and in oneness we will grow, learning to support and encourage one another, learning to work together for the benefit of all. Today we pray for our world leaders, that they may seek to work together for the good of the world rather than defending their own small part of the world. We pray that the technology which is enabling a new way of sharing will continue to be used to explore new ways of being, and that new ways of harnessing and sharing the world's resources will help to sustain the life we share together in creation. In our life together we pray for one another and for friends and family, particularly those who are unwell, or struggling, may they sense your presence with them.

In Jesus name we pray, 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 Teach me, my God and King, (sing to: Have faith in God my heart-Carlisle)
 in all things thee to see,
 and what I do in anything
 to do it as for thee.

A man that looks on glass
on it may stay his eye;
or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
and then the heaven espy.

All may of thee partake:
nothing can be so mean,
which, with this tincture, 'For thy sake',
will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
makes drudgery divine:
who sweeps a room, as for thy laws,
makes that and the action fine.

This is the famous stone
that turneth all to gold:
for that which God doth touch
and own cannot for less be told.

GEORGE HERBERT (1593-1633) altd.

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.