

Sunday 7th 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 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty,
 early in the morning our song shall rise to thee;
 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty,
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

 Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore thee,
 casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea,
 cherubim and seraphim falling down before thee,
 who wast and art and evermore shalt be.

 Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide thee,
 though the sinful human eye thy glory may not see,
 only thou art holy, there is none beside thee,
 perfect in power, in love, and purity.

 Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty,
 all thy works shall praise thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
 Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty,
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

 REGINALD HEBER (1783-1826)*

Poem In the darkness,
 the breath of God
 rippled the deep dark brooding waters
 until the moment when the time was right
 and God illuminated the earth.

 A tiny spark in all the darkness,
 became a bright, warming light that stirred life
 into the formless shape and brooding waters,
 so they became a seething mass of creation
 and God's people were brought to life.

 In the beginning it was a light
 that shone in the darkness,
 the word of God,
 bringing meaning and love to God's people.

 It is a light that shines forever,
 that welcomes each new day,
 and warms our hearts with the love of God.

Based on Genesis 1 and John 1

Prayer

Eternal God, source of all being, your essence is woven throughout creation,
your love shines within the fabric of life.

From the laughter of a child, to tears of joy glinting in the eyes of memory,
the sparkle of your love surprises us and nourishes us.

When I look at creation in its glory and intricacy, I wonder at our place within all this but then I remember the laughter and the tears, and I know; we are one with creation for we are one with you and together we are love.

The Lord's prayer

Readings	Genesis 1:1 – 2:4 Matthew 28:16-20
Hymn	Jesus, Lord, we look to thee, let us in thy name agree; show thyself the Prince of Peace, bid our jarring conflicts cease. By thy reconciling love every stumbling-block remove; each to each unite, endear; come, and spread thy banner here. Make us of one heart and mind, courteous, merciful, and kind, lowly, meek in thought and word, altogether like our Lord. Let us for each other care, each the other's burden bear, to thy Church the pattern give, show how true believers live. Free from anger and from pride, let us thus in God abide; all the depth of love express, all the height of holiness. CHARLES WESLEY (1707-88) altd.*

Reflection

For many our readings today would demonstrate the alpha and the omega, but they may be better described as the alpha and the alpha of readings, the beginning and the new beginning. Last week we celebrated Pentecost, the birth of the Christian church according to the author of Luke. The book of Acts is Luke part two, the continuing story, Matthew and John use the final chapter of their writing to point to the future and so our reading from Matthew is for his readers the birth of the church, the mission statement – 'Go out, make disciples, baptize and teach.' The order is interesting, don't expect people to come to you – go out to them, make disciples – I suspect that to make disciples we need the next two points, baptize and teach although perhaps the other way around. I think we must be very careful about the authenticity of baptising in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, given that it is an expression of the Trinity not in use until after 325CE but the message to evangelise, or tell/share the message of Jesus is at the heart of our reason to be as church, although how we might do that has probably changed with the changing of society and knowledge.

Evangelisation is different from evangelism. Where evangelism is about drawing people into church, converting them through a message of salvation that requires being in the 'club', evangelisation is about the interaction of the message of Jesus, the gospel, on culture, and this achieved through the actions and lifestyles of the community we call church within that culture. It is a dialogue about the Kingdom of God and how the values of the Jesus can and will transform the world we live in.

The kingdom of God, for Jesus, was all about relationships and humanity's destiny to fulfil God's design for creation, unity and oneness, and Paul recognised this in his writings about one body, and we read of it in John's gospel when Jesus speaks of his oneness with the father. Today the term 'Kingdom of God' may be better expressed as 'Reign of God', the Christ Age, the Age of universality or the New Civilisation of Love for when Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God it was not about power and authority but about interdependence and mutuality, or the Greek work Oikumene. Jesus does not preach about God but rather about God in action with and within humanity, he preaches about love. Jesus also demonstrated love, an unconditional love which was accepting first and foremost, it did not matter who you were you were loved, it did not matter what you had done, you were loved for your humanity. Jesus demonstrated that the whole world and everyone in it was a reflection of God, the being of love. The churches task, in any age, has been to translate that message of love in words and a manner relevant to the age, relevant to the understanding of the age.

Theologian Adrian B Smith writes, 'The Kingdom, being greater than the church will be brought about by all people of good will, some of whom will be church members, but the majority will not.' This demonstrates an understanding of the universality of the human mission, to work together for the enhancement of the creative order. The churches task within this is to model the Kingdom, to model a new way of life, that others may understand the message of Jesus. Jesus did not intend to start a new religious order, his message was to bring together the best of humanity's journey in knowledge, and encourage further journeying. That we have the Christian Church simply means we have an opportunity to explore together what it means to live by the values of Jesus, and how best we can demonstrate those values within our everyday lives.

Our reading from Genesis is widely accepted as a creation poem, similar in style to many others from different cultural backgrounds of around that time. It was almost certainly written down in the 6th Century BCE, during Israel's exile in Babylon, a place full of creation stories, and it speaks of how the world as it was known might have been formed. It is a story rich in myth and legend, rich in vision and inspiration and also a remarkably challenging story for its time. It weaves the power of Babylonian God's, the Gods of the sun, moon and stars, into a universal story of one God. It is a story which establishes the relationship between God and humanity and humanity and creation, a partnership. It is a story that would have been told around camp fires and tables as Israel's relationship with God grows in understanding and wonder. This is the tradition into which Jesus was born and it is a tradition he carries on using story to encourage exploration and wonder, to encourage growth in understanding. The writer of Matthew has gathered together some of these stories and when he talks in chapter twenty-eight about teaching, it is these stories that must come to mind. Taking the eleven of the most remembered parables in Matthew and producing a 'sound bite' from each we produce a 'code', a Jesus code for living.

- Keep sowing even though not all seed will grow.
- Life is not perfect, weeds happen!
- Great things can come from tiny beginnings.
- When you know what is important you will do anything for it.
- If you go astray God will keep looking for you.
- God's Kingdom is about justice.
- Treat others as you want them to treat you, live generously, give time and talents freely.
- Do not seek the kingdom for yourself but for others.
- Be careful! Don't value the wrong things.
- Always be prepared to greet God, even in the strangest places.
- Do your best, and whatever God gives you use it to bring a richer harvest to God.

Dermot O'Murcha, in his book Quantum Theology, writes, 'God becomes meaningful in the process of relating, God's identity is of no real consequence for God is love, and love is a relational

statement.’ In the church calendar today is Trinity Sunday, an opportunity to reflect on the diverse nature within the unity of God. The church adopted the Nicene understanding of the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but ever since there have been explorations of the nature of God and different attempts to express that nature. St Augustine expresses it as ‘the one who loves, the one who is loved and the relationship which binds them together. References to the personhood of God date back to 325CE and refer to the masks performers wore during a theatrical performance. God is not an extension of our humanity and reference to a modern understanding or personhood in many ways limits God. Adrian B Smith suggests we might be better served by imagining God in terms of movements or modes of being – knowing, serving, loving, or source, manifestation or presence, perhaps even primordial, expressive and unitive. However, how we express the diversity within unity that is God, must come second to our response to the love that is God, and our understanding of humanity as part of God, part of creation. In responding to that love we should see ourselves and others as part of God and embrace the message of Jesus that all are loved and all have value. In societies before the agricultural revolution, and today in indigenous cultures around the world, people were valued for their role and contribution to the common good. It was not so much what do I get out of this but what do I bring to this and what might we get out of this. The Kingdom of God is about our interdependence on others, humans and non-humans, and how we relate. In our present situation there is a big debate about the wearing of face masks, wearing a face mask does not protect you but it does protect others from any infection you may be carrying. If we all wear face masks then we protect each other, a demonstration of mutual interdependence.

If we have a mission it is to be Kingdom people, to recognise the presence of the divine in everyone, to promote Kingdom values rather than church doctrine and to be instruments of change which means we need to model change. Jesus spoke, never wrote, about a world in which everyone relates to others in the way he did with unconditional love and acceptance. We are called to do no more but no less. It will change the world. Amen

Prayers

Loving God, we praise you; you challenge us and open us to new ideas through our encounters with the world and its people. As we worship you, may we remember that we are not alone, we are a part of creation and everything we do matters. Through your Spirit, active within us, may our eyes be opened to the opportunities before us to live by the values of Jesus and make a difference in our world. May we be Kingdom people.

In our everyday encounters may our love for others shine through our actions and our words. You are a forgiving God who wants us to be the best we can be, you do not hold grudges, you do not demand redemption, instead you encourage us to embrace one another in acceptance and tolerance and to be ready to ask forgiveness when our words and actions are less than loving, and to forgive others when they ask for forgiveness.

In our choices and decisions may we remember our oneness with others and demonstrate this through sharing in love all that we have. May we use our skills and abilities to build the Kingdom, and through the exploration of possibilities embrace change where it brings us closer to one another and to you. May we be generous in our sharing, creatively exploring new ways of sharing to build your Kingdom and enable others to live to the fullness of their humanity, free from poverty, hunger and all that limits life.

In our prayers, we remember those we love and those to whom we are particularly close, our friends and family. May our words and actions encourage them to explore their own actions and words, may our example sow seeds of change and seeds of hope, the hope that is your Kingdom. We pray for all those who through their generous sharing and care of others are making a difference in the world as we learn to live with the change brought about by Covid 19. We pray especially for those

who have lost loved ones during this pandemic and who are facing the worst change, life without a loved one, may they sense your presence with them and know your love through the actions of those around them in their grief.

God of love, gracious and creating, you empower us in your Spirit to live our lives faithful to the way of Jesus, as people of the Kingdom in a society seeking change, may we answer your call and become the fullness of our humanity as the world becomes the Kingdom of love. 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

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
naught be all else to me, save that thou art
thou my best thought in the day and the night,
waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
thou ever with me and I with thee, Lord;
thou my great Father, thy child let me be,
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my dignity, thou my delight,
thou my soul's shelter, and thou my strong tower;
raise thou me heav'nward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise,
thou mine inheritance, now and always;
thou and thou only, the first in my heart,
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
grant me its joys after vict'ry is won;
heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O Ruler of all.

Ancient Irish poem

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.