

Sunday 16th August 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.

Suggested Hymn Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation

Prayer

Loving God for this day and all it promises, we give you our thanks.

For the beauty of creation, its mysteries, and its majesty, we give you our thanks.

For friends and family, and the people we share our days with, we give you our thanks.

For the life of the church, the sharing of love with each other and the world, we give you our thanks.

For the teaching and ministry of Jesus, which lead us in a new way, we give you our thanks.

For the promise of life eternal, revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we give you our thanks.

For light in the darkness and hope in despair, we give you our thanks.

The Lord's prayer

Remembering Genesis 45:1-15 and some thoughts

Genesis 45 is almost the culmination of the Joseph story. Joseph has revealed his identity to his brothers, who are anxious and do not know what to think, they are in shock. Joseph has had plenty of time to reflect on what happened and to realise that good has come out of the situation in which his brothers placed him. He tries to explain this to his brothers, giving his plans for the family, bringing his father Jacob to Egypt, and settling them where he can care for them. There is then a great reunion, with hugs and many happy tears and perhaps a few regretful tears shed.

Before this moment though, Joseph had played a trick on his brothers, planting a cup amongst Benjamin's belongings, and accusing him of theft, to see how his brothers would react. Have they learned from their actions before? It is part of the story, but do you think it was the right thing to do? Is it for us to test others, to judge them even, or are forgiveness and love meant to be unconditional?

Reflect for a moment - Have you ever found yourself in a desperate situation where it appears everything has gone wrong, only to find something unexpected and fulfilling results?

Story (source unknown)

There was once a farmer with an old and rather unsteady donkey. One day the donkey fell into a disused well, where it made quite a lot of noise which the farmer eventually heard when, realising the donkey was missing, he went searching to find it. The farmer asked his neighbours for help to retrieve the donkey, but they all laughed at him and said the donkey was not worth rescuing, better to bury him down the well.

The farmer was alarmed and saddened, he loved the donkey but he knew he could not rescue it on his own and so he had to agree to his neighbours' plan and soon they began throwing clumps of earth into the well to bury the donkey.

At first, the donkey continued to bray but eventually the noise grew less and less and then stopped. The neighbours continued to throw earth down the well, imagining they were burying the donkey. However, the donkey may have been old and unsteady, but he was also wise, and each time a clump of earth landed he shook it off and climbed on top of it. As the neighbours continued to throw earth the donkey continued to climb getting closer and closer to the top.

Imagine the farmer's surprise when the donkey emerged from the well. He was so pleased to have his donkey back he threw his arms around the donkey's neck. The story goes that as he did so the donkey whispered in his ear, 'when life throws dirt at you use it to rise above it'.

Readings Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32
Matthew 15:21-28

Hymn In the world, God's life declaring, Tune Blaenwarn
wisdom dances in delight;
all earth's hope and passion sharing
ways and truths beyond our sight.
In creation's heavenly glory,
all the power of love is shown;
in the telling of earth's story.
God's redeeming grace is known.

When we reach out to the stranger,
offering welcome and embrace;
then the Christ of cross and manger
shines in every human face.
In our hands outstretched in greeting,
all the strength of love is shown;
in the openness of meeting,
Christ's compassion is made known.

In our search for fairer giving,
we discern the Spirit's call;
in the struggle for just living,
God demands no less than all.
In our speaking, in our doing,
all the hope of love is known;
in our dream of earth's renewing
Holy Wisdom shall be known.

Jan Berry (Used with permission)

Reflection

Joseph forgave his brothers. It probably took a while, and it was part of a bigger experience of realisation that he was in the right place at the right time. Paul, in Romans Chapter eleven, wrestles with the nature of forgiveness, and in particular God's forgiveness which he calls mercy. In our reading we see an awareness of a bigger story, which theologians call the meta-narrative, and Paul recognises that it was as a result of Israel's rejection of God's law that those outside Israel became aware of God and as he sees it, received God's mercy. He also recognises that none of us are perfect and that in our disobedience of the way of love we continue to receive God's mercy for God does not withdraw his forgiveness, it is for all time. Some translations of this passage seem to imply that God tempts us to disobedience for the purpose of forgiving us but that, I believe, is to misinterpret the nature of God.

Sometimes it is easy to misinterpret a passage of the Bible. Our story from Matthew is complex and open to many interpretations. Was Jesus really saying that his message was only for the 'lost sheep of Israel'? Did he really refuse to give this woman help because of her race? Did he change his mind?

As Christians, we are aware of the bigger picture, we have the picture of God that Jesus revealed for people, and which Paul wrestled to understand from his Israelite background. We believe that God is loving and that God's healing is for all people. We know that we can pray to God for help without an intermediary. From Matthew's perspective Jesus was there to remedy the problems in Israel, many created through a misinterpretation of the law by zealous pharisees and scribes. This is the point in Matthew's gospel where the author begins to explore the bigger picture and he chooses to do this by having a Canaanite woman challenge Jesus belief. She challenged Jesus human understanding and he changed his mind. Now, if Jesus can change his mind there is hope for all of us. Without this story we who knows where the Christian faith might be, without this change of mind would there ever have been Christianity?

The future is always a challenge, we get set in our ways and forget to dream, we resist change. Jesus often spoke of the Kingdom, saying that the Kingdom was already present although only in part. We get glimpses when we see loving actions. Many people were longing for the kingdom, seeing it as an end to oppression, whilst others saw it as the earth perfected something that could only happen after a catastrophic event. Glimpses of the Kingdom happen when a dream of the future is realised. Martin Luther King had a dream, and it became his life's work to make it a reality. He succeeded in part, but the realisation is not yet complete and inequality between races is still an issue in most parts of the world. Paul dreamt of equality; he saw it as an essential part of maturity in Christ. Writing before Matthew he may have influenced the message of the gospel. The disciples had still not grasped the dream but here a woman, a Canaanite, sees the vision and holds out the dream for them and for us.

As Christians, we are called to be agents of change. What is your dream of the future and what are you doing to bring it to realisation? Forgiveness is a part of the Kingdom, a glorious unconditional forgiveness but that itself is a challenge. Forgiveness is a gift but to be able to forgive, someone needs to have done something that needs forgiving, so forgiveness is part of the journey rather than the destination. This is not about permission to do hurtful things; it is an acknowledgement that God has given free will and sometimes bad choices are made along the way. What difference would it make to forgive unconditionally and see it as giving a present to someone, rather than grudgingly saying we accept an apology? How we respond to difficult situations not only affects our relationship with God and each other it can have a positive or negative effect on those who witness our response.

There was once a cave deep in the ground under the earth, hidden away from view. It was shielded from all light. The cave had never seen light and so the word light meant nothing, and the cave therefore could not dream of the light. One day the cave received an invitation from the Sun to come up and see the light. When the cave saw the light it was amazed, dazzled by the wonder of what the light revealed. Feeling grateful for the experience, the cave invited the Sun to come and visit the depths of the earth. Now the sun had never seen darkness, so it accepted the invitation. The day came for the visit and as the sun entered the cave it looked around with interest wondering what this darkness would look like, but it could not see the darkness.

When you live in the darkness you cannot dream of light; when you are light darkness fades. We are called to be light, to offer those who live in darkness something on which to build a dream, a dream of a different reality in which the darkness fades and love blossoms. To forgive unconditionally is to sow seeds of love that light the corners of despair.

Psalm 133 taken from Psalms for a quantum World (Heather Whyte)

Joy, peace and love
are the reality of our oneness.

When we understand this
new creation becomes possible.

The compassion of empowerment;
the unity of community;
these are precious,
as they always have been.

When we live in the oneness of the source of all being,
love overcomes fear,
freedom overcomes oppression,
dominion overcomes domination.

A new reality is realised,
a reality beyond the bounds of time and space,
a reality of eternity.
Life everlasting in the love of God, source of all being.

Prayers of concern and commitment

This we can do for to bring the Kingdom closer.

Loving God, every day brings new opportunities to be light in the darkness. When we use our imagination we can recognise what needs doing to bring your kingdom closer, to create a world of justice and peace. In our daily living may we work to answer prayers that other people pray. Recognising the injustice in our communities that breeds fear and despair, may we be creative in our living and our sharing.

Your kingdom come, through our prayers and our actions.

This we can do for to bring the Kingdom closer.

Generous God, for the many gifts and wonders in our lives we bring you our thanks, but it is not enough to list our thanks if we do not also share those gifts with others. There are too many people in the world who struggle on less that they need, who go hungry to feed their children, who never experience the healing power of medicine. While we live, they exist, and it is not fair. As we dream of the kingdom may our dreams include the means by which every human can explore life in all its fullness, and every human can dream.

Your kingdom come, through our prayers and our actions.

This we can do for to bring the Kingdom closer.

Loving God, you invite us to dream, and to grasp the dream and make it real but we cannot do it alone. Help us find ways to share the dream in ways which others can grasp and together we will build a new reality. If you have never seen the light, how can you dream of light. In the power of the Spirit that unites us all, we pray for wisdom and compassion in our relationships with others. We pray for unity of purpose and a sense of oneness within our communities, and around the world.

Your kingdom come, through our prayers and our actions.

This we can do for to bring the Kingdom closer.

There are too many dark corners in the world which hide the realities of life. Where there is hunger, let us bring food, where there is pain let us bring love. Let us live for one another, being light to the world, and sowing hope in despair. May our light shine in the darkest corners and invite others to see another way, the way of love. When the world throws mud may we show determination to use

the mud to escape and live life in the light, holding the hands of those around to share the strength we find through being one with you.

Your kingdom come, through our prayers and our actions.

In the quiet we think of those we know who are struggling with challenges that make their world darker. We think of the news stories that have gripped our minds and shaken our hearts. We think of a new normal and pray for compassion, understanding and patience amongst our communities as we explore a new way of being. We think of our churches together yet apart but held in the oneness of your love, now and for ever.

Your kingdom come, through our prayers and our actions. 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

The Kingdom of God will be fair and be loving, Tune The bard of Armagh
everyone having as much as they need;
no hunger or thirst, just a sharing and caring
where everyone's valued for all that they bring.

The Kingdom of God will be justice and freedom,
everyone sharing so all can grow strong;
no envy or fighting, no greedy dictators,
instead all will flourish because we are one.

The Kingdom of God shows a new way of living,
changing our values and outlook on life;
we're called to be one with all neighbours and strangers,
remembering others in all we decide.

Heather Whyte 2019

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.