

Sunday 23rd 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 Tune - Moscow

Thou whose almighty word
chaos and darkness heard,
and took their flight,
hear us, we humbly pray,
and where the gospel day
sheds not its glorious ray,
let there be light.

Spirit of truth and love,
life-giving, holy dove,
speed forth thy flight;
move o'er the waters' face,
bearing the lamp of grace,
and in earth's darkest place
let there be light.

Thou who didst come to bring
on thy redeeming wing
healing and sight,
health to the sick in mind,
sight to the inly blind,
now to all humankind
let there be light.

Holy and blessed Three,
glorious Trinity,
Wisdom, Love, Might,
boundless as ocean's tide
rolling in fullest pride,
through the world, far and wide,
let there be light.

JOHN MARRIOTT (1780-1825)* adpt. from FELICE GIARDINI (1716-96)

Prayer

Loving God, we come to worship you, to offer you praise and thanksgiving. We praise you for the wonders of our world, from the highest peak to the deepest water our world is filled with amazing life, from the single celled microbe to the million-celled whale, from the granite faced mountain to the intricate snowflake and everything in between. Every day is different, with a variety of weather that both challenges and refreshes, creating the environment in which life exists and flourishes. From forests to plains, from orchards to rice fields, food is grown and nurtured by the climate and by those who work the land, providing food and nourishment for humanity. For all this and more we praise you. As we praise you, we are reminded for how much we need to give thanks. For the beauty which surrounds us and your love which holds us; for friends and family, colleagues and acquaintances who share our interests and our lives; for each new day with all its opportunities, and the technology which allows us to keep in touch even in difficult times; for food on the table and fresh water from the tap, for inspiration from books, magazines and television which nourishes our minds; for the life of the church, the message of Jesus, the guidance of the Spirit, and the promise of eternal life in you, for all these things and more we give you our thanks.

The Lord's prayer

Readings Exodus 1:8 – 2.10
 Romans 12:1-8

Story (based on a Lakota legend)

Once upon a time a man was walking by a lake on a bright, calm, sunny day. Stopping to wonder at the beauty of the lake his gaze fell on still calm water and he saw his reflection. He was amazed and wondered aloud to himself. Is this who I am?

All night he thought about what he had seen and the next day he returned to the lakeside to this marvel again. But the weather had changed, and a wind now ruffled the water. When he looked in

the lake his reflection was very different, it was distorted and disturbed, and he wondered to himself
Is this who I really am?

Even more puzzled the next day he returned to the lake, but now it was raining. His reflection in the lake was blurred and indistinct. He was as confused as the image he saw reflected.

The man went away and felt disappointed. One day an enormous storm blew up. The man remembered the lake and the reflection and wondered what he would see that day. He returned to the lake and the reflection he saw seemed full of anger. Once again he wondered to himself, is this the real me?

Now a sly fox, called Iktomi, had been watching the man and recognised his puzzlement. He chuckled to himself and the man heard the sound. He looked towards the bushes and saw the fox laughing at him.

"You foolish human," said the fox. "What you see is merely a reflection which changes with the passing weather. How can you think this is the real you?"

"Where then is the real me?" asked the man.

"Come back here in the depths of winter and you will find who you are," said the fox.

So, when winter arrived winter arrived the man returned. It was very cold now and the lake was frozen solid with snow settled on top of it. The man looked at the whiteness and was dejected. There is no me in the lake anymore.

The fox was sitting quietly beside him and replied, "that is correct. Now you do not need to settle for mere reflections. This lake is a blank canvas and it invites you to become who you truly are. Look inside your heart, deeper than passing moods and discover who you are."

Hymn

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty,
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore.

Open thou the crystal fountain
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fiery, cloudy pillar lead me
all my journey through:
strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee.

v. 1 tr. PETER WILLIAMS (1722-96) altd.

Reflection

This is the start of Moses story and his journey, a journey that has as many twists and turns as the best detective story or soap plot. It is a story that will see Israel travel through desert and wilderness, sometimes chased, to a new beginning in a new land.

It is part of a much bigger story, the story of faith beginning with Abraham. A story which continues in many forms today. That too is part of a bigger story which begins with the first homo sapiens, who we designate Adam and Eve, but who were around long before the biblical timeline.

So, this story is representative of the story of creation, the story of humanity's journey to discover the full potential of our humanity, and also representative of each of our stories as we explore who

we are? I have often wondered how much Moses understood who he was, after all he grew up as the child of the Pharaoh's daughter.

In Matthew 16, Jesus asks the disciples two questions. 'Who do people say I am?' and 'who do you think I am?' It is a version of a question that had provided a long running programme for the BBC and drives many an ancestral search to discover the people who 'made us'. Who do you think you are? More importantly are you who you want to be?

In life it is easy to be typecast – someone's mother, someone's wife/husband, someone's son or daughter. A nurse, a fireman, an accountant, a tax collector. There are so many labels that we all carry that it is easy to forget who we really are, and what makes us unique and special.

Paul reminds us that we all have gifts, although the proportionality of our gifts is partly what makes us unique. Sometimes we do not recognise our gifts and someone else needs to point them out or encourage us to discover them. More importantly, Paul reminds us that these gifts are for building up the body of Christ and helping the church to bring the kingdom closer.

Our readings, as well as reminding us of the story so far are also a reminder that there is still a journey to be made. We are still discovering. It reminds me of the yellow brick road and the journey of Dorothy, the scarecrow, the tinman and the lion. They all had a dream, a wish to be something they did not think they were – to be clever, have a brain, to be loving, have a heart, to be brave, have courage, and Dorothy wished for a return to those she loved. The scarecrow was clever, he just couldn't see it, the tinman was loving but he could not see it and the lion was brave but needed the opportunity to discover it – their journey together revealed their hidden gifts but they still needed someone to tell them, to acknowledge those gifts. For too long they had been typecast and they had come to believe what they were told they were, rather than explore what they could be.

Let me tell you a story –

A long time ago, a female eagle was flying all alone. It had been a long journey and she became weary and needed to stop for a rest. Circling above the land she spied of a sheltered spot, and landing she made a nest for herself to rest in for a while. As she nested the time came for her to lay an egg, so she stayed even longer, to guard her egg and keep it warm. Many days passed and just before the egg was due to hatch something terrible happened. A man arrived and began to erect fencing around where the eagle was resting, she was well hidden, and he had not seen her. Realising she was in danger the eagle had no option but to soar into the sky, leaving her egg alone and unprotected.

The next day the man returned and completed the fencing, he was a farmer, and this was his new chicken run. The farmer installed a dozen chickens in their new home, and as he did so the eagle's egg cracked, and the chick emerged. The farmer did not notice he now had thirteen birds in the chicken run. The eagle chick grew up among the chickens with everything he could need. Food arrived regularly, and the chicken run was kept warm and dry, and safe from predators. What more could a baby eagle ask for?

The eagle chick grew and then one day a travelling ornithologist passed by, he stopped to look at the chickens and noticed the eagle and stopped to talk.

"Why are you in there?", he asked. "You are not a chicken; you are an eagle?" he said.

"Don't be silly " said the eagle. " I *live* in a chicken run, I eat with the chickens, I behave like a chicken. Of course, I am a chicken, what else would I be? Anyway," he added, "I cannot fly. Chickens don't fly."

I think you can fly," the ornithologist assured him. "You just haven't tried."

"Why would I fly anywhere?" asked the eagle. "when I have all I could wish for here in the chicken run."

"Everything except freedom," the ornithologist replied. "The freedom to be who you are destined to be."

"I don't have any destiny beyond the chicken run," the eagle said.

"So, you are happy to end up on someone's dinner plate when you could be soaring to the skies?"

"I will do what chickens do," the eagle insisted. "I *am* a chicken."

The ornithologist shrugged and went on his way. However, not long after, another passing visitor came near the chicken run. A majestic golden eagle, soaring overhead, called out to the heavens. We don't know if the eagle chick heard the cry or simply sensed the eagle's presence, but something stirred in his soul. Gently his feathers quivered, and then he flapped his wings and before he knew what was happening, he had lifted off the ground and found himself on top of the fence.

"What are you doing?" the chickens asked him. "Get down, before you fall. Chickens can't fly."

But it was too late. The eagle chick had responded to his inner self and he was already soaring beyond their vision, following the trail of his ancient destiny. *Based on a traditional tale.*

What are your hidden gifts?

What did you once believe you could do but have forgotten?

More importantly have you begun the journey to uncover your true self?

I invite to take a moment and note down your answers to the following:

Your name

Your place of birth

The places you have lived

Schools you attended

Churches you have been involved with

Briefly note any significant moments, people or thoughts associated with places, schools, or churches in your life journey.

Why not share this with someone else, comparing experiences and be surprised at common points.

This is part of your story which is part of the bigger story. It may also remind you of some of your special gifts or start a train of thought that leads to a new discovery or begins to answer Who am I?

We are all children of the creator God, we are all creators, yet sometimes we need a nudge to remember and begin the journey that peels away the labels and reveals our true self. We need our own yellow brick road, it is called the way of Jesus.

Prayers of concern and commitment

Loving God, amongst the busyness of life you call us to stillness. Amidst the many journey we make, to work, to school, to shop, to church, you call us to take a journey to discover our true selves. We are all your children and each of us is unique. We share many similarities with family, friends and colleagues but there is something that makes us special, not better but special, for the exact combination that makes us who we are is unique to us. As we journey to discover more about you, so we discover more about our true self.

In a world that often fails to value life, it is easy to overlook the special in every human, it is all too easy to categorise and generalise – the poor, the hungry, the unemployed, the young, the old - labels which gloss over the uniqueness of each human being. May we see each person for their special qualities and the gifts they bring to our experience of the world.

As we worship we remember those whose circumstances create a life different from the fullness that is possible, we pray for all who are cast aside by labels, overlooked in statistics or who deny their own potential by believing the judgement of others.

As we worship, we pray for your kingdom to come closer and our world to become fairer; we pray for an end to poverty, injustice and lives restricted by a lack of healthcare. We pray that each person, no matter their circumstances, will be encouraged to seek the fullness of their humanity and enabled to uncover their special gifts, that they may sense their belonging through all that they have to offer.

Eternal God, source of all being, always present, your creative love embedded within all experience, you invite us to recognise our oneness with you and all people. May we journey deeper into the knowledge of your being, growing in strength and wisdom. May we reach out to others with your unconditional love and encourage them to journey to the knowledge of your presence and the reality of our oneness, so that one day all will know you in their hearts, all will recognise their oneness and we will walk humbly together, united in your eternal love.

May your love overcome our fear, our lack of confidence as we trust in your promise that we are never alone and we will find the words we need or the actions which are right, to enable us to be the one for others on their journey. 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

We are people on a journey,
through the world of love and fear,
drawing strength from knowing Jesus
and his message 'God is near'.

Tune Servant Song

God unites us on our journey,
leading us on paths unknown,
showing wonders unimagined,
by our side, not on a throne.

One with us and with all people,
God embodies, Christ is light;
by his openness and sharing
giving wisdom and new sight.

So we gather to encourage
one another on the way.
Through our living and our loving
showing Jesus every day.

Children on the way of Jesus,
pilgrims guided by a star,
called to love and share our treasures
with all people, near and far.

Heather Whyte 2016

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.