

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> October 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**

Morning has broken

Watch at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VL9xXyLrq00>

**Prayer**

God of the morning and the night, of this time, all time and no time, of the earth, the universe and beyond, we come to you with thanksgiving in our heart.

When we think of your creation, we wonder at our place in it, feeling small and insignificant and yet you know each one of us by name, you are around us and within us and we are never alone. When we marvel at the intricacy of your creation and the amazing skills you have woven within us we are staggered by the way it all works. When we open our eyes on a new day, when in the midst of rain we see a rainbow, when we witness a random act of kindness we remember again your love for all your people and your promise of life eternal.

Loving God, we thank you, for creation, for family and friends, for new opportunities and for Jesus whose life and ministry are our model for life together and whose death and resurrection is the hope on which we build our lives. Gathered as church, gathered as your people, gathered in the name of Jesus we pray together saying,  
Our Father....

**Readings**

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Matthew 22:34-46

**Reflection**

Jesus asks a question, one that silences the certainty of those questioning him. Jesus knew the law and the prophets, he had studied at the feet of great teachers and he asks a question that he knows will give a ready answer, 'whose son is the Messiah'. David, say his hearers and Jesus replies, 'why then did David call him Lord?' Silence, in the face of such a question they have no answer, without engaging in some deeply theological reflection.

It is good to have our certainty questioned, it helps us to grow. As we share with one another we hear different opinions, some of which will question our own opinion and invite us to reflect on our belief. That, I believe, is one of the fundamental reasons for church, to be a place of sharing, reflection, and growth. Contrary to some popular understanding we do not come because we know it all but because we want to understand more. The pharisees had learnt the law and the prophets, they could recite them, they knew the book of knowledge but they had not yet acquired the wisdom of applying that knowledge to their personal experience, they had not tested it out in practice.

When I was growing up there were many jobs that were vocational and an aspect of that was learning as you went through day release. Nurses, lab technicians, police to name just three areas. Then, the government decided that everyone should have a degree, and everything changed. The difficulty was that a degree taught you the knowledge but not the practical application and secondly it excluded many who had a calling but were not academically minded. It changed how these careers were viewed and as people graduated, they expected to start higher up the scale, but they did not have the practical skills for that level. Practical application of what you know takes time yet

if we do not do that, we are likely to eventually be silenced at best or worse find our faith threatened.

We are on a journey of discovery that involves two aspects, challenging and questioning the doctrines and creeds of our faith to discern a practical theology rooted in the wisdom of experience based knowledge, and pulling of layers or learning and acquired identity to discover our true self, a bit like opening Russian dolls. We are born a child, maybe a sibling, we may become an aunt or uncle, a partner, a parent, we will have different job titles. Some of these we have no control over, others are our choice, but they are all layers which can in time define us in a way that covers who we really are.

Take a moment to identify all your layers, perhaps write them down. They are all a part of your journey and yet you are not those labels.

On our journey we will face challenges, but it is often through those challenges that we grow in understanding. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians talks about travelling to see them despite things not having gone well in Philippi. Their practical experience had been challenging but they learnt from the challenge and carried on in their task of sharing the message of God's love. Just because something does not work once does not mean it will never work however when it goes wrong than we reflect on what happened, why it happened and what we can learn and then how we will approach a similar experience the next time. This same pattern of reflection, when applied to our faith journey informs our spiritual travelling. To say we tried something once and it did not work is not journeying.

Sometimes there are things we live with most of our lives without questioning them. Often, not questioning leads to us not being able to help others on their journey. I think an example of this is our ready use of the term 'eternal life'. We often refer to this, we have read of it in scripture, but have you ever really thought about what you understand by that term and how it fits with your understanding of God? There is a wonderful children's book called 'How to live forever' by Colin Thompson, in which he explores this concept.

[Listen to the book here](#)

In the book eternal life proves to be less than perfect. It is like being trapped in time whilst all around things change. The eternal life described in scripture could be seen to be like that if it is only acquired by some and not all people. What is this eternal life? In John's gospel we read of Jesus saying that eternal life is 'to know' God. For me, eternal life has nothing to do with retaining our current form for all time, we die, we know we die, but that which is our core, our essence lives on in God, in that which connects and is all things, all eternity, outside the time of our reality. This takes a lot of explaining and yet it is far more hopeful than an eternal life trapped in time.

As we journey, peeling back the layers of self, we discover that we often have to live with paradox and unknowing. It seems we are all in such a time right now and having to recognise how little control we have over things. The future is suddenly very uncertain, will there be a vaccine, or will we have to learn to adapt and live with Covid 19, or will the future be something we have not yet envisaged? It is all very unsettling. Perhaps it would help to see this as a new beginning and whilst acknowledging the survival skills we all have and need, also draw on our creativity and our ability to adapt. Children are overall very good at adapting and Jesus suggested we all need to become more like children, perhaps this is one of those times apply this. We are called to reflect on our experience and grow in understanding. Paul would say we are called to travel regardless of the challenges. We need to come together and embrace the future, rather than fearing the future, and together work at whatever is required for the next stage of humanity's future, in the knowledge that God is always with us and we are always in God.

**Hymn** Tune 'How great thou art' – [listen here](#)

Through changing times that call us to new learning  
you lead us on, the challenge ever- new;  
through health and strife, your wisdom still discerning,  
we trace your path, and search out what is true.

For you are God, who guides us through the days;  
your love is good, your promise sure.

For you are God, who touches us with grace;  
your love is good, your promise sure.

When courage fails, and heart and hope are dying,  
we struggle on, through conflict and through tears;  
you hear our pain, and listen to our crying,  
and give us strength, to turn and face our fears.

For you are God, who guides us through the days;

The future now invites us to new sharing,  
seeking your will, in ways we cannot see;  
we walk in faith, in trust your promise daring,  
the God who was, and is, and yet shall be.

For you are God, who guides us through the days;

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### **Prayers**

Loving god, the world is challenged and the future seems uncertain but you promise you are always with us and trusting in you, and journeying in our faith we will discover a new way, the way of your kingdom.

In our uncertain times,

**We embrace the future, trusting in your loving presence and the hope of eternal life.**

As we reflect on the world around us, we pray for all who are coping with the direct effects of the virus, those who are ill and those who care for them; those feel trapped and unable to see a future. May they sense your presence with them and know your love around them as they journey through their experience, and may we find creative ways of sharing our faith with those who are struggling.

In our uncertain times,

**We embrace the future, trusting in your loving presence and the hope of eternal life.**

We pray for all those whose work is threatened as we seek to protect one another, those who fear they will lose their homes, who fear they will have no job in the future, who fear they will not be able to feed their family. May we find ways of working together to share precious resources in these difficult times, recognising that we have more than we need and offering help to those who are struggling.

In our uncertain times,

**We embrace the future, trusting in your loving presence and the hope of eternal life.**

We pray for all who are trapped in loneliness, isolated from family and friends, and whose lifeline of comfort and companionship has been removed by the safety measures. May we seek out the lost and lonely and using creative communication bring new experiences of friendship into the lives of those who are struggling.

In our uncertain times,

**We embrace the future, trusting in your loving presence and the hope of eternal life.**

We pray for brothers and sisters around the world for whom the virus is one more challenge in lives already challenged by war and terror. In our relative peace may we shout out against the injustices that fuel conflict and deny people the opportunities to explore the fullness of their humanity. May we work for justice and equal opportunities for all your people.

In our uncertain times,

**We embrace the future, trusting in your loving presence and the hope of eternal life.**

Loving God, we pray for wisdom for world leaders as they discern a path through this pandemic.

May they work together for the benefit of all people, sharing knowledge and experience to build a new world where we can live together in peace, a world of justice and joy. As we wrestle with all the challenges may we recognise the opportunities and reach out to build a better world from this new beginning.

In our uncertain times,

**We embrace the future, trusting in your loving presence and the hope of eternal life.**

Amen.

### **Our offering to God.**

As we continue to worship apart but together, we pledge our commitment to sharing in the work of our church through our continued offering and by exploring new ways of living generously, and may we know your blessing on all we do. Amen

### **Suggested hymn**

Tune 'What a friend we have in Jesus' [listen here](#)

In the questions without answers,  
in the truth we seek to find,  
God is calling us to journey,  
leaving certainty behind.

In the thirst for peace and justice,  
in the struggle to be free,  
God is offering living water,  
freshly poured for you and me.

In the energy of living,  
breaking bounds of church and place,  
God is naming all things holy,  
making earth a sacred space.

In the shaping and the sharing,  
in the finding common ground,  
God is offering living water,  
flowing out to all around.

In the cross of loving mystery,  
in the mix of tears and joy,  
God embraces and enfolds us,  
with a hope death can't destroy.

In the silence and the waiting,  
in the anger and the prayer,  
God is in the living water,  
depth of life for all to share.

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### **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.