

Sunday 24th January 2021

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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 **Great is thy faithfulness**

[Listen here](#)

Lord's Prayer – say slowly pausing at the end of each line.

Our father

Reading Jonah 3: 1-10
 Mark 1: 14-20

A Fable

Once upon a time a father and his two sons were left on their own on a wet Saturday afternoon. It was too wet to play football and the father was struggling to keep his sons amused. They were bored, they were restless, and they were moaning.

Desperate for a moments peace the father looked around for ideas and saw on the table a pile of magazines. Looking through them for ideas he came across a map of the world, full of tiny details. He cut the map from the magazine, and then he cut the map into a hundred tiny pieces, mixed them around and placed them in the floor. Then he challenged his sons to remake the map, telling them it was a new jigsaw puzzle.

Satisfied that this would keep them busy for some time he went to make himself a drink in the quiet of the kitchen, then he sat down to enjoy the peace. It did not last. His sons appeared saying they had finished the puzzle. Sure that this could not be the case he went to check and was amazed to find the map complete. Curious, he asked his sons how they had managed it so quickly. They explained that as they were sorting the pieces they had realized that on the reverse of the map was a picture of a man, so, side-tracked, they sorted the pieces to build the man. When they turned over the paper the word had been sorted as well. They had discovered that when you sort out the man, the world is also okay.

Suggested hymn God in his love for us lent us this planet

Listen [here](#)

Our world is an amazing place. Take a moment to think about the most amazing natural thing you have seen.

Reflection

How did Jesus know to call together a group? Last week we thought about how we sense a call, and the challenge of responding. This week we have the call of four fishermen, people in touch with nature, attuned to the tides and the winds, and they leave it all to join this new band of men following a carpenter. Why? There are so many questions around these early passages in the gospels and we get little clue to the answers. That there was a group attached to Jesus is without doubt. That they were a mixed bag of people from different backgrounds is likely. That they travelled together around the area of Galilee, and that they drew crowds where they went is recorded in other sources and so is accepted. But why? The gospel writers give us their versions of why, possibly augmented later by the church as it sought to 'explain' certain doctrines that had been adopted. However, there are still a lot of unanswered questions which are often loosely termed 'the mystery'.

Jesus was a rebel, someone who challenged the status quo. He knew it needed challenged, he saw how it was affecting people's view of God and their view of themselves, there was a hierarchy which was alien to the oneness Jesus understood. If you are a rebel with a cause, you persuade others to join the cause and rebel with you, there is a power in numbers. The message of Jesus was LOVE, it was a commandment, 'question your actions and ideas and discard those that are not loving', that are contrary to the way of oneness and mutuality. I believe, Jesus was probably the first person to

understand our connections with creation and with the source of creation, the first person to be aware of the power of that connection and to demonstrate this through signs and miracles. These were to show a different reality, a glimpse of a different world in which the power structure and boundaries of the present world were no longer necessary or viable. The gospel writers record this world as Kingdom. Did the disciples get this, it is difficult to say from the gospels, but I believe Paul understood even if he did not become practiced in the connection. His letters show a depth of understanding of the message of Jesus long before the gospels were written, and he reiterates this idea of a better world which he refers to as Kingdom.

Challenging the status quo was not new, the Bible records prophets doing this throughout history. Jonah was a prophet, albeit a reluctant one. God called Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn the people that their actions were going to bring about destruction. Jonah's reluctance was because he 'knew' that God would not follow through with his threat. It is an interesting dynamic. We believe in a God of love, many of us have moved away from the idea of an interventionist God, a manipulative God, whilst still understanding the invitation of God to a different way. We see God as desiring all people to come to an understanding of oneness which will change the way of the world and create a different reality but without the overarching threat. So, we are still called to challenge the status quo where it limits the fullness of humanity, there is still a task to do as Jonah found out.

As I read this passage, I was struck by a modern day parallel. The Ninevites had forty days before their world would be overthrown. We cannot avoid the truth that if we do not change our ways the days of life of earth, as we know it, are limited. Our actions are changing the world and its ability to sustain life. Our prophets, David Attenborough, Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall, Greta Thunberg and countless other scientists and activists, are calling to us to take seriously the damage we are doing to the earth, through pollution, plunder, and plastic. It may not be forty days, but we are fast approaching the tipping point from which there is no return. The Ninevites responded to Jonah's call, they dressed differently and turned from their 'evil' ways and disaster was averted. Will we change our ways?

The way of Jesus means taking change seriously, it means avoiding the ruts we allow ourselves to travel unthinkingly along, like trams on a track. It means changing the way we are, the way we do things, the way we view things, and the motto of the way is LOVE. When we understand ourselves as one, we see ourselves as the gift of love. Love brings change, love seeks the best for others, love sees opportunities and takes them, from challenging an action to opening a door, from campaigning for change to changing our lightbulbs. As church we have the opportunity to influence a community by our actions and our message. Our buildings, whether church or home, should be eco-friendly, using every possible means to alleviate our effect upon the planet, our actions should speak loudly of our belief in the need to change.

As individuals, we need to adopt the way of love in our relationship with creation, we must take recycling seriously and encourage more and better recycling by our councils. We must ensure that recycled goods are dealt with within this country and not merely fly-tipped on another country's doorstep; we should use less plastic, discourage single-use plastic and encourage the use of recycled plastic wherever possible. We need to be conscious of plastic within our daily routines and seek alternatives where possible, wax wraps, foil, reusable tray liners and to buy clothing made from sustainable fibres. We also need to cut down on waste, compost where possible and encourage food waste recycling. In Taunton, the council had a very efficient system for recycling, and everything had to be put out sorted and was collected in lorries with separate containers, everything was recycled including food waste. When we moved to Luton, we were shocked at how little was done and have become suspicious of systems where recycling is collected without sorting as this is likely dumped rather than dealt with.

We spend a lot of time talking about what we could do. The King of Nineveh did not call a committee meeting to discuss possible change, he adopted and instructed change. If we have a dream, and we do have a dream of a Kingdom, then let us stop talking about what we could do and talk about what we are going to do, and high on the priority list needs to be the planet on which the Kingdom will come. We are people of creation. We should be people of action, and our action should be loving and the catalyst of real change. That is the Jesus way, using our connections to change the world through our actions.

Let us take a moment to reflect on the beauty of our planet as we watch and listen to John Rutter's Look at the world.

[Watch here](#)

Reflection on Psalm 62

In oneness my soul waits,
listening and feeling, as the world and creation live and breathe.
In oneness I am aware of God,
connected through the web of life
which weaves together all people and all things.
This connection is my strength and my guide,
this connection leads my life, in love.

The ways of the world can batter me,
sometimes relentlessly
and I struggle:
those who do not understand,
whose path is not guided by love,
can overwhelm,
but in oneness my soul waits, and I can feel peace.

The source of all being is always present in my life,
always present in the world
and in the knowledge of oneness, I feel safe,
the powers of the world cannot shake me
for I am one with the source of all being
and this connection is my strength and refuge.
The source of all being is love,
and invites love;
we are all in oneness
and invited to know the connection and feel the peace.

In oneness is our being,
together we are love,
and the world is how we build it,
a world of love or a world of fear.
In oneness there are no divisions.
Our confidence comes from the knowledge of God,
we need not fear.
As oneness increases, the ways of the world decrease,
as love grows, fear departs,
as we belong, the illusion of separation ends
and a new reality dawns;
bright with hope,
radiant with love,
we are one.

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Prayers

Eternal God, source of all being we rest in your presence and offer you our prayers, sharing our concerns through our commitment to the way of Jesus. We pray for the people who are struggling with challenges that feel threatening and overwhelming. We think of those whose lives are threatened by Covid and whose families are anxious and feel powerless. We think of health workers who face the tide of Covid, treating for those fighting the disease and caring for their families; workers who feel sapped of energy and struggling to face tomorrow. May they feel your presence and know your strength within them, bringing them light and hope. As we pray for the NHS, we commit ourselves to practising and advocating keeping safe in love for one another.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

As we seek to live in oneness, we pray for all who find themselves displaced, refugees of war and famine struggling to find their place in a strange land. We pray for the people who commit themselves to reaching out to the stranger and offering help to those whose lives have been turned upside down by circumstances over which they had no control. We pray for a world in which there are no refugees, and all sense their belonging in your universal oneness. As we pray for your kingdom to come, we commit to being catalysts for change and challengers of the status quo.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

Creator God, we pray for your creation and seek forgiveness for the times when we have been neglectful of the earth. We pray for the people who shout out against pollution, the plundering of rainforests, and the practices which put convenience over care. We pray for those who seek to conserve and preserve the amazing diversity of life on the planet, risking hostility and harm in their attempt to raise awareness of how our actions are affecting life on earth. As we pray for our world we commit to taking all necessary steps to become people and churches who whose footprint is light, and whose actions are loving.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

In this week of Christian Unity and Holocaust Memorial, we pray for reconciliation amongst race and creed, understanding of different approaches which illustrate the diversity of your creation, and a desire to overcome intolerance and fear through the power of love. As we pray we commit to openness and hospitality and a willingness to welcome the stranger.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

Recognising your call to be people of oneness guided by the way of Jesus, we commit to being prophets of love and pioneers of change, and to share our understandings and beliefs with family and friends, encouraging a different way, and growing in our humanity through the strength of our oneness with each other, creation and you.

In your love, may our actions bring change and hope for the world.

In oneness we pray. Amen.

Offertory

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 Touch the earth lightly

[Watch here](#)

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.