

Sunday 21st March 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 Praise to the Lord, the almighty
Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Eternal God ever present in creation, we offer you our praise and thanksgiving.

Your energy and inspiration create all that we know and all that we have yet to discover, from the stars in and beyond our galaxy to the planets which orbit the stars, and life itself in myriad forms. Your energy and inspiration sustain all of life, your Spirit indwells all life, and even when it is not recognised, the Spirit binds and connects all life.

Your energy and inspiration bring forth new life and in the knowledge of you we are constantly invited to see life anew, to live life to the fullness of our humanity living generously to reflect your love for all life. In our day-to-day life we follow the way of Jesus, it is our model for the fullness of humanity, our guide for the choices we make.

Loving God, for all this we offer you our thanks, treasuring this new day, and the many people who will support and encourage us today and every day. In our life together in the fellowship of your love we say the words Jesus taught the disciples.

Our father

Reading Psalm 51: 1-12

Exploration

Psalm 51 is a cry for forgiveness and there are times when each one of us offers a cry for forgiveness but as we delve into the words of this psalm, we encounter ideas which may puzzle us, concepts that are challenging to our understanding of God. These words offer the opportunity to question and wrestle with ideas and beliefs which are often assumed within the realms of orthodox Christianity, and as ever it is in the questions and the wrestling that we grow. So, let us look a little more closely at just a few of the verses we have read.

V4 – 'against God alone have I sinned', in what way could this ever be true? The best definition of sin I have heard is based on Paul's use of the Greek word hamartia, meaning to miss the mark. As we follow the way of Jesus we have a clear model to follow, but we have not yet reached the maturity of humanity Jesus demonstrates and so there are times when our words and actions fall short of the love, and we hurt others. Now God is present in all things so, when we hurt others, we also hurt God, but to ignore the hurt of others would be wrong. Our humanity grows when we acknowledge our oneness with others and build deep relationships with others, so when we 'sin' against others we need to seek their forgiveness as well as accepting the gracious forgiveness of God.

V5 – 'I was born guilty', this is perhaps the closest Scripture comes to the Augustine notion of original sin, an idea which has distorted the picture of God for centuries. In the Genesis creation stories we read that all God created was good, and we are creations so how might we be born guilty? Perhaps the greatest mythbuster of original sin is Matthew Fox who, in his book 'Original Blessing', looks at the wealth of knowledge that contradicts the idea of original sin, from Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen to the spirituality of indigenous people. He asks the question 'how can anyone on the seeing and experiencing the joy of new life imagine for a minute that it is filled with sin and guilt', and yet the whole salvation and redemption practice of the church makes that assumption.

V6 – 'truth in the inward being', being honest with ourselves is really important, if we delude ourselves we cannot relate fully as we are hiding behind a mask. Acknowledging our flaws and mistakes is a part of forgiveness, and if we pretend and hide behind a mask we will not feel the fullness of God's gracious forgiveness.

V9 – 'hide your face from all my sins and blot out my iniquities', ignoring is not the same as forgiving and yet here it seems that the Psalmist is asking God to ignore his flaws. Being forgiven requires action on our part, it requires honesty and a change of direction, a recognition of the hurt caused and

a commitment to avoid such actions and decisions in the future. How would you feel if someone said 'I know I got it wrong but can you just ignore it'? In love, we may answer yes, but that person would not be growing in their own love.

V12 – 'the joy of salvation', joy in God comes from right relations with God and with others, and its essence is a contentment with life, no envy, no jealousy but also an openness to creation and a vision of a better future. There is little joy in forgiveness if it does not move us on to a better relationship.

To reflect on this read a contemporary stating of Psalm 51

Psalm 51 (Psalms for a quantum world)

The love that is God
is merciful and unconditional;
it holds no grudges
but seeks to encourage a new life,
in which, through oneness,
we recognise the hurt we cause
and seek a new relationship.
Only in the knowledge of our oneness
do we find this new life.
A life filled with love born of honesty;
we must know ourselves
through our relationships with others;
through seeking the best for them
we find our own new expression of our humanity.
We are never separate from the source of all being,
even when we feel alone.
When we open our eyes to the oneness in creation,
we open our minds to the power of our participation in creation.
In unity within community
all may know their oneness in God,
the source of all being,
and creation reveal the glory of peace between all people.

The love that is God
seeks only the unity of humanity,
through the flowering of relationships.
The love that is God
breaks down the barriers of fear
and opens the gate to a new way of being;
a way of justice and freedom
through sharing the goodness of creation
with friend and not yet friend.
The love that is God is eternal
and in oneness we know that life is eternal,
and life is love.

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Suggested Hymn

Tune Blaenwern Listen [here](#)

In the world, God's life declaring,
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.

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Readings Jeremiah 31:31-34
 John 12: 44-50

Reflection

Do you have a dream? When I was younger, I dreamt of taking my camera around the world and photographing creation in all its different hues and guises. When I was younger, I did not have the financial means to fulfil that dream, and now I am older I do not have the physical means to follow that dream the way I envisaged it but yet I find myself content. I can still photograph creation in all its hues and guises simply in a different way. As we grow our dreams adapt to new circumstances, but they never really go away. When we are in challenging times our dreams are always of a better future. The prophet Jeremiah talks of a better future, although we are now aware that these words were written long after the events they forecast that does not diminish the dream. In Jeremiah 31, verse 34, we read 'No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.' In those words I see the kingdom Jesus spoke of, a place of pure God, the fullness of humanity.

Our reading from John has been referred to as a summary of Jesus' teaching, it is a heartfelt cry in much the same way as the Psalmist uttered his heartfelt cry. Throughout his ministry Jesus painted his dream in colourful imaginings and challenges stories, it was a dream of a better world, a world where people grew into the truth of their humanity and knew God. Since Jesus there have been many who have shared 'the knowledge' of God in a similar way, great spiritual writers like Meister Eckhart, Hildegard of Bingen, Teilhard du Chardin to name just three. In recent years John Spong has painted his own picture of knowing and Neale Donald Walsh and Richard Hayes are two of the more recent exponents of understanding God in a different, a simpler way. Yet, within the church we are still stuck with St Augustine's rule of separation and salvation. How can we say God is everywhere and then act as if we are apart from God?

In a remarkable testament of trust and wonder Richard Hayes shares his experience of God in his book 'What God told me to tell you', it is a simple message – you are totally worthy, you are totally loved, and there is nothing that can ever separate you from God. A simple message that for many people years of church doctrine makes hard to believe. Yet that message is coming through time and again in so many different ways, and through so many different people and it started with Jesus. Sometimes we choose not to believe the message because it opens up the power of our humanity and with power comes responsibility. When we share a dream and believe in God's presence with and within us, then that dream is a reality within our grasp. Jesus was not offering some distant utopia, he was offering the means of creating the kingdom in the here and now, in his time and in our time. Nelson Mandela once said that our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate but rather that we are powerful beyond measure. Nelson Mandela was held in captivity for 25 years and yet he was never imprisoned because he knew that no prison could even separate him from the truth of his existence, he did not need possessions to be who he was. He grew stronger with each year as he trusted more and more in the reality of his being. What we believe defines who we are and the reality we live. Jesus called people to believe something new and change reality, and that challenge is with us today. We talk a lot about the kingdom, we pray 'thy kingdom come' but we need to realise that the kingdom is ours to build, through our dreams, our imagination and our belief in the message that we are totally worthy, totally loved and can never be separated from God.

Do you have a dream?

Suggested song I have a dream - Abba

Watch [here](#)

Prayers

Loving God, as we worship and praise you, we are reminded of what it means to be followers of the way of Jesus, and to accept your call to live more fully in our humanity. We understand that we are blessed but sometimes we forget we are to be a blessing, but you are gracious and forgiving and encourage us to continue the journey to know you more.

Loving God though our dreaming and our journeying may your kingdom grow through us.

In our worship we bring our prayers of concern and commitment.

All around us we see the signs of separation, particularly now, and we pray for those who are missing the presence of loved ones, and especially those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. This experience of Lockdown has revealed much that is wrong in our world and communities, too many people who are alone and feel isolated, people who have no one to visit. We pray that we may play our part, in whatever way we can, to reach out to the lonely in our communities, offering support and conversation and a sense that they are not forgotten and invisible.

Loving God though our dreaming and our journeying may your kingdom grow through us.

All around us we see signs of hurt and abuse, on screens and in papers, and we cry out, we are ashamed that as we pray for your Kingdom come these things are happening. There are too many forgotten people, hidden in a system that values unfairly and acts unjustly. You call us to be a people of love, you encourage us to be a blessing for others, and yet in our world many do not feel blessed and do not feel loved. We are witnessing an uprising of despair driven by centuries of injustice, and this is fuelling violence and unrest. May we challenge the system that silences pain and frustration, may we fight peacefully for every human to have a voice and may we encourage a world in which there are equal opportunities for all regardless of colour, creed or gender.

Loving God though our dreaming and our journeying may your kingdom grow through us.

All around us there are silent women, who have little or no control over the path their life takes, and who feel powerless to change the reality. We pray for the victims of domestic abuse, for women who are prisoners in their own home, for young girls forced into marriages or unwilling participants in ritual practices which endanger their lives. May we be generous in our support of those who challenge these practices, organisations who seek to release women from unjust circumstances which limit their opportunity to explore the fullness of their humanity and who offer a voice to the silent.

Loving God though our dreaming and our journeying may your kingdom grow through us.

All around us are prisoners of poverty, people who fear for tomorrow, who must drink dirty water to live, or walk incredible distances to see a doctor. People who love intensely but whose fear for tomorrow extinguishes the flame of hope. Loving God, in you Kingdom there will be no poverty, and hope will burn brightly fanned by oneness and equal opportunity. May our way of living be a positive movement in the world, may our love enfold those who are victims of injustice, and our generosity make a difference, bringing the reality of your kingdom more fully into our world.

Loving God though our dreaming and our journeying may your kingdom grow through us.

In Jesus name 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

Tune Streets of Laredo

Listen [here](#)

The Kingdom of God will be fair and be loving,
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.

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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.