

Sunday 18th April 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.

Reflection – Witness to the wonder

While they were talking, Jesus came;
intrusive, uninvited, standing there
telling them, not to be afraid.
Never mind afraid, they were terrified,
everyone knew he was dead.
Someone had whispered, 'Jesus is alive',
someone had said they had seen him, but
expecting him to be there, never,
such things did not happen.

'Touch my hands and feet!'
O such doubt!

'Touch me, see I am real!
Have you anything to eat.
Everything written about me is fulfilled.'

Witnesses to the wonder,
one by one they realised!
Now they could see.
Drawn to touch, they had been touched
and their eyes were open.
Repent and believe your sins are forgiven.

Our reading from Luke takes us to the moment the disciples returned from Emmaus filled with excitement and wonder. They burst into the room where the other disciple are gathered; they have just begun explaining what they have experienced when Jesus himself appears within their midst.
Read Luke's story and take a moment to imagine the scene.

Reading Luke 24: 36b - 48

Suggested Hymn Be still for the presence of the Lord
Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Eternal God, you are the creative energy that holds together the fabric of creation, in you we have our being and in you we are one with all knowledge. When we stop and listen, we hear you in the whispers of the weather, the quiet falling of snow, the pattering of rain, the movement of the wind and the warmth of the sun, when we are one with creation we are surrounded by your love songs and know peace. In the stillness we find space, space to be and space to discover, space away from the pressures and confusion of a world struggling with the effects of our choices. In the space we can see things differently, we suddenly know and in the power of the Spirit we gain insight and courage to make different choices. In you, we seek justice and fight injustice, in you we offer love and fight fear, in you we become the depth of our humanity, the fullness of humanity we see in Jesus. As we worship together may this time be your time, a space of wonder and possibility, in Jesus' name.

Lord's Prayer

Reading Acts 3: 12-19

Suggested Hymn Sing of the Lord's goodness
Listen [here](#)

Reflection

We are God's people, and we are Easter people, but like all disciples there are times when life and events are a mystery, and we need space to sit and reflect. At the end of our reading from Luke Jesus urges the disciples to stay and wait, to reflect on their experience and then to draw strength from the power of the Spirit.

In Acts we pick up the story. The disciples we find did wait and then in Jerusalem they experienced the connecting of all the dots, and things fell into place in a radical and powerful way. In Acts three we have the beginning of their ministry and we learn that the disciples have healed a man. The authorities are once again unhappy and Peter, sensing this, challenges them, explaining that it was the man's faith that has healed him. The experiences that the disciples have been through and the time spent reflecting have led them to a deeper place, a place of peace, knowledge and power.

Peace is often seen as the goal, ask people what they want to pray for, and the answer will often be peace. Sometimes it comes from personal unrest, sometimes world unrest and sometimes it may just be the obvious answer. However, I believe peace is a part of our journey and not the goal. We are called to dwell in God's presence and be both at peace and showing peace. To do that we have to understand what we mean by God.

In 2008 a book was published that divided the church, that book was *The Shack* by William Paul Young. It was a story but also a journey, it was fiction, but it offered an opportunity to explore God in a new and radical way, it also challenged a lot of what was accepted doctrine, hence the division. Many church people dismissed the book without reading it, but it stirred up something around the edges, it was read by millions on the fringe of church, people who were struggling with life but found the doctrine of the church irrelevant. I invited a group of friends to spend time with the book and bring their questions, I read the book and marked up the bits I gelled with and those I found challenging and then we talked. It took us on a journey, I believe it changed people's lives and gave them a new perspective of God – all from a story.

In '*The Shack*' we are introduced to God as a verb – the verb 'to be', after all when Moses asked God who he should say had sent him the answer was 'I am'. God we are told deals in verbs, not nouns, which can turn things upside down. Things like responsibility, expectation, patience, generosity, the easy definition of the Christian life are out. Instead, we need to recognise opportunities to be generous, take responsibility, practice patience, live expectantly. I wonder how Luke's story would have changed if the disciples had been expecting Jesus to appear.

The resurrection appearances are strange, they point to the reality of resurrection but leave us with questions. Jesus appears from thin air, he looks real, he acts as if real but then he disappears again, the resurrected Jesus did not stay around for long, but the experience brought some peace to the disciples. Jesus also gave them a message and a challenge. The message was 'repent and believe your sins are forgiven'. Often there is a comma inserted after 'believe' but that may have been inserted later and it changes the sense of what Jesus said. If we live believing (verb) that our sins are forgiven, we will act differently from when we believe we have to do something to be forgiven by God. God is love, a gracious love that is unconditional and as Paul understood there is nothing that can separate us from the presence of that love in our lives, so why wouldn't we act as forgiven people? However, the message of the church has centred on that comma, and our lives have been less than peaceful. Metanoia, living in the love of forgiveness, is very different to paranoia, living in fear, the first brings peace and the latter leaves us searching for peace.

Jesus often spoke about life in all its fullness, acknowledging that life was happening, but it was a fraction of the fullness of our potential. Jesus himself gave glimpses of that potential and encouraged the disciples to move beyond their fear and into love. God loves us to life in all its fullness. In the story *Sleeping Beauty*, it is the prince's love which brings Aurora back to life, in our story it is God's love which opens the door on the full potential of our humanity, a love which is a verb rather than a noun and which asks us to live in a reality of love. When we take that step, we open ourselves to the power that comes from the knowledge of God, a living knowledge not a theoretical knowledge.

Around the same time as the release of '*The Shack*', the Killers had a hit with the song '*Human'* which asked are we human or are we dancers. They were puzzling lyrics, but many suggested that

they were comparing being human and free to create, to a life choreographed by rules, doctrine and fashion. Were we going through the motions, or were we alive and living the reality of a created and creative being? As churches are we journeying together and individually deeper into God and living our faith actively or are we simply going through the motions. The former will change the world, the latter is likely to make little difference.

God is that which transforms how we experience everything not with a magic wand but by changing our perspective. When we believe we are loved and forgiven, when we believe we are connected to the creative energy that we name God, and in that connection we can achieve a new reality then in that knowledge we discover the power to imagine a new world into being. God is the name we give to a way of living in which we experience a world worthy of living for, fighting for and dying for! When we lose ourselves in love for others, then and only then do we indirectly find God.

God is love, but love is a verb and not a noun, God is creative energy, surrounding us with love and calling us to participate in love. Love itself is not sublime, beautiful or glorious instead it points to these things. God is the depth present in the act of love. To believe in God is to be a site where love exists. In resurrection we participate in the creation of eternal life by loving the world and loving each other and challenging the status quo of dance by being fully human and pushing the bounds of reality towards a new horizon in oneness.

If love is a verb then prayer is a feeling. When we live love, our hearts are filled with compassion and we choose justice. We move from judgement and blame, into acceptance and generosity, and we take responsibility for our decisions. Our prayers must come from deep within and when we pray together, we must share our feelings and guide one another towards one prayer. Others cannot see our prayer, but they can feel our prayer and experience our prayer when it pours over our lives and changes our perspective. Prayer can be a catalyst for change when we allow love to change us.

As we move forward from Easter let us explore a new way of being church. As we plan for a new normal let us plan as loving beings, living in the reality of forgiveness and allowing God to guide our path.

Suggested Hymn

Listen [here](#)

We cannot own the sunlit sky

Prayers

Take a moment to remember the news stories which you have heard or read this week and reflect upon how they made you feel and whether you are content with that feeling.

List each story and write down-

*a summary of the issue, what you believe to be causing the problem,
what needs to happen to create a positive change
and what part we might play in the solution.*

Now spend a few moments living with your list and allowing love to fill your heart.

During the week you might like to phone someone from your church and share with them what you felt; this is also prayer.

Prayer for today

Eternal God as we worship together we bring our prayers and concerns for the world.

We continue to hold the Royal Family and particularly the Queen in our prayers as we remember the life of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh. We remember a life lived in love, supportive love, encouraging love, interested love, gentle love, and challenging love. In grief may your love bring comfort and enable courage.

May the love that is God heal our sorrows and guide our path as we live as forgiven people.

We pray for the people of St Vincent whose lives have been turned upside down by the eruption of volcanoes. May they sense your presence with them through the aid agencies who are helping to relieve the crisis dominating their lives, and through our support for those helping.

May the love that is God heal our sorrows and guide our path as we live as forgiven people.

We pray for the people whose lives are affected by civil unrest caused by political and racial injustice and religious hatred and think particularly of the US, Myanmar, Mozambique and Northern Ireland.

Our prayers are for tolerance and acceptance and an end to incitement as a means of power. We pray for all those who are victims of violence and that love will overcome fear.

May the love that is God heal our sorrows and guide our path as we live as forgiven people.

We continue to pray for those affected by Covid, people who have suffered the loss of loved ones, and those who fear for the future. We pray especially for those countries where infections are surging, particularly Brazil where poor choices have left people vulnerable, and the health service overcome. As we move forward may we all act responsibly to minimise risks and encourage one another in living carefully recognising that it is oneness that will lead us forward.

May the love that is God heal our sorrows and guide our path as we live as forgiven people.

We pray for our planet recognising where greed has led to poor decision making, resulting in pollution. We think of the oceans on which we all rely, but which are being filled with plastic and industrial waste. We give thanks that there is good news, and our actions are beginning to make a difference with some animals moving away from extinction and pray that we can encourage one another to work together to effect more change.

May the love that is God heal our sorrows and guide our path as we live as forgiven people.

As we make our choices everyday may we remember our oneness with creation and seek to have a positive effect of the wholeness of creation. May we encourage one another to move from greed to need, living sustainably and responsibly. Recognising that greed is fuelling scams which are targeting people who are vulnerable may we seek to be the eyes and ears of love, caring for and protecting each other through shared knowledge and experience.

May the love that is God heal our sorrows and guide our path as we live as forgiven people.

As we learn more and journey deeper into our humanity and our experience of God we offer these prayers in the name of Jesus, who revealed to us a different way. 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 The church is wherever God's people are praising

Listen [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.