

Sunday 20th June 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 In heavenly love abiding
Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Eternal God, present in every atom, present in our every breath, we gather in your presence bound by your Spirit, which binds everything, and we worship you. In our worship we offer you praise and thanksgiving, praise for the wonder of creation, the wonder of life and the wonder of love, and thanksgiving for the gifts of creation which are so abundant in our lives.

As we pause to reflect on the past week, we recognise the many different ways we experience the gifts of creation; in joy and in sorrow we receive, in times of plenty and in times of worry we receive, in our sharing and in our loneliness we receive, for in every moment you are with us and your love holds and embraces our lives.

For love in all its shapes and forms we thank you.

For friendship, companionship, and family we thank you.

For surprises and unexpected opportunities, we thank you.

For comfort and presence, and for space to be, we thank you.

For our church and church family, the stories which bind us together, and the life and teaching of Jesus we thank you, and in oneness we offer you this time we share together.

Lord's Prayer

Reading 1 Samuel 17: (1a, 4-11, 19-23) 32-49

Story - Faith in the face of danger

The land of the rising sun was at war, its people lived in fear of advancing invaders who threatened their land, their livelihood, and their lives. The warning bells tolled, and the people of the village lifted their packs which contained all they could carry and fled to the hills to escape.

Arriving in the village the enemy found only deserted homes, a ghost town with no one to fight. The general of the troops was furious, he gathered his troops and bellowed at them, they in turn cowered and tried to explain that the people had fled in fear. It made no difference, the general wanted slaves, he wanted treasure, he wanted to see fear in the eyes of his victims, he wanted respect.

He sent his troops to search for the people, but they returned empty handed with the information that the only person living near was an old holy man. The general marched towards the place where the holy man lived and demanded to see him. His troops found the holy man quietly meditating in the far reaches of the garden, but they could not persuade him to move. The general was furious when he was told the holy man would not come to him. He went to where the holy man sat and shouted long and loud about conquerors and battles and respect. Standing in front of the holy man he asked him, 'Don't you know who I am, I am a man who could strike you dead without batting an eyelid?'

Without moving the holy man lifted his eyes to meet those of the general, and without blinking replied, 'Don't you know that you are looking at a man who can be struck dead without batting an eyelid?'

The general, his gaze held by the holy man, was speechless for a moment. His troops watched with a mixture of trepidation and wonder which turned to amazement as the general bowed to the holy man and then turned and walked away. He and his troops left the village without doing any harm.

Based on an oriental fable.

Thoughts

In our bible story we are given a lot of detail about Goliath, and from this we are meant to understand that the Israelites fear, perhaps even cowardice, was to be expected in the face of such an opponent.

We all recognise times when we have felt overwhelmed at the task in front of us, and yet David shows what can happen when you have faith in what you believe, faith in your own 'God-given' ability.

Perhaps an equivalent today is someone like Greta Thunberg standing up to the governments of the world and fighting for action on climate change, or Marcus Rashford standing up to the government over meal provision for children during lockdown.

I have been involved in telling this story many times for Open the Book, and apart from the sheer size of Goliath, the other thing that strikes you is the ridiculous idea that the boy David should wear the King's armour. David is wise and bold enough to say no, and to face Goliath just as he is, with the tools of his shepherding trade, which prove to be enough. Sometimes we use our lack of things to prevaricate but David, in this story, shows us that what we have is often all we need, and it is how we use them that matters. Our prayer is to have faith in the face of danger, and to trust in our God given skills and attributes.

Suggested hymn Take, O, take me as I am

Listen [here](#)

Reading Psalm 9:1-11

Thoughts

Psalm 9 is one of the 'difficult' Psalms, using words and imagery that we are often uncomfortable with and which we question. It is a triumphal psalm written by the victors and one of the questions it raises for me is what about those who had faith and were not saved? What about suffering? We all know someone who was a faithful Christian and suffered great sadness or loss, or lost their life through no fault of their own, how do we equate that with a Psalm such as this?

We are told to trust God, but I remember listening to someone who had suffered an acquired brain injury tell of how they had believed that God would catch them if they fell, then they fell, and God did not catch them. Their faith was blunted, if not destroyed. Terrible things happen in our world, mostly as a result of actions taken by humans, even natural disasters can be the result of human activity, or the consequences are worse because of human activity. However, if we never take risks we cannot grow. David took a risk, he had faith, but he could not be sure of the outcome.

In 1968, Christopher Logue wrote a poem which explored the concept of going beyond, it included the following lines:

Come to the edge.

We might fall.

Come to the edge.

It's too high!

COME TO THE EDGE.

And they came,

and he pushed,

and they flew.

Life is a balance between the predictable and risk. Risk means accepting that the outcome is uncertain, but in that uncertainty lies the possibility of new creation. If we never take a risk we will never experience the fullness of what it means to be human. Sometimes, life throws a curved ball, which stuns us, throws us off course and may even make us question what we believe but in wrestling with the challenge and being prepared to take a risk we move beyond into something remarkable.

Story - Beyond Fear

In the land of the Lakota people forest fires were common in the summer heat. These all-consuming fires swept through the land and the people would gather up their animals and flee.

One year, a fire like no other came upon the land, it was faster and fiercer than usual, and the tribe struggled to outrun the flames. They ran as fast as they could, but the flames ran faster, and the people looked to their elders for wisdom.

The wise woman, the eldest of the tribe, was struggling herself no longer having the speed she once had and recognising the despair in her people she stopped running. She faced the people and told

them they could never outrun these flames. Instead, she told them they must turn and face the flames, and then run through them to safety on the other side.

The tribe looked at one another, not sure they had heard correctly, to run through the flames seemed madness. However, they trusted the wise woman who had led them through many dangers and so they prepared as she asked. Taking the water they were carrying, they soaked their children, then with what water was left they soaked their animals and themselves. Quickly, before the heat of the fire could dry the water and holding their children as close as possible, they faced the flames and ran, those without children herding the animals.

They ran into the flames not sure what would happen, but knowing it was their only hope. It was terrible, and some died in the heat, all who made it through were scarred, scorched by the flames, but they were alive. They carried the scars for the rest of their lives and became known for them, but also known as the tribe that faced their worst fears and emerged to a new life beyond fear.

Based on a traditional Lakota legend

Suggested hymn My life flows on in endless song

Listen [here](#)

Reading Mark 4:35-41

Thoughts

What did Jesus mean when he asked the disciples 'have you no faith'? I have been on a cruise liner crossing the Bay of Biscay with a thirty-foot swell around us. This meant one minute it felt as if the ship was facing down to the depths and the next minute it was facing up to the sky. It was not a pleasant experience. Imagine then being on a small boat, big enough to hold maybe 10-12 people, and a storm whips up and the boat is being tossed around all ways. Would you be scared? What would you fear would happen? That is how the disciples must have felt, and then they realised that Jesus was sleeping through it all and in their fear they accused him of not caring.

Jesus, we are told, does not take time to answer them, he deals with the situation first and then he questions them, why are you afraid, do you still have no faith, but we are not told exactly in what they were meant to have faith. For me, this passage raises the question what is the link between fear and faith? I remember an episode of Doctor Who in which the Doctor's companion has been rendered blind and the Doctor asks her to trust him and he will return, she replies that he doesn't always tell the truth and he says that is why she must trust him. At the time I pondered on our casual use of the term trust in God against this revelation that if someone always tells the truth there is not need to 'trust' them. The term trust is perhaps linked to the notion of risk, the idea of uncertain outcome. If we never take risks where does that leave our faith?

Fear paralyses, fear inhibits our actions, fear opens our mind to perceived danger and we become distrustful. Faith frees, faith encourages, faith sees the danger, knows the risk but also sees the bigger picture. Risk is subjective, and each risk is measured. We can take personal risks, but together our decision may be different especially if our actions involve others in risk. During the pandemic we have all approached the danger differently, we have calculated the risks for us as individuals and taken decisions, but as churches we have also calculated the risks and our decisions have included not putting others at risk. However, risk levels change and so we need to constantly evaluate and adapt our actions to the current risk, moving forward will mean taking risks.

I believe that God, the source of all being, is all around us in creation, and within us as a part of our created being. I believe that God experiences everything we experience, the highs and the lows, the joys and the sufferings. I no longer believe in a puppet master God who pulls the strings to make the right people win, and leaves others as losers. God is love, and love would not act in that way. My faith is in love, in the created order of everything and in a 'God' who inhabits that order, and through the Spirit's guidance humanity is invited and encouraged to explore all possibilities. I also believe in life after death, that this experience is one experience and another experience awaits us, an experience which will be wonderful and which we need not fear. In this belief death loses its sting, and so the fear associated with risk is lessened. That does not mean that I take risk lightly, living recklessly, but it does mean that when I am faced with an unexpected choice, the result of which is uncertain, I

am less fearful. Perhaps as we face the future we need to remember these words of Jesus and ask ourselves why are we afraid, in what do we put our faith?

Story - Never alone

Within the Native American tribes there are many rituals of growing, rites of passage into adulthood. One such ritual involves spending a night alone, blindfolded, in a forest. It is a test of courage and a test of trust.

It was time, and Little Eagle knew what he must do. He was led slowly into the forest where he sat in the middle of a clearing, was blindfolded, and then left alone to confront his fears. It was a long night, every noise seemed louder, every rustle seemed nearer, and his imagination fed his fears, without sight he tensed waiting for the worst to happen. As the night wore on and his tension grew so did his imagination, blending the sounds with stories told around the fire, of spirits that roamed the forest. He had never felt so alone, so defenceless, or so lost.

Morning arrived, the sun rose and with it came the elders, their footsteps adding to the sounds of the dawn. As the blindfold was removed Little Eagle blinked in the light and then he saw his father sitting quietly in the trees. Little Eagle knew then that he had not been alone, his father had watched over him silently throughout the night. They smiled at one another in recognition of love shared, then his father got to his feet and walked with pride to embrace Little Eagle in his new status as adult.

Song

A simple change of heart by Carrie Newcomer

Watch [here](#)

Prayers

Loving God we bring to you our prayers of concern and our commitment to living to the fullness of our humanity. As we reflect on the world in which we live, we bring to mind the stories that worry us and cause us concern, in our minds we play the newsreel of pictures that alarm us, sadden us and sometimes frighten us. The headlines seem so large, and we feel so small, and yet in oneness we are all, and we can through our actions change the world.

Creator God, you call to us in our oneness, and encourage us to dream dreams and risk all for love.

May we your church live courageously in a world caught in the grip of fear. May we remember we are the children of a creator God and be the explorers, the discoverers, those who dance in puddles, who take a chance on making new friends, may we take risks, recognising that faith in a living God, reduces the need to fear.

Creator God, you call to us in our oneness, and encourage us to dream dreams and risk all for love.

Creator God as we look to the future may we be daring in our planning, trusting in our faith in your presence may we take the lessons of the past year and build a new way of being church that is open and loving, a space for growing in our humanity as we explore the possibilities of church for today. May we be bold in reaching out to others as we seek to follow your Spirit as it builds the Kingdom in our midst.

Creator God, you call to us in our oneness, and encourage us to dream dreams and risk all for love.

As we look to your Kingdom, we pray for the inspiration to fight injustice, to advocate a fair sharing of the wealth of creation, to encourage equality of opportunity, and to be courageous in standing alongside those who are oppressed by dictatorship and selfish governance around the world. We pray for the day when all may live in peace in their own land without fear of violence.

Creator God, you call to us in our oneness, and encourage us to dream dreams and risk all for love.

Creator God you hold us in love, may we hold others in love. In the quiet we think of family and friends, of neighbours and those who work within our communities, recognising their individual needs and listening for guidance to be love in their lives. (pause for thought)

Creator God, you call to us in our oneness, and encourage us to dream dreams and risk all for love

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. In Jesus' name Amen

Suggested song

O where are you going, and can I come with you?

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.