

Sunday 8th August 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 Lord God your love has called us here
Listen [here](#)

Prayer

Loving God for this day and all it promises, we give you our thanks.
For the beauty of creation, its mysteries, and its majesty, we give you our thanks.
For friends and family, and the people we share our days with, we give you our thanks.
For the life of the church, the sharing of love with each other and the world, we give you our thanks.
For the teaching and ministry of Jesus, which lead us in a new way, we give you our thanks.
For the promise of life eternal, revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, we give you our thanks.
For light in the darkness and hope in despair, we give you our thanks.

Lord's Prayer

Reading Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2 (NRSV)

Reading 1 Kings 19:1-13

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

Story A change in perspective

Aboutall was a small village on the edge of the forest. It was a place to visit with its charming cottages and a stream that ran through the village but above all it was known for its welcome to strangers. It was a friendly village, or at least it had been, but times had changed.

No one knew quite when the change happened or why, but where the villagers had once been in harmony now there was rivalry, and quarrels were happening all day long. Visitors stopped coming and the village chief was worried and anxious. People were not happy; the life of the community was being destroyed and without visitors his people would not survive the winter but what could he do?

One day, a stranger arrived in Aboutall, this was so unusual that the chief instantly heard about it. He rushed to greet the stranger and was surprised to find that the stranger knew all about the trouble. Soon the two were in deep conversation. Anyone watching would have seen a look of astonishment cross the face of the chief, but no one was watching because they were all too busy arguing. Shortly afterwards the stranger left the village.

The chief stood for a moment, a look of wonder on his face, then he rushed to the house of his best friend and shared what the stranger had told him. His friend was equally astonished and could not help but tell his friends and soon the village was buzzing with the news that one of their number was the Messiah.

Deep down the village folk were people of faith and this news was enough to bring them up short. Could one of them really be the Messiah. Everyone wondered who it might be, the baker, the postman, the old lady who sold eggs from her chickens, could it be the old woman whom the children thought looked like a witch? Each one of them realised that they had no idea who it could be and so their attitude to each other changed. Worried that they might offend the Messiah they began to treat each other with respect, and to help each other once again.

Slowly peace and harmony was restored, and soon the visitors returned because now the village was a place of reverence. (Based on a traditional story.)

Suggested hymn

Let there be love shared among us

Listen [here](#)**Reflection**

Experience colours the way we see things and the way we act. Many people find themselves caught in a cycle of behaviour which stems from the way they have been treated. We see how discrimination can breed unrest and how injustice fuels violence. If you have been watching the Olympics recently you will have witnessed a myriad of emotions from the athletes competing; utter joy at an unexpected medal, the release of having achieved what you hoped for, and the devastation from not achieving the expected result. Even a silver medal can feel like failure when everyone told you were assured of gold.

We are very good at measuring ourselves and finding ourselves short – even Ezekial did it – in 1 Kings 19 we find him feeling a failure when he measures himself no better than others because he was threatened and ran away; in his hiding place he prays for God to take his life but instead he is woken from sleep and finds food and water and is called to continue his travels. God does not judge as we do, for God is not human, God is. Jesus is so remarkable because here was a human who was different, who saw things, sensed things as God does. As Christians do we expect to be different, does being a Christian change your senses?

I once heard a remarkable story. Danae was born at only 24 weeks and not expected to live the night. Her parents were distraught, this was their dream dying, they willed their child to cling to life and she did, she made it through that night and the next but the doctors warned she would never live a normal life, she may never walk, never talk, never laugh, never cry but still her parents clung to hope and to God. For the first two months they could not touch her as her nervous system was so raw every touch caused major distress, all they could do was sit and look, and pray, pray that God would be with their daughter holding her when they couldn't. At two months old they touched her for the first time, held her close and two months later they took her home where she grew slowly and though petite, she was perfectly normal doing all the things a child does. All this is quite remarkable, but the most remarkable thing was yet to happen. One day, five years later, the family were on an outing to the park. As they sat chatting in the blistering heat Danae suddenly went quiet and hugging herself closely said, 'Can you smell that'. They sniffed the air and recognised the change in atmosphere – yes, they said, it smells like rain. Danae closed her eyes and repeated 'Can you smell that'. Again, they sniffed and said yes it smells like rain, we're going to get wet. No said Danae, it smells like him, it smells like God when you lay your head on his chest. Tears flowed from her mother's eyes as she recognised the proof of God having been with her daughter all through those long days when they could not hold her.

Does being a Christian change your senses?

It is a story which raises many questions but if we believe in the presence of God all around, and within, why shouldn't a small child, without worldly experience, be open to the knowledge of the presence of God and be able to equate that experience to a sense of smell. We often talk about changing our outlook, but how often do we really change our perspective? Ephesians talks of our old life and our new life, and our passage today gives us rules for our new life, but how real is our change of life? Does it change our senses? We are familiar with the concept of seeing things differently but do we hear things differently, touch things differently, smell things differently, taste things differently? When we accept the bread will we smell it, will we feel it, will we taste it as if it were God? Sadly, all too often we keep our senses firmly tied to human values. Elijah for all his contact with God still judged himself by human standards, and as such judged himself a failure. God had different ideas, and an angel came and fed him and then Elijah experienced God not in things but in the silence.

The Jews had a very real problem with the identity of Jesus because they used human and social values instead of faith values. He couldn't be who he said he was because they knew his father and mother; they knew where he had been born, where he had grown up. Remember there are no mentions in John's gospel of a virgin birth, angels, shepherds and wise men. It is a man standing in front of them, talking in a local accent, who says he is come from heaven, and dares to call himself the I AM! Jesus spoke but the Jews did not hear. Their senses were not changed by their faith.

There are many ways of listening

- The listening of criticism
- The listening of resentment
- The listening of superiority
- The listening of indifference
- The listening of those who cannot wait to speak

Yet listening is one of the great gifts of God, but it is listening as God listens not as humans listen. We must listen to learn. There is a story in the book of Numbers that tells of the people who refused to brave the dangers of the Promised Land because of the reports of Scouts who had been sent to spy out the land. They were condemned to wander in the wilderness until they died. Jesus said God calls us, but we must be prepared to listen to him and become risk takers, people who live without insurance, people who dare to be different for God. In Numbers the people rejected the call of God out of fear, the Jews rejected the message of Jesus because they did not recognise the messenger.

God calls us and God changes us, an awareness of God present changes our senses and changes our values, we can accept or reject the call. If we accept, we are called to adopt some new rules –

Be angry when you see injustice and discrimination, when you see hurt or feel hurt but do not let your anger lead you to hurt others, and do not let your anger fester, do not let the sun go down on your anger.

Do not steal, there are many forms of stealing and even greed is a form of stealing, instead earn honestly, take only what you need and share wherever you can.

Do not gossip, use only words that build, words of encouragement and appreciation, if you cannot say something good don't say anything at all.

Forget bitterness, wrath, slander and malice, instead nurture kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness, sharing the love you receive from God with others

Be imitators of God. If we look up to God and desire to be like God, as perhaps we looked at our own parents and aspired to their qualities, then we will be changed and the world will be changed.

To reflect upon

Children learn what they live.

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.

If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.

If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.

If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.

If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.

If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.

If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.

If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.

If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.

If a child lives with acceptance and friendship,
he learns to find love in the world.

Suggested Hymn

Brother, sister let me serve you

Listen [here](#)

Prayers

Don't shoot the messenger

Almighty God you love us and you trust us,
drawing us gently towards you, step by step, moment by moment,
experience, encounter, engagement.

Yet we fail to see and feel you.
We are blinded by our own expectations,
containing you within our own experience.
Expecting the encounter to be familiar
we reject the touch of a stranger:
we turn aside from the unfamiliar face
and miss the look of your love.

“I have come down from heaven”
How can this be?
We know your sort!
We don't want you here!
You have nothing to give me!
Rejecting your children, we reject you.
We fail to see the angel sent to deliver your message.

Open our eyes to see the messenger.
Open our ears to hear your words.
Open our hearts to love as you love,
without prejudice, bitterness, pride or expectation;
simply loving as Jesus loves,
welcoming all,
caring for all,
sharing with all, the bread of life:
touched by angels,
touching angels,
living life in all its fullness,
eager and ready for the unexpected
sent in the name of Jesus.

Loving God, may we let your love shine in us and around us.

As we worship you and pray for the world we think of the many ways in which words and actions mask your love. We think of the many ways in which prejudice distorts our society and changes the way communities respond to each other and we pray for the courage to speak out against prejudice in all its forms. May we always be careful with our words and attitudes so that the seeds we sow are nurturing and loving. Where we see intolerance, ridicule and shame may we offer the hope of patience, encouragement and praise.

Loving God, may we let your love shine in us and around us.

We pray for peace in a world where injustice breeds despair and violence. We think of the many places in the world where dictatorships create unfair societies and fear embeds itself within communities closing them down. We think of governments where individual ambition overrides care for all people and results in ghettos of poverty and need. May we speak out against injustice in all its forms whilst seeking to create communities of fairness, hope and security for all people through our life as church.

Loving God, may we let your love shine in us and around us.

We pray for our life as church, and for a readiness to welcome the unexpected and an eagerness to explore new opportunities in our changing world. On the way of Jesus may we reach out to those who feel marginalised, those who have been hurt by the world, those whose experiences have left them feeling shy, guilty, or condemned and cut off from love.

Loving God, may we let your love shine in us and around us.

We pray for our families and friends, recognising where experiences have hurt, changed or closed people off from recognising your love. May we offer an acceptance and friendship that reawakens the knowledge of your presence through kindness, gentleness, humility and oneness.

Loving God, may we let your love shine in us and around us. Amen

Offertory

As we worship 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 song

Make me a channel of your peace

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.