

Sunday 24th October 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](#)

Prayer

God of the morning and the night, of this time, all time and no time, of the earth, the universe and beyond, we come to you with thanksgiving in our heart.

When we think of your creation, we wonder at our place in it, feeling small and insignificant and yet you know each one of us by name, you are around us and within us and we are never alone. When we marvel at the intricacy of your creation and the amazing skills you have woven within us, we are staggered by the way it all works. When we open our eyes on a new day, when in the midst of rain we see a rainbow, when we witness a random act of kindness we remember again your love for all your people and your promise of life eternal.

Loving God, we thank you, for creation, for family and friends, for new opportunities and for Jesus whose life and ministry are the model for our life together and whose death and resurrection gives us hope on which we build our lives. Gathered as church, gathered as your people, gathered in the name of Jesus we pray together saying,
Our Father....

Readings Job 42:1-6 & 10-17

Mark 10:46-52

Suggested hymn Amazing grace

Listen [here](#)

Reflection

The book of Job is part of the wisdom tradition but very different from Proverbs and other wisdom literature. It is a story of a man of deep faith, Job, whose whole life is torn apart, and is a reminder that bad things happen to good people. It is a story that explores suffering and in particular the role of faith in suffering, and it is a conversation, sometimes one-sided, with God.

Job is a wealthy man, a sheik, and his family want for nothing. The backdrop to this story is the heavenly court where God, angels and a character called The Satan, not to be confused with the characterisation of evil referred to as the devil hold meet. The Satan is the accuser, the questioner, someone who challenges, and in this story he raises a question about Job's faith, suggesting that Job's faith exists because things go well for him, it is linked to reward for good behaviour. God defends Job, knowing that his faith is deeper than that and replies that there is nothing the accuser can do that will rock Job's faith. The accuser accepts the challenge and the story unfolds as catastrophe after catastrophe befalls Job. He loses everything except his wife, his wealth, his sons, his health and eventually his friends. Job's friends stood by him, but their simple faith suggested what befell Job must be a result of him having done something wrong, Job knows he has done nothing wrong, the friends then suggest Job's family did something wrong, but Job remains defiant, and his friends desert him. Through all this Job wrestles with God, why has this happened, he feels that God has left him then at the end of the story he hears God speak to him, he hears God question him, where was Job when God was creating the world? It is a long conversation and through it Job comes to a place of perspective, seeing the world and himself from 'above'. God is beyond human values and ideas of justice, God's love is not about reward or punishment. The understanding of Job's friends reduces God to a moral bookkeeper but now Job recognises the unfathomable nature of God and in this new understanding he finds freedom and he changes his mind.

Most of us at some point have shouted at God. As we travel on our faith journey our understanding changes and grows, I know mine has, but I remember a point where in desperation I sat on the stairs

and shouted 'what more do you want of me'. Most of us know someone 'good' who has suffered and understood their confusion and frustration as they question 'why me', and yet if we believe in the oneness of humanity then our understanding becomes 'why not me', and we recognise the bigger picture in which we share in the suffering of the world. In his book 'Conversations with God', Neale Donald Walsch asks the question 'why does God allow suffering', a question repeated more and more in the last eighteen months. Creation is a process, and there is perfection in the process but also freewill. Suffering need not happen but sometimes the choices we make have consequences that lead to suffering, sometimes it is the choices of others that lead to our suffering. In his conversation with God Walsch discovers that suffering is in part about how we respond to events, events happen but how we react to them determines our experience and our faith should inform our reaction. We have witnessed the best and the worst reactions to the pandemic, we have seen community spirit in the true essence of oneness, and we have heard of strange reactions expressed through social media and other outlets. We have witnessed the suffering of victims and the frustration of families separated from those suffering. We have seen generosity of spirit, and selfishness. All these are reactions to an event over which we felt we had little control and yet our response will have determined our experience of that event, and the experience of those around us. We may not have control over the event, but we can choose how we will respond. The family of David Amess are suffering and yet they have asked people to let go of hate, seeking a positive outcome to an horrific event.

In our reading from Mark, we are confronted with the complexity of healing as Jesus asks the blind man what he wants Jesus to do, a strange question we might think and yet why do we assume that the experience of the blind man is negative. I recently visited a farm shop and used the toilet set aside for the differently abled, it brings a new perspective. In her book 'Roots and Wings' Margaret Silf explores the complexity of healing, and therefore of suffering. In a story entitled The Blind Beggar we hear first-hand of the experience of the beggar and his reaction to Jesus, which reveal his reaction to his condition. Born blind, he was dependant on the help of others and his begging bowl became his alter ego and he could not imagine life without it. He had been through the arguments that his parents or he must have done something wrong, and he had railed against God, why me! Why can't you flick a switch and make me see? He longed to see, and he had done the rounds of miracle workers and healers, but nothing changed and over time he came to see himself as a victim – poor me! Then he hears about Jesus, hears how he has healed others and hope is kindled, although in the story he leaves it for the reader to evaluate that hope.

He meets Jesus and 'feels' Jesus listening to him. Jesus debunks the myth that his blindness is punishment for wrongdoing saying God is not like that, then he asks the man to describe his life, what does he do each day, and what he feels about it. The man describes his life but puzzles over the question about how he feels, he explains that he wants to see again, and Jesus asks him 'does he really?' The man is angry, what sort of question is that, what blind person wouldn't want to see again? Jesus senses his response and asks, has he thought what it will mean to be healed. For the first time the blind man considers what his life would be like if he was suddenly not blind, and the thoughts disturb him. He is no longer young, and he would have to find work, learn a trade, he would have to discover his new identity and build relationships, find his way in a different world. Suddenly, he is not sure he wants to change, and Jesus seems to sense his dilemma. He tells the man to open his eyes and throw away his begging bowl, and then fear hits the man, he opens his eyes, but he cannot see, and tears flow from his eyes. Jesus holds him as the man confesses he doesn't think he can survive outside the world he knows. Jesus understands, but tells him he knows the man can survive if he wants to, and that was the moment of understanding, the miracle moment. The man realises he has a choice, he can stay blind and relatively safe, or he can accept sight and all the risk and responsibility of a fuller human life. He feels the strength of Jesus and knows what he wants. Jesus places the begging bowl in his hands and the man throws it away and turns to gaze into the eyes of Jesus and sees the love he has sensed from deep brown eyes.

We all have a comfort zone created by our response to events, but we need to recognise it as a choice we have made and that there is always an alternative choice. As churches we are all facing struggles following the pandemic, the world has changed and maybe we feel blind, we cannot see a future and yet there are possibilities for us, there is a place for the church in the new future, but it means throwing away our 'begging bowl, and being open to a new experience, being open to change.

Job, in his new perspective, found his life again, he became wealthy, and we are told had more sons and three daughters. We are told that he treated his daughters the same as his sons, something radically different from tradition and a sign that Job had grown in his humanity through his experience, things would not be the same again, would not simply return to normal, but would be better because of his experience. We have that same choice, we can move forward into a new way of being in the strength of a new understanding of ourselves and of God, or we can cling to our comfort blanket and allow life to pass us by. How we responds informs our experience and determines whether we suffer or thrive. Jesus encourages us to live in the fullness of our humanity, invites us to throw away our metaphorical begging bowl – what is our decision?

Climate change contemplation

Watch this video and then read Psalm 34 from Psalms for a quantum world

Watch [here](#)

Psalm 34 (Psalms for a quantum world)

At all times I praise the creator,
source of all being.

In my very being I am one with God
and shout this all my days.

I discovered God and in God I am one.

In God are all people,
united in eternal love,
in this is hope and peace.

In oneness is all meaning,
know this and find yourself,
know this and find life.

Without this knowledge there is fear,
with this knowledge there is love.

Do you seek eternal life?

In the knowledge of our oneness is life eternal,
in our connectedness is our meaning.

In oneness is love,
in our sharing is joy.

Turn from the illusion of separation
and live as one,
in the community of creation.

In our oneness we are never alone,
connected for all time

to the eternal source of all being,
restored to wholeness,
no longer fearing

but released into loving,
bringing new meaning to our humanity.

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Prayers

Loving God, we give thanks for the opportunity to worship together and in our worship we bring our prayers of concern and our commitment to be a people of change, a people of love.

We thank you for our families and friends, for the love we share, and the opportunities relationships bring to grow in love. As we worship, we remember all who have lost their lives during the pandemic, family, friends, neighbours and those within our own church fellowships. We think of all the people living with loss, grieving for a loved one and struggling to build new lives without them. We continue to pray for the family of David Amess and for the community he served.

God of love, as we seek to live the way of Jesus may we walk the way of courage.

We thank you for the privilege of freedom and the opportunities we have to share our faith openly. May we recognise our oneness with others who express their faith differently, and learn more of our

humanity and relationships with each other, creation and you as we listen openly and lovingly, willing to discover new ideas and new ways. In freedom may we learn new respect for each other, and together challenge the social and political barriers that threaten our sense of oneness and allow injustice to oppress the lives of many. We think of children and young people stripped of their innocence at the hands of predators, men and women robbed of dignity by poverty and injustice, those robbed of life because medicine is not shared freely, and people trapped in circumstances of war and terror over which they have no control.

God of love, as we seek to live the way of Jesus may we walk the way of courage.

Loving God there are so many questions about suffering and need, how to save the planet, how to rebuild after the pandemic, how to be church in an evolving world? May we recognise your presence in the questions, and your love around us in the events which often frighten and alarm us. May our faith be strong in the knowledge of our relationship with you, the source of all being. When we are uncertain may we draw strength from each other and encourage each other to seek a new way and a different response.

God of love, as we seek to live the way of Jesus may we walk the way of courage.

May we build places of freedom and love, places of sharing and caring, places of listening and learning where all are welcome as we journey together through the questions. May we recognise when our response is more about safety and less about freedom, when we cling to the past for fear of the future and when we compromise rather than risk the adventure of the fullness of our humanity.

God of love, as we seek to live the way of Jesus may we walk the way of courage.

As we live our lives making choices everyday, may our choices be life giving, embracing the reality of our relationship with creation and accepting where our choices have been less than loving, less than generous and harmful to ourselves and others. In your love may we have the strength to make different choices and learn to live in harmony with all life using the resources of creation wisely and carefully to nurture and protect life in all its facets and wonder. We pray for the informers and the decision makers who will meet at COP 26 to plan a sustainable way forward for all life on earth.

God of love, as we seek to live the way of Jesus may we walk the way of courage.

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 hymn O Lord all the world belongs to 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.