Sunday 27th February 2022

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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,
we worship together in God.

Suggested hymn Be still for the presence of the Lord
Listen here

Prayer
Eternal God of creation as we gather in your presence we bring our praise and thanksgiving. Surrounded by the beauty of creation in all its diversity and wonder we are constantly reminded of your goodness. As we pray, we give thanks for the world in which we live, for the colours of the land, the flowers and the trees, the green of the grass and the blue of the sky, the yellow of daffodils slowly blossoming like miniature suns amongst the grey of winter and the rainbows lighting the sky after rain. There are so many signs of your love, it sometimes blows our minds.
As we rejoice in seeing one another we give thanks for family and friends, companions on our journey through life, people to care and people who help, people with whom to laugh and people with whom to cry. In all the ups and downs you are with is us in the love of friends and family, and in the still of the night.
As we gather to worship, we remember the life and ministry of Jesus and all that he has brought to our journey, the challenges and the promises, the knowledge of your love for all your people, and his example of service and patience. For all of this we give you thanks and as followers we pray the words Jesus taught the disciples saying, Our Father….

Readings 2 Corinthians 3:12 – 4:2 (NRSV)
Luke 6:39-49 (The Voice)

Suggested hymn The Lord's my shepherd (Townend)
Listen here

Reflection
We are born into this world a blank canvas, a human being full of the potential of God's love, but experience changes people. We are not born good or bad, but when we are old enough to begin exploring our independence, we make decisions which can be good or bad, and we may be judged by those decisions. It has been said that prisons are not full of bad people just people who have made bad decisions. Sometimes those decisions are a result of the influence of others, or the result of injustice and frustration, sometimes they are selfish decisions, made with or without thought for the consequences. As children grow, they are faced with more and more choice and yet they are often not taught how to make decisions, how to choose wisely.

Our reading from Luke features the parable of the two builders, or as most of us remember it the wise man built his house upon the rock. It is a parable about decisions and wise choices. It is a parable that always takes me to the story of the three little pigs, and their choice of material to build their houses and the subsequent consequences. In the traditional story the two little pigs who made ill-advised choices escape to their brother's house but Roald Dahl in his revolting Rhymes offers a twist in the tale. It follows from his tale of Red Riding Hood with its own twist which results in Red Riding hood sporting a fetching wolfskin coat. Let's listen to the story of the three little pigs.

Watch here

This version highlights not only that your choice of materials is important but also who you trust. The third little pig had made a good choice of materials, but his fear of the wolf led him to trust Red Riding Hood which proved to be unwise. It perhaps highlights the fine dividing line between wisdom and cunning. In the parable Jesus follows up his question about the blind leading the blind with an

incisive comment about judgement, pointing out that before we judge others, we need to look carefully at our own decision making and our own actions. God's love implores us not to judge others at all, but Jesus knew that human nature means we can all be guilty of forgetting this. We can also be guilty of listening and acknowledging what it means to live God's love without actually changing our ways and our choices. Jesus says this is like the man who built his house without foundations, who knew what he needed to do but chose not to do it and his house crumbled. Those who hear the message of Jesus and allow it to change them find they have a firmer foundation when challenges occur.

Floods hit, a change in circumstances, the loss of a job, illness, the loss of a loved one, these things happen but how we respond is often a matter of belief and faith. When we trust in God, we have a hope that steers us through the challenges when they happen, and they do happen. Faith is not a magic blanket against misfortune. Paul says hope, the trust in God, can make us bold. He uses the example of Moses to explore the difference between faith built on the message of Jesus and the faith of centuries earlier. Moses, we remember talked with God at the top of the mountain and it was an experience that made his face glow but when he back down to the people he covered his face with a veil. The veil has come to be symbolic of the difference between when the people needed a mediator between them and God and the time of Jesus when we recognise at that each one of us is invited to a personal relationship with God and there is no need of a mediator, or a veil. We remember that at the crucifixion it was reported that the curtain in the temple was torn in two, the curtain through which only the priest could pass, and this was seen as the opening up to all people of that inner meeting with God. Paul is interpreting this with his talk of the veil being lifted.

He goes on to say that this close relationship, made possible through the Spirit, is a transformational experience, we are changed one degree at a time, one decision at a time. Each positive decision takes us one step further along the path to the fullness of our humanity. It is a journey and like all journeys there are times we stay in the same place, times we get side-tracked and times we have to retrace out steps because we went the wrong way. That is human, not every decision we take is always the best decision but recognising when those points happen is part of the transformation. Someone who experiences depression will often find themselves unaware of the changes that lead to their depression but with help they can become aware of those signs and respond by acknowledging they need help before they find themselves lost in the depression itself. Depression is an illness, but perhaps repeated bad decision making is also a sign of dis-ease, a sign that someone needs help to re-establish a positive pattern in their life.

When we choose to walk the way of Jesus, we are choosing to acknowledge our journey but also recognising that in God's love we are called to help others on their journey. It is not about judging others but simply being there for others in their need. They will only know we are there by the glow of love in our actions. Paul says 'they have renounced the shameful things that one hides' the things that make us put back the veil thinking it covers out shame although of course God present, around and within, is aware of our feeling anyway and does not judge but loves us back to life without the veil. Paul commends himself and his companions to the Corinthians on the basis of the truth of their journey, their transformation in God's love. We should do the same, allowing our transformation, however slight, to be a symbol of the hope that in God all are accepted as they are and encouraged to explore being more.

Our mission is to take time to build our house on the rock, to build it with good foundations and the best materials. To allow our house to be a place of welcome, safety and encouragement for all who need shelter, and to allow our actions to be the invitation to hope and dream of a world in which love reigns and poor decisions are slowly eradicated to reveal the glory of a life lived in God's Love.

Suggested hymn Christ is our light
Watch here

Prayers

Lord God, as we gather here and spend time with you we reflect upon our lives; we are surrounded by choice; from simple choice to complex choice, from everyday choices to heart-breaking choices. We think of the choices we have made today, the choices that have and will change our lives. You are present in every decision, and we pray that we may recognise your presence and seek your wisdom in our decision making. May our decisions reflect our love of you and of one another. Help us to choose the right way, help us to overcome our fear of the unknown and step out in faith.

As we walk the way of Jesus
may we be changed and change the world through the decisions we make.

Lord God, as churches we are surrounded by options, from local to international, from logistics to theology. As we think of the choices our church has made, when and how we worship together, our mission within our community, our support for others, the way we encourage one another on our journey, we give thanks for the life of our church and the opportunities we have to make a difference. As we look to rebuild our life together after the pandemic may we look for and listen to the guidance of the Spirit, and may we have courage to let grow and respond to the light of your love in new ways.

As we walk the way of Jesus
may we be changed and change the world through the decisions we make.

We think of the denominations that support us in our ministry and the decision-making systems that guide our life together as churches. We pray for the Heartland Group as it too faces changes, the work of Synod, and Circuit and the meetings of General Assembly and Connexion and the difficult decisions that all face as the future unfolds. May we recognise the wisdom of others and support the decisions made to enable ministry to be shared and resources to be used wisely.

As we walk the way of Jesus
may we be changed and change the world through the decisions we make.

Lord God, as we meet together we pray for your world, a world facing many decisions, from population to pollution, from opulence to deprivation. We think of the need for tolerance and understanding between races, between faiths, between Christians, between neighbours and in families. We especially think of Russia and the Ukraine. We think of your love for all people and pray that the decision makers of the world may reflect that love in the choices they make.

As we walk the way of Jesus
may we be changed and change the world through the decisions we make.

Powerful yet loving God,
in love you have called us to Love one another.
May your Spirit guide us on our journey together
that running or walking, laughing or crying we implicitly act together,
making a difference in the world by allowing your love to shine through our lives.

Together we pray for
openness in place of oppression;
generosity in place of greed;
encouragement in place of egotism;
tolerance in place of terror.

As we walk the way of Jesus
may we be changed and change the world through the decisions we make. Amen

Our offering to God.

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 sharing the message of hope that is God's love. Amen

Suggested hymn This little light of mine
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.