

Sunday 19th November 2023

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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.

Reading 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 ([New Living Translation](#))

Reflection 1

Have you ever tried to describe something unseen to someone. Imagine you have seen something truly wonderful how might you describe that to someone who has not seen it? We have to use metaphor and feelings, to tap into how it affected our senses, to try and make sense of it for others.

In some of the psalms that is what is happening, through poetry and prose, through metaphor and mystery the psalmists are trying to paint a picture of something unseen. It is what Paul is trying to do in this passage from Thessalonians. It feels as if Paul is trying to interpret the parable of the foolish and wise bridesmaids we had in last weeks lectionary for this new church. He is picking up on the need to be ready, to live each day as if it might be our last and do the things most important to us. Paul uses comparison to make his point – don't be like others be the person you are meant to be in God's love.

There are many things about belief that are a mystery and many beliefs which are difficult to explain to others. What do you believe about life after death? How would you explain God as love? How do you explain eternal? I would like to share with you a modern version of Psalm 90, a Psalm which explores the idea of God as eternal, and as ourselves held within God.

Psalm 90 (Psalms for a quantum world)

Eternal God, source of all being,
in you we live and breathe,
in you we exist now and forever.

You have always been,
before the world we know was created you were,
in all time and space you are and will always be.

Our days are a mere spark in the light of creation
and a thousand years is to you a moment,
such is the way of eternity.

We live to this world and we die to this world
but you are forever
and in you we are held for all time and no time.

The beauty of this world is in constant flux,
flowers grow and bloom and die,
as does life in all its forms
but your love holds and renews, refreshes and restores
in the pattern of time which is eternal.

Eternal God you see all, know all and understand all,
for you are knowledge and wisdom, you are love.

We live our lives held and encouraged in your love,
your love is perfect but we are not,
we hurt one another with words and actions.

Your love is merciful,
and calls us to be merciful in our love for each other.

Held in the infinite wisdom of love

may our lives become love;
may every day be a celebration of love and mercy,
both given and received,
and an opportunity to challenge injustice in the world
and encourage the quest for your eternal justice.

As we journey deeper into your love
may our words and actions bring the kingdom of love closer to the world,
and the restorative power of love
change the lives of those around us and around the world. © Heather Whyte 2023

Paul ends this section of his letter to the Thessalonians by urging them to encourage one another and that for me is one of the most important reasons for gathering as church whether for worship or study. I would like to be a part of a community that reflects the model of those early churches in which we encourage one another and invite others to join us as we:

ASK questions of faith, and what it means to follow the teachings of Jesus in today's world;

SEEK answers that are relevant and which don't demand acceptance of creeds or dogma;

FIND a welcome as together we try to spread a message of peace, justice and compassion to all.

A community of people who look to Christ, some with deep faith, many with doubts and questions, but all drawing on the strength of fellowship with others who see Jesus as the pattern for our lives.

A community which does not claim to have all the answers, but invites anyone interested in taking a journey in search of a fuller understanding of God, his presence within the world and the invitation to be partners in creation to come and share fellowship together.

Reading Matthew 25:14-30

Reflection 2

Matthew gives us another parable – often referred to as the Parable of the Talents and it is again a parable that needs careful consideration. It follows on from the Parable of the wise and foolish Bridesmaids so maybe Jesus saw it as pointing to what it means to be ready. How do we live our lives making a difference? Neither of these parables begin the Kingdom of God is like this, rather they are about the world as it is and how we behave.

Over the centuries we have been taught to see this parable as being about using our gifts and skills for the kingdom. The problem lies in the fact that this means seeing the master as God, and for me that just does not stack up.

Lets look at the actions of the master for a moment:

- He does not treat his workers equally – he gave them different amounts of money.
- We are told that he was a harsh taskmaster, he takes what is not his to take, he cheats in business.
- He ignores the biblical principle of not taking interest on money loaned.
- He is feared by his workers.

Is that a picture of a just and faithful God? Would Jesus have told that story expecting his listeners to see the master as God, I don't think so? So what was the point of this story?

Perhaps it paints a picture of the world as it was, and still is, a world where the corrupt and powerful dominate and become more powerful. The first two slaves, who were obviously more favoured by the master, demonstrate collusion with his ways – they very quickly make

a profit, too quickly perhaps to be honest. As they had done so well they were rewarded with even more – and isn't that the way of the world?

The third slave we are told was so afraid of failing his master that he simply kept what he had been given safe so he could return it in full. However, the master is not at all pleased and calls him wicked and lazy for he has cheated the master out of profit on the money. He could at least have invested the money for interest. He strips the slave of everything he has and condemns him life as an outcast.

What did the third slave actually do – he stood up to his master and called out his cheating ways. When this story is read out in the middle-east the crowd cheers when the third slave speaks up because as they see it he has not only stood up the master he has refused to copy the corrupt ways of both the master and the other slaves.

This story then is about the world as it is and our role within the world to be a voice for the oppressed and poor, for the victims of the injustice of the world. Jesus is the third slave, he called out against the injustice of the rich and powerful, both state and religious. Jesus points to another way of being, the way of love and oneness. The way of loving your neighbour as you if they are yourself. Oneness is not about uniformity of thoughts and ideas but about encompassing all ideas in love. It is not about one way of doing things but about learning new ways from each other. It is not about all being the same but about being an expression of the wonder and diversity of creation. In creation everything as a place and everything has a role and without that thing creation falters. Every life matters.

The Kingdom of God is about fairness and justice, equal opportunity and sharing. It is a place of oneness. We learn lessons from the past to build a better future for all people. We are learning from the past about slavery and seeking to uncover the ways that slavery has formed the society in which we live and how we can undo the negative effects in the world. It is right that we do this but we must also remember that whilst one type of slavery was abolished others have taken its place and we need to shout out about people trafficking and sweat shops and the denial of justice. Addiction is another form of slavery which limits the fullness of life and can cause much hurt in relationships. We have neighbours everywhere and this story from Jesus reminds us that we are called to do somethings about it.

We are not alone for we are held in the love which is God and united with others who are also called into the way of life that is love. It can be hard to stand out, it takes courage, but that is what being a follower of Jesus means and it is what gives us strength.