

A service for Sunday 20th September 2020

Bible Reading: Psalm 105: 1-6, 37-45

Hymn: There's a quiet understanding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTfESpt74Ig>

There's a quiet understanding
When we're gathered in the Spirit
It's a promise that He gives us
When we gather in His name
There's a love we feel in Jesus
There's a manna that He feeds us
It's a promise that He gives us
When we gather in His name

And we know when we're together
Sharing love and understanding
That our brothers and our sisters
Feel the oneness that He brings
Thank You, thank You, thank You, Jesus
For the way You love and feed us
For the many ways You lead us
Thank You, thank You, Lord.

Prayers:

Gracious God, I praise you for who you are. For you are the Lord, the giver and Sustainer of life whose nature is love. I thank you that even when I rebel against you, your unquenchable love seeks me out. I thank you that in Jesus, you made the first move and have rescued me. I pray that as your Word ministers to me, I might so open my heart to your grace that it might fill me, transform me and overflow into all my relationships and dealings with the world. Amen.

Old Testament Reading Exodus 16: 2-15

We have now been back to some kind of normal now for a couple of weeks and I have to confess how difficult I have found preaching. I have come away from each act of worship, feeling as though I could have done better and I was interested to hear a colleague preacher say that they weren't completely satisfied with a recorded sermon they had preached and it was only then that I recognised the problem. I rely on feedback from congregations when I am preaching, a smile when somebody relates to something or even a yawn, that suggests I have lost somebodies attention. Of course, at the moment, most people are wearing masks and facial expressions aren't as easy to recognize.

Like a lot of us, I feel that the whole business of wearing a mask is an inconvenience I would rather live without, it is both restricting and inconvenient, yet I appreciate the importance and will do whatever is necessary to keep people safe from the virus. The Israelite people are getting restless in the story, they are getting fed up of going without, they are tired and hungry and are complaining and the wonderful thing is that as they call upon the Lord, he fills them.

Consider:

- *How quickly do you complain to God if things aren't right? Are you prepared to be put out for the work of the Kingdom?*
- *How far are you prepared to go for God? In recent weeks we have been forced to do things that ordinarily we would not naturally do, we have missed seeing family members, hugging those we love, shaking hands and coming and going as we please? How much are you prepared to give for God?*
- *A lot of our Churches struggle, because too much is done by too few people, all of us are getting older and a lot of Churches get tiered, how do we overcome this? Do less?*

Hymn: All my hope on God is founded

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DohxO6ytsaU>

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew,
me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Pride of man and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Still from man to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ, his Son.
Christ doth call one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Epistle **Philippians 1: 21-30**

Over my years of preaching, first as a Local Preacher and more recently as a minister, I have often found myself turning up to a church to be told “we sang this hymn” this morning, last week or even for the last two or three weeks, I will normally offer to change it, but I remember one steward saying “no, if God keeps telling preachers to pick it, then he must be struggling to get through to us. There seems to be a recurring theme in the Bible readings that we have had during the time of Covid and that is about the cost of discipleship.

Paul appears to be agonising between the joy of heaven and the toil of preaching the Gospel. It certainly feels to me as though preaching the Gospel over the past six months has been downright hard work. Trying to understand all the legislation and its application to Churches, an even bigger nightmare. St Paul reminds us to stand firm in the Spirit, striving, side by side for the Gospel.

Consider:

- *I had a boss a long time ago who loved to use Acronyms, one of his favourites was “TEAM – Together Everyone Achieves More” It must have been effective, because it is still imprinted in my head. As members of the body of Christ, we are members of God’s team, each bring our unique skills to the table for His sake. What do you bring?*
- *I believe that a sign of a good Church is one that has a range of gifts and graces, why not have a quick glance around the congregation next time you’re together and try to identify what each other’s gifts are.*
- *Do you see suffering for your faith as being a privilege or an inconvenience?*

A time of prayer

Loving God,

I pray that the world might know your grace. As I begin to inhabit a “new normal”, I pray for wisdom for the leaders of the world that powerful nations might respond with that self-giving generosity that you bring to the world.

On this peace Sunday, I pray for all those who respond to your love by making the first move to call an end to conflict. I pray for those caught up in conflict, those who flinch at the sound of explosives or gunshot.

I pray for those slowly returning to collective worship as some places of worship reopen and for those who feel excluded from that worship.

I ask your blessing on those close to me that even in these distanced times that you would give me the opportunity to reflect that grace first shown to me.

I ask these prayers in the only way that I can; in the power of your Holy Spirit and in the name, grace and character of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The Lord’s Prayer:

Hymn When I survey the wondrous crosshttps://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_fvFfPqjO4

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Gospel Matthew 20: 1-16

One of the great joys of my childhood was backing day, my mum always used to let my brother and I clean the bowl out after she had made a bun or cake mixture. She had a cunning way of making sure that the whole thing was fair, one of us would make a line across the centre of the bowl, the other would choose the side they wanted to clean. Never in your life will you have seen a bowl so accurately divided. I grew up with the concept of things being fair, a kind of you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours, ethos.

It must have seemed unfair to the Scribes and Pharisees who had lived in obedience to the law, always believing that their compliance assured them a place in eternity, finding favour with God. Suddenly Jesus appears on the scene and it seems that the gateway to heaven is open to almost any Tom Dick or Harry, does loyalty count for nothing?

Consider:

- *Do you think that the story Jesus tells is fair? How would you feel if you were one of the workers who had started first? How would you have felt if you were one of the ones who had done the least? How important is fairness in your mind?*
- *I am what you might call a "Cradle Christian" I have gone to Church all my life, held most offices in the Church over the years, sat through hundreds of meetings and thousands of sermons, many of them ones that I have preached. Does that gain me extra points in the Kingdom of God?*
- *What motivates you to do what you do? What is it that causes you to avoid doing things? What incentives do you think there are that would encourage you in Church? What's in it for me?*
-

Hymn: Father, hear the prayer we offer

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qd_K44OAvAM

Father, hear the prayer we offer:
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength, that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be;
But the steep and rugged pathway
May we tread rejoicingly.

Not forever by still waters
Would we idly rest and stay;
But would smite the living fountains
From the rocks along our way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our Guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Saviour, be thou at our side.

A prayer of blessing

God to enfold you,
Christ to uphold you,
Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight ;
so may God grace you,
heal and embrace you,
lead you through darkness
into the light.