

19th June, 2022

Prepared by David Welbourn

Are you ready to Inherit the Kingdom of God?

Call to Worship

We are called to be children of God – may we live in the certain knowledge that we held in the arms of a loving parent.

We are called to be heirs of God – may we live in the confidence that we will inherit a Kingdom full of Hope and rich in love.

Hymn: *STF 45 Earth's Creator, everyday God* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0S_w5BJr4s

Earth's creator, everyday God,
Loving Maker, O Jesus,
You who shaped us, O Spirit,
Recreate us, come be with us.

In your presence, everyday God,
We are all gathered, O Jesus,
You have called us, O Spirit,
To restore us, come be with us.

Life of all lives, everyday God,
Love of all loves, O Jesus,
Hope of all hopes, O Spirit,
Light of all lights, come be with us.

In our resting, everyday God,
In our rising, O Jesus,
In our hoping, O Spirit,
In our waiting, come, be with us.

In our dreaming, everyday God,
In our daring, O Jesus,
In our searching, O Spirit,
In our sharing, come be with us.

God of laughter, everyday God,
God of sorrow, O Jesus,
Home and shelter, O Spirit,
Strong and patient, come, be with us.

Way of freedom, everyday God,
Star of morning, O Jesus,
Timeless healer, O Spirit,
Flame eternal, come be with us.

Word of gladness, everyday God,
Word of mercy, O Jesus,
Word of friendship, O Spirit,
Word of challenge, come, be with us.

Gentle father, everyday God,
Faithful brother, O Jesus,
Tender sister, O Spirit,
Loving mother, come, be with us.

Our beginning, everyday God,
Our unfolding, O Jesus,
Our enduring, O Spirit,
Journey's ending, come be with us.

Alleluia, everyday God,
Now and always, O Jesus,
Alleluia, O Spirit,
Through all ages, come, be with us.

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Opening Prayer

Lord of all, we come before you in praise and adoration. Only you are worthy to receive true praise. Praise for the wonder of creation. Praise for the gift of life. Praise for your encouragement to live to the fullest. Praise for the way Christ walked on earth to live out your love. praise for the grace granted to us as your Spirit was freely bestowed upon us.

We pray that as we come to you in worship, our praise may be joined with the company of all your family, on earth and in heaven.

Amen.

Scripture Galatians 3:23 – 4:7: Paul explains our promised place in God's Kingdom

Sermon

Our faith journey can sometimes feel as if it changes from too rapid a pace through the seasons of faith to something which is almost killing time, as we progress through the annual cycle of our spiritual journey. Last week was Trinity Sunday. In a way, that marks the end of the rollercoaster journey of the ups and downs of the cycle in which our spiritual growth is dominated by the way God reveals more and more of his true nature to us. Now we begin the next phase when the reins have been handed to us, and it is our responsibility to answer that big "so what?" question.

Perhaps I need to explain my thinking a little more carefully here. Each year, the bible passages suggested for each week provide a clear framework within which to explore, learn and develop our faith and discipleship. We begin in advent – looking at the promises God has made about a future filled with hope. That leads up to the incarnation, the birth of Christ – the coming to earth of the Son of God. We then move with great haste, learning of the great impact Jesus had through his companionship, his teaching and healing ministries. He set the supreme example of how to live our lives with love and concern for the disadvantaged, the neglected.

We learn in that period of how living in God's way poses an enormous threat to those in authority who too frequently exercise their power to their own advantage – so much so that Jesus, God himself, chooses to pay the ultimate price to expose the folly of wrongly exercised power. Through the season of Lent, we see the tension in which God's way of justice and peace, battles with the greedy abusive use of power by authorities. That battle is resolved by the atonement and resurrection: the combination of events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Our spiritual journey then leads us through the consequence of encounter with the risen Christ – demonstrating just how futile the efforts of those authorities had been, compared with the powerful of God's love, and the inspiring nature of the hope that is grounded in God. When we reach Pentecost, all that love and hopefulness is capitalised as God poured himself freely into each one of us with the gift of His Spirit. We are reminded at Pentecost that each of us has been endowed with the very nature of God,

it is almost as if God says to us – hey guys, I've done my bit, I've prepared, coached, supported and guided you as I have unfolded my purposes to you – now go and put everything you've learnt into action – the future is up to you. When we celebrate Trinity Sunday the three stages in which God's will has been revealed are brought together into one coherent view. God is clearly demonstrated in the power of the almighty creator, through the living embodiment of God in Jesus, and the inspiration and guide of the Spirit. One God who loves us and empowers us to live truly fulfilled and promising lives.

Armed with that reminder of the glory and wonder of our amazing God, we come to this point in mid-summer, when God says to us: the rest is up to you. In the opening verse of Mark's gospel we read – "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the Son of God". Our journey from Advent through to Pentecost, is just the beginning – the foundations of faith have been built and reinforced – now it is God's will that we put all that that learning into action to respond to his love. He calls us to fulfil the hope he has vested in us as we live out our discipleship.

As I said at the beginning – we have completed that rollercoaster journey and now it is up to us. We can choose to coast through the church calendar year, waiting for Advent to roll round again, or we can recognise that God has equipped us to write the next chapter of his revelation to the world. As Paul wrote to the people in Galatia he clearly had similar thoughts in mind. He points out that until they were enlightened and liberated by the faith they have now received, they were constrained by the laws handed down. Those laws held them prisoner. Like all laws, they protected from the combination of ignorance, selfish desires and proclivities. But now, in faith, the revelation of God has overcome that ignorance, God's indwelling spirit and the example of his love provides the tools to cast aside selfish ways, allowing them to direct their skills and talents toward the building of God's kingdom.

Paul goes further than this by reminding them that there is no privilege of Jew over Gentile, man over woman, slave over ruler. So too for us. God deals equally with us, not because we deserve it, but because he wishes it. Irrespective of our earthly station and standing, the moment we put our faith and trust in Christ, and in so doing, we put our faith in the nature of God as revealed to us in the Son, then we were welcomed into God's family. This revelation is so rich and unbelievably profound. It isn't just that God called us to be an important part in the Kingdom. It isn't just that we are agents to fulfil the hopes and promises for ultimate glory of that Kingdom. No. The full truth is that we are called as rightful heirs of that Kingdom.

Not just guests. Not just agents. Not workers or employees. Our place in that Kingdom is secured as a right and as our future inheritance. The inheritance that is reserved for the direct descendants. In Paul's time – the inheritance passed through the male line alone, with greatest measure going to the eldest and first born. What Paul tells us is that by faith alone – simply through our belief in Jesus Christ, everyone has been welcomed and accepted into that most powerful position in the Kingdom. That Kingdom which is characterised as one in which the Glory of God is its light, the justice of God means that there is no separation or distinction of status. There are none cast out to the margins, There will be no tears or hurts or wounds, whether physical or mental, because we are at one with God who is the greatest source of nurture and compassion and healing.

So as we leave all those festivals marking our spiritual foundations behind us, are we going to coast all the way until we rediscover advent hope? Or are we going to seize the moment as heirs to this Kingdom and do all that we can in our discipleship and our calling, to accelerate the coming of this Kingdom. Will we live in recognition that all are equal and call out the abuse of privilege, to be an ally to those who are marginalised for whatever reason? Will we use our calling as heirs to the only Kingdom in which injustice of any description is not tolerated, because in that place, God's will prevails?

This is the astonishing truth of the gospel – we begin our journey with the hopefulness of God's covenant promises, on to the incarnation before walking with Christ all the way to the atonement, resurrection and empowerment by the Spirit. Finally, we reach our destiny as we are welcomed as heirs, rightful sons and daughters of God in that glorious Kingdom to which all hopes point. Believe it. Live it. Do all you can to make it happen now, don't wait for another year to cycle round.

Amen.

Prayers

Lord, you do indeed welcome us into your Kingdom as sons and daughters, enriched by the inheritance you bestow upon us. As we look around your creation today, we feel the injustice and pain and hurt which is a barrier that keeps

us apart from the promise of fulfilment in your Kingdom. A Kingdom within which there is no injustice separating people by colour or gender or wealth, or other arbitrary division. A Kingdom within which the intricacy delicacy, mystery and majesty of your creation is celebrated, nurtured, protected and valued. A Kingdom within which we as heirs dedicate our time and talents to enjoy and enhance the future of all life and substance of creation.

We pray for all those prevented from enjoying the fruits of your creation and your love, by the abuse of power, the indulgence of greed and the corruption of authority.

May we all live our lives following in the steps of Christ and living by His example – bearing rich fruits of your Spirit, Amen

In silent prayer now, lift up your concerns for creation and the world ... Our Father ...

Hymn: STF 545 Be thou my vision (tune Slane) <https://youtu.be/6AdBkJurR4>

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my
power.

tr Mary Byrne, alt Eleanor Hull

Blessing:

Praise and glory, and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength are due to God alone – the God who grants us the rite to inherit the Kingdom of justice and peace and love. Be enriched and enlivened by the power of the Holy Spirit as you seek to live out your calling and this inheritance, from this day for evermore.