

A service for Sunday 3rd September 2023

Things divine? Or Human?

Prepared by Rev Derek Grimshaw



Bible Reading: Psalm 105: 1-6

Hymn: Great is thy faithfulness <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKIqmdfHSk>

"Great is Thy faithfulness, " O God my Father,
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.
"Great is Thy faithfulness!" "Great is Thy faithfulness!"
Morning by morning new mercies I see;
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided—
"Great is Thy faithfulness, " Lord, unto me!

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
"Great is Thy faithfulness!"

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,
Sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
Join with all nature in manifold witness
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.
"Great is Thy faithfulness!"

Prayers:

Lord God, we pray to you, as Father Son and Holy Spirit, to praise you, For You are our God. We pray to thank you for all that You have done for us, for you are always there. We pray to You as our God, who made the world, died for us, rose again to show us the way to heaven, and lives in us all. We bring before you the burden of all the sins we have committed, and we say Lord God, we are sorry for them. We know that such is your Love, we are forgiven our sins. Thanks be to you, Our God, **Amen**

Gospel Reading: **Matthew 16: 21-28**

Sermon

During my first year as a probationer minister in the Norwich Methodist Circuit eighteen years ago. I got involved in an initiative, bravely referred to as "the Church in the 21st century". A group of us met on a Saturday morning for breakfast and discussed what the Church fit for the still new millennium might look like. We never really got anywhere, we had some imaginative and quite innovative ideas, but never managed to get any of them off the ground. We were restricted by three issues:

1. We were all too busy with getting on with the business of making traditional Church work, that we could never quite figure out how we would find the time to do something new.
2. We were a small representative group and didn't have the backing of the entire Church community and the problem was that the people of the Church weren't involved in all the blue sky thinking.
3. We were limited by our humanity and all we knew was what we knew. I don't think that we were being radical enough, we were thinking by earthly standards rather than being led by The Holy Spirit.

Two or three years later, I attended a "Fresh Expressions" conference, looking at "Fresh Expressions of Church" and I can remember being quite underwhelmed and without being in the least bit critical of those who led the event, a lot of what they were suggesting, sounded like the same old thing, just slightly repackaged.

In the Gospel story, Jesus is now facing the agony of Holy Week and he is preparing the disciples for what is to come. His words are intolerable for Peter, he likes what is currently happening, he loves Jesus and passionately believes that this will be the style of his life forever. The words of Jesus threaten that, and Peter can't deal with the pain of what he is saying.

No matter how painful it is for us, the truth is that the Church as we have known it in the past is dying, we naturally fight like mad to keep things going as long as we possibly can, we want to hang on to what we know, what we feel comfortable with, and it feels somehow to be a betrayal to those who have gone before us and if we're not careful, the whole thing feels pointless and we feel to be failures.

It has been my belief for some time now that we must nurture the traditional Church and help it through this time of transition, but at the same time, listen to the Holy Spirit and grow something new and fresh, different, that will continue the work of God, long after we are gone. How we do this? Jesus tells us how:

1. **Deny self:** I don't believe that Jesus means that we don't matter, he calls us as we are and that continues to be important, but we must not put our selfish desires first, we must be ready to surrender ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit.
2. **Take up your cross:** We need to understand that discipleship is a costly affair, we might be called to serve in ways that are beyond our comfort zones.
3. **Follow me:** Jesus doesn't expect us to do it all ourselves, he will guide us through the power of His Spirit.

The Church of Christ in the twenty first century can be exciting, fulfilling, and revolutionary, if we put aside our humanity and concentrate on the divine. God will continue His Mission; I pray that we can all be a part of that.

A time of prayer

Gracious God, we bring before you our prayers for the world

We pray for all those who lack physical things, food, shelter, water, and all of life's necessities.

We pray for those who mourn, and those who ail. Lord, for those we may help, may our hands work quickly, and for those we personally cannot help, we pray for the hands that will.

We pray for all those who work to provide care and help to others. Lord bless them and keep them from tiredness and error, and those they care for, keep them from despair. We bring the names of those known to us before you...

We pray for all in spiritual distress, who struggle to hear your message, or to come to you in prayer. Lord, help them to heed.

We pray for ourselves. Strengthen us to come through renewed in faith in certainty.

We pray for our land and nation. Lord, help us all to endure, to do our duty and to serve you faithfully. May our land be brightened by the Light of Lord as we leave these times behind.

Lord, we ask these things, knowing that when we pray, wherever we pray, you hear our prayers. Thanks be unto you, Father Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

The Lord's Prayer:

Hymn: Will you come and follow me <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6k6lUalJ3sk>

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| 1. Will You Come And Follow Me
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Go Where You Don't Know
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Let My Love Be Shown,
Will You Let My Name Be Known,
Will You Let My Life Be Grown
In You And You In Me? | 3. Will You Love The 'You' You Hide
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Quell The Fear Inside
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Use The Faith You've Found
To Reshape The World Around,
Through My Sight And Touch And Sound
In You And You In Me? |
| 2. Will You Leave Yourself Behind
If I But Call Your Name?
Will You Care For Cruel And Kind
And Never Be The Same?
Will You Risk The Hostile Stare
Should Your Life Attract Or Scare?
Will You Let Me Answer Prayer
In You And You In Me? | 4. Lord, Your Summons Echoes True
When You But Call My Name.
Let Me Turn And Follow You
And Never Be The Same.
In Your Company I'll Go
Where Your Love And Footsteps Show.
Thus I'll Move And Live And Grow
In You And You In Me. |

A prayer of blessing

Lord, as we go forth, may we see all the things you long for us to notice. May we be your people in all we do and say.
Amen