

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 10th May 2020

Sunday Worship

Fifth Sunday of Easter

With Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, I hope you are well. This week, we worship God together with our focus on a familiar story in John's Gospel where Jesus explains to his disciples that he is 'the way, the truth and the life' (John 14:6). Let us worship God together.

A call to worship

This is based on today's Psalm, Psalm 31 which you may wish to read

As we begin our weekly journey in worship, O God,
lead us and hear our prayer.
As we entrust our days to you,
guide us and hear our prayer.
In the testing moments, and in times of disappointment,
be our rock and our salvation.
Hear our prayer, and shine your love upon us.
Amen.

A gathering prayer

Knit us together, Lord Jesus,
and draw us deeper into the Father's love.
Open the rooms of our hearts that we may praise you,
and be a people of extravagant welcome,
inspiring and encouraging others to follow
your way of hope and peace.
When the journey of life gets tough
may we find strength for each new step
and courage for each new day.
Amen.

Hymn: How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

1 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear.

2 It makes the wounded spirit whole
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

3 Dear name! the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace.

4 Jesus! my shepherd, brother, friend,
 my prophet, priest, and king,
 my Lord, my life, my way, my end,
 accept the praise I bring.

5 Weak is the effort of my heart,
 and cold my warmest thought;
 but when I see you as you are,
 I'll praise you as I ought.

6 Till then I would your love proclaim
 with every fleeting breath;
 and may the music of your name
 refresh my soul in death!

John Newton (1725-1807)

A Prayer of Adoration

Gracious God, you are the rock of our lives.
 Your strength sustains us.
 Your power delivers us.
 Your mercy brings forgiveness to us.
 We come to you in adoration,
 praising you that our whole life is in your hands –
 held, sustained, protected.
 Glory be to you, merciful Lord,
 glory, honour, majesty and worship,
 in the name of your Son, our redeemer.
 Amen.

Bible Reading: John 14:1-14

Reflection

'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6).

This key verse within John's Gospel, with his core belief and continuous emphasis on the incarnation, expresses the central theological conviction of his Gospel: Jesus is the tangible presence of God's love to the world, and this new, fledgling first-century Christian community that John's Jesus is speaking to, discover most clearly what God is like, through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. In this important verse, Jesus responds to an understandable and thoughtful question posed by Thomas - "*how can we know the way?*" (14:5). As Jesus answers, we note that '*no one*' here in verse 6 really means 'none of you' within the community who are learning from Jesus '*the way*' who speaks words of '*life*' and '*truth*' which define God for the concerned and questioning disciples in this emerging faith community.

In its original context, this is a deeply affirming and ultimately costly message about the nature and knowability of God as their '*Father*' to a small religious community within the ancient Mediterranean world. Throughout this passage, the language of Father and Son points to the intimacy of the relationship between God and Jesus, and an encounter with Jesus the Son is what makes a new experience of God as Father possible (see also John 1:17, 20:17). This was no doubt very reassuring for those first disciples as they prepared to face an unknown future as Jesus' followers, followers of 'The Way' without Jesus physically with them. We too may find reassurance and affirmation in our faith here, as we, with our own understandable and thoughtful questions and contextual crises, seek, through following the way of Jesus, to know and experience God in this our time.

No doubt along with others among us who are more liberal theologically, as a progressive Christian, I have grown increasingly uncomfortable with how this verse is often interpreted by others to assert the supremacy of Christianity with its claimed monopoly on God at the expense of all other faiths. As we see, in its first-century context, this is not even the question being asked and answered. Twenty-first century religious pluralism is not addressed by the Gospel of John! What John intends to teach and celebrate are the particular beliefs of a particular faith community. He is teaching particular beliefs about the incarnation and the truth and the life that they find in God their Father through the revelation of Jesus the Son and these teachings do not support contemporary Christian claims of exclusivism – it is particularity, not exclusivism that are in view here. John seeks to help Christians name and know their God and the distinctiveness of their identity as a people of faith – I don't think he's teaching on the relative value of the different faiths in our modern world!

There is something wonderful and particular and affirming about how still now, we know God through Jesus, we best see what God is like through Jesus - this is our distinctive way of encountering the divine and I am sure we are able to exuberantly celebrate God as seen in Jesus, our way, truth and life whilst also deeply respecting the other faith traditions through which many others encounter God. For now, let us faithfully follow Jesus, *'the way'*. Although our future is unknown, we may be confident that a full and fruitful life in God is before us. Jesus is our way to be connected to God. Jesus is *'the way'* that we gladly choose to journey, in order to know God, to serve God, to pray to and trust in God, and to do even *'greater works'* than he for God's glory (John 14:11-14). Amen.

Our Prayers of Intercession

In a world where there is warfare and violence,
 many people live in fear of the bullet and the bomb;
 many have had their lives and livelihoods destroyed;
 many grieve for loved ones who have been killed.
 That they may know your strength and peace, loving God:
be for them a rock and a stronghold.

In a world where harvests have failed;
 where there have been droughts and floods;
 many do not have money to pay for food and power;
 many are reaching the end of their tether.
 That they may know your strength and peace, loving God:
be for them a rock and a stronghold.

In a world where many people are alone;
 many do not know where to look for comfort and encouragement;
 many see no purpose or future;
 some cannot see the point of anything.
 That they may know your strength and peace, loving God:
be for them a rock and a stronghold.

We pray for those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic
 and especially for those unwell and those who have recently been bereaved
 and who are mourning in very difficult circumstances.
 We pray for your blessings upon those who work in health and social care,
 and upon those who are continuing to work during this season.
 That they may know your strength and peace, loving God:
be for them a rock and a stronghold.

In our lives when we struggle and doubt;
 when we don't know what to say or do;
 when life overwhelms us and we turn to you.
 That we may know your strength and peace, loving God:
be for us a rock and a stronghold.

For ourselves and for each other today,
we ask for your grace and comfort,
thinking especially of those close to us who are in need.

A moment of quiet for your own thoughts and prayers where you may bring before God those in your thoughts.

That we all may know your strength and peace, loving God:
be for us a rock and a stronghold.

In the name of the living Lord Jesus,
our Saviour and companion.
Amen.

Trusting in the compassion of God,
we pray together as Jesus taught us....

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Hymn: Seek ye first the kingdom of God

Seek ye first the kingdom of God,
and his righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you:
allelu, alleluia.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluias, allelu, alleluia!

You shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word,
that proceeds from the mouth of God;
allelu, alleluia!

Ask and it shall be given unto you,
seek and ye shall find,
knock and the door shall be opened unto you;
allelu, alleluia.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart,
he shall direct thy path,
in all thy ways acknowledge Him;
allelu, alleluia.

Praise to the Father, praise to the Son,
praise to the Spirit too,
and to the Godhead, three in one;
allelu, alleluia.

Karen Lafferty (1948-)

The Blessing

May God bless you, guide you and direct you.
May God bless you, give you strength and the assurance of his love.
May God bless you and fill your life with his presence –
today and always.
Amen

The Grace

(As is now usual in this unusual time(!), we say these familiar words imagining that we are saying them together, to one another, in our Sanctuary)

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all,
for evermore.
Amen.**

May God bless you all richly,
With our love and best wishes to you and your families,

Neil