

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 4th October 2020

Sunday Worship with Holy Communion

Hello, I hope you are well. Today, there is an opportunity for us all to share Holy Communion together again. If you'd like to participate, may I encourage you to prepare some bread and wine (or something as similar as possible) ready for this part of our worship. This Sunday, we will reflect on the Lectionary reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians (3:1-14). Here, Paul sets out his credentials by citing the marks of his Jewish identity. Remaking his identity 'in Christ' is a major project for Paul; it is one that he has not yet fully achieved but it remains his ultimate goal. Let us worship God together.

A gathering prayer

Creator God, who calls us to follow,
we are on journeys, individual journeys and shared journeys,
experiences that are ours alone and ours together.
Guide us on our journey this day
and help us to keep our eyes on the goal. **Amen.**

A prayer of approach

Lord God, as we journey towards the goal you set before us,
we see glimpses of who you are,
often too deep and unimaginable
to grasp fully the depth of your being.
What we see and feel spurs us on
in our journey to discover more of you. **Amen.**

Hymn Be still, for the presence of the Lord (BPW 5)

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the holy one, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found -
we stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the holy one, is here.

Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight -
our radiant king of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place:
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace -
no work too hard for him,
in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

A prayer of confession

God of the journey of life,
 the mystery of our very being,
 we confess that the journey we take
 gets disrupted and we get sidetracked.
 We go off on wild goose chases that lead us nowhere,
 up blind alleys and into bad and barren places.
 We find our way back to you in sorrow for our failings
 and in penitence for our wanderings.
 May we be enriched by your welcome,
 relieved by your forgiveness
 and comforted by your all-embracing love. **Amen.**

Deeply thankful for the amazing grace and mercy of God,
 we bring before him our prayer of thanksgiving:

A prayer of thanksgiving

Lord God, we are all so different, each our own being;
 and yet you love and care for us all,
 you nurture and protect us.
 How can we not be thankful to you
 for all that the journey with you offers!
 We thank you that you guide us,
 in unexpected ways, to find the right way in life.
 We thank you that when we wander, you draw us back to you,
 give us new direction and encourage us to follow where you lead.
 We thank you that you know our individual needs and quirks,
 and yearn for us to be on the journey of life with you.
 We thank you that the pains of life can be overshadowed
 by the joy of walking with you.
 For all these blessings and more,
 we give you thanks and praise. **Amen.**

NT Bible Reading: Philippians 3:1-14 (NRSV)

3 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord.

Breaking with the Past

To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard.
²Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! ³For it is we
 who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no
 confidence in the flesh— ⁴even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.
 If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a
 member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a
 Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.
⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I
 regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I
 have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be
 found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes
 through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power
 of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may
 attain the resurrection from the dead.

Pressing towards the Goal

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own, but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

Reflection

Philippians 3 begins '*finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord*' and whilst this might be due to how different letter fragments have been edited together, it is thought far more likely that this indicates that Paul is moving to a brand new topic. Certainly, in the letter as we have it, there is a sharp turn in the tone and topic of Paul's message in chapter 3. Talk of imitating Christ's humility, shining brightly within a dark world and pastoral notes about Timothy and Epaphroditus abruptly end. Now Paul warns his readers in Philippi about the influence of some dangerous opponents (3:1-4a), he presents his own story as a compelling counterexample (3:4b-14) and then, just beyond today's reading, he goes on to offer exhortations to imitate him as he seeks wholeheartedly to follow Jesus:

¹⁵Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. ¹⁶Only let us hold fast to what we have attained.

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, ^[k]join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

Prior to this, as mentioned, Paul firstly declares, '*beware*'! As well as the very insulting '*dogs*' tag, '*evil workers*' and '*those who mutilate the flesh*' are also referred to. These two terms may well be clever word plays in Greek and in short, perhaps they indicate Jewish-Christian missionaries just like those Paul contended with in Galatia.

Next, Paul lays out his impressive credentials by citing the marks of his Jewish identity (3:4-6): he was once part of the ruling elite condemned in Matthew's '*Parable of the Wicked Tenants*' (Matt 21:33-46) which happens to be the assigned Gospel reading for this Sunday. There has been a dramatic change in Paul though! He has had a life changing experience with God through an encounter with the risen Jesus. Now, none of the achievements and accolades on his old CV mean anything to him! In fact, it is a disadvantage and an identity that he is willing to give up. This does not mean that Paul ever walked away from his Judaism; it is just that what he has in Jesus Christ matters so much more to him, and this is all available to Jews and Gentiles alike. So, Paul stands firm against those who want Gentile believers in Christ first to become Jews. For Paul, faith in Jesus Christ is all that matters.

However, Paul knows that to walk faithfully trusting in Christ often leads to a difficult and demanding journey. He is careful to not claim too much for himself. He is striving towards the goal of resurrection from the dead, but not even he has secured it yet. In fact, he is not able to reach this goal alone; he is certain that it is only because '*Christ Jesus has made me his own*' (3:12), that it becomes possible. Now, remaking his identity '*in Christ Jesus*' is a big project and it is one that he has not yet fully achieved, but this remains his ultimate goal (3:14).

For us, I think there is some wonderful encouragement here as we seek to grow in our faith in God. Hopefully, we may find much light and life as we reflect on our journeys with God so far. Certainly, we also know, and hopefully can accept, that the past is not where we live – the journey of faith goes on, our growing in our reliance upon God through '*Christ Jesus*' continues, work is still being done on the '*big project*!' There is more light and love to be discovered and embraced concerning ourselves and our God. Whatever our own sense of what the '*ultimate goal*' looks like, let us fervently and hopefully '*press on*' into God, trusting in his immeasurable and unending love, for certainly, there is more to come! Indeed, we trust that '*the best is yet to come*'! Amen.

Hymn O Jesus, I have promised (R&S 509)

O Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
be thou for ever near me,
my Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway:
if thou wilt be my guide.

O let me feel thee near me;
the world is ever near,
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but, Jesus, draw thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

O let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

O Jesus, thou hast promised,
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be;
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Saviour and my Friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816-74)

Holy Communion

Words of Invitation

Look, here is the Lord's Table spread as for a feast.
Bread for breaking, wine poured for drinking:
signs of his love and hospitality,
symbols of his life broken, his blood poured out.

He is not dead!
He is risen and present among us,
evidence of God's covenant grace and promise.

So we come in faith to the table, you and I,
companions on the journey.
Some of us fresh and eager,
others weary, in need of nourishment.
All of us conscious of our failings.

*Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Come now, don't hesitate,
the feast is ready
and the Lord himself invites you.

We Remember

It was the night of the Passover, and Jesus and his friends were sharing supper together. While they eating, he told them that one of them would betray him. They were appalled and protested saying 'Not I Lord, I would never betray you.' Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying 'Take this and eat. This is my body.' He took the cup of wine and after giving thanks passed it among them saying as they drank 'this is my blood of the covenant. It is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. I will not drink again until the day comes when I drink with you in my father's Kingdom.'

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Creating and redeeming God,
we give you thanks and praise
for your covenant of grace:
a covenant expressed in sinful people
who know forgiveness,
the weary who are refreshed,
the hungry who are nourished,
the captives who are set free
and the oppressed who experience liberation.
Thank you that you chose to make us a part of your story.

Thank you for Jesus Christ
who revealed your love in his death and resurrection
and who continues to share his life with us
through bread and wine.

Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit
who sustains us in our walk together,
helping us to watch over each other,
to pray for one another,
and to work together for justice and truth.

As we eat this bread
and drink from the cup,
(signs of hospitality and grace),
may we be empowered to serve boldly
wherever you may call.

Accept these prayers
and our heartfelt thanksgiving
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

We Share

The bread

One people, one loaf, a sign of our common faith
and testimony to the generosity of our lord Jesus Christ.

Take this bread, food for faith,
and feed on it with thanksgiving.

The wine

One people, one cup, a sign of the new covenant
poured out for you and for many.

It is a covenant sealed by his blood.
When we drink we must be thankful
and agree together never to forget.

We Journey

Holy God,
we have been nourished and had our thirst quenched,
through bread broken and wine poured
in thanksgiving for your son Jesus Christ.

Send us out to be as generous to those we meet this week, that we might show through word and deed
that he is not dead, but risen and present among us.
Hallelujah! **Amen.**

Our prayers of intercession

A prayer for those we know and love:

We pray for those we know and love. We pray for all those who are part of our Church and especially for
those who are in need. We pray that you will watch over them, keep them in your love, uphold them and
bless them.

We were so very sorry to hear this week of the loss of Frank Austin. We pray for Janet, William, Frank's
daughters, Jessica and Lucy, and all the family at this difficult time. May they sense God's comfort, peace
and love.

We pray for Stephen Hogger and his family following the sad loss of his Father. With the funeral being
this coming Tuesday, we think of them and pray that they would know the comforting presence of God.

We are very pleased to hear that Netty Waters is doing well and is back at home following her surgery.
We pray for a full and speedy recovery for Netty and that she, Alan and their family would sense God's
blessing.

We pray for Christine Goddard who sadly has had a fall, has been in hospital and is now back in the
home. May Christine know God's love and blessing as she continues her recovery.

We pray for Richard and Marjorie Havers, Eddie and Audrey Naylor, Joan Cross and Chikondi Midgley,
who are all facing challenges with their health at the moment. May they know God's healing presence
and help in this time of need.

Here is a moment for our own prayers.

Lord, hear these our prayers, we ask, in Jesus' name, **Amen.**

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. 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.**

A sending out prayer

Almighty God,
 We now continue our journey,
 the journey of our Christian life.
 Its foundations, full of all that has gone before,
 are part of the scaffold of our lives.
 Some of it can be seen by others,
 some only by ourselves;
 some is very obvious,
 some more hidden.
 But it is there. It is a personal journey
 – no one else's is quite the same
 – but you know it and you know all of us,
 and we trust you to guide us,
 to give us the strength, the courage and the persistence we need
 to follow where you lead, even if the path is tough.
 Be our guide, we pray. **Amen.**

The Blessing

Go and as you go, know this:
 In grace you were created, in mercy you have been sustained and in love you will be held forever.
 And the blessing of almighty God, Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,
 be upon you and all those you love, this day and always. **Amen.**

The Grace

Holding each other in our prayers, we say together:

**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

Resources taken and adapted from *ROOTS for Churches Limited*
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