

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 11th October 2020

Sunday Worship

With Revd Neil Coulson

Hello, I hope you and loved ones are well. This Sunday, we will again reflect on the Lectionary reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians, which this week is 4:1-9. Here, as Paul signs off his letter, he urges the community to support two women named as co-workers, to be always rejoicing, praying, pursuing whatever is honourable, pure and praiseworthy and he says that the peace of God will be with them.

Let us worship God together:

A gathering prayer

Lord God, faithful and loving,
we do not always feel like rejoicing.
Even as we gather to worship you,
our minds are sometimes distracted and elsewhere,
weighed down by the burdens of our lives.
Help us, in this moment, to find it within our hearts
to rejoice in your constancy and loving care for us.
People of God, let us rejoice. **Amen.**

A prayer of approach

Lord God, we never know what the future holds or where life will take us next.
We never know what is just around the corner and what the outcomes of things will be.
But we know that whatever follows on from this moment, you are here with us, by our side,
above and beneath us, entwining your life with ours, surpassing all human understanding.
In this moment, bless us and awaken us to your abiding presence. **Amen.**

Hymn Rejoice, the Lord is king (R&S 657)

Rejoice, the Lord is King;
your Lord and King adore;
mortals, give thanks, and sing,
and triumph ever more:

*Lift up your heart, lift up your voice:
rejoice, again I say: rejoice!*

Jesus the Saviour reigns,
the God of truth and love;
when he had purged our stains,
he took his seat above:

His kingdom cannot fail,
he rules o'er earth and heaven;
the keys of death and hell
are to our Jesus given:

He sits at God's right hand
till all his foes submit,
and bow to his command,
and fall beneath his feet:

Rejoice in glorious hope;
 Jesus the judge shall come,
 and take his servants up
 to their eternal home:

*We soon shall hear the archangel's voice;
 the trump of God shall sound: rejoice!*

Charles Wesley (1707-88)

A prayer of confession

Eternal God, so often we give up if something goes wrong or doesn't go our way.
 So often we are overwhelmed by our own problems that we forget to look out for others.
 So often we are consumed with negatives and endings that we lose sight of the positives and beginnings.
 Eternal God, forgive us for our self-centredness, our blindness and our deafness, and reawaken your Spirit within us.

Amen.

Overwhelmed once more by the goodness and grace of almighty God,
 we bring before him our prayer of praise and thanksgiving:

A prayer of thanksgiving

For eternal hope that comes from you, almighty God,

we give you thanks and praise.

For your gentleness and compassion,

we give you thanks and praise.

For your peace within,

we give you thanks and praise.

For your light in the darkness,

we give you thanks and praise.

For hope when all seems hopeless,

we give you thanks and praise.

For love beyond measure,

we give you thanks and praise.

Amen.

Bible Reading: Philippians 4:1-9 (NRSV)

4 ¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters,^[a] whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

Exhortations

²I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion,^[b] help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice^[c] in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.^[d] ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved,^[e] whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about^[f] these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

Reflection

In today's reading from his letter to the Philippians, we find Paul preparing to sign off with what are in this letter, the familiar motifs of longing and joy. As I'm sure we are all aware, he is writing to them from prison, although there is no consensus on where Paul is imprisoned and so there is no consensus on when Paul wrote to this church that he had founded. It may be that he is writing from Ephesus in the mid-50s or Rome in the early 60s. Paul had founded the church here, and had probably visited them once or twice since, and certainly he has maintained a good, friendly relationship with them. But now it is quite possible that he writes to those he loves and longs for, his *'joy and crown'*, knowing that they would not see or hear from him again.

Perhaps with this in mind, he seeks to address something specific that is burdening him. He speaks to two women co-workers, Euodia and Syntyche, who he states have *'struggled besides me in the work of the gospel'*. We don't know anything for certain about these two women except that an issue had arisen between them. They may well have been working with Paul when he planted the church in Philippi. Perhaps they were even among the women at the riverside meeting when Paul met and converted Lydia (Acts 16:13-14). Certainly, here is a clear indication that, despite concerted efforts of the Church to marginalise the contribution of women for many centuries, women were extremely active in the ministry of the Early Church. We also know nothing about the precise nature of their dispute. But we do see Paul urging them to put aside their personal disagreement or rivalry, to be of the same humble *'mind in the Lord'* as so emphatically encouraged earlier in his letter and to remain fully focussed on the furtherance of the gospel. We also see how Paul urges 'Syzygus' to help them sort out their differences. Syzygus is a Greek word or name for 'yokefellow' and it is translated here as *'loyal companion.'* Perhaps Paul is playing with the word and making a pun as he urges his good friend to live up to his name!

The verses that follow (verse 4 onwards) offer more general exhortations and suggest a way of being and behaving designed to minimise such quarrels. And then there's the highly effective rhetorical use of repetition in verse 8 (*'whatever is true, whatever is honourable...'* and so on *'think about these things'*). This is probably a list of the qualities Paul was thinking of earlier when he prayed that his readers would *'determine what is best'* (1:10).

In a sense, just as then, still now for us modern readers, these are sound spiritual and moral exhortations and encouragements here, designed to focus our minds in ways that drive out negative thoughts and behaviours and create positive feelings towards others: don't stir up your anxiety; pray about things instead; let your mind think about good, beautiful, honourable things; God's peace will then come to you, to guard your hearts and minds in Christ. We note that *'heart'* in the ancient world was the centre of the will (the stomach was the centre of the emotions), so the peace of God is not there just to make us feel better but also to help us do what is right. In short, a kind, cooperative, caring, Christ-like Christianity is called for here and this speaks to everyone us as we continue to build a community together in this church and as we serve together in the furtherance of the gospel in this our time. Amen.

Hymn What a friend we have in Jesus (R&S 413)

What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations,
is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
 burdened with a load of care?
 Jesus is our only refuge:
 take it to the Lord in prayer.
 Do your friends despise, forsake you?
 Take it to the Lord in prayer;
 in his arms he'll take and shield you,
 you will find a solace there.

Joseph M. Scriven. (1819-1918) altd.

Our prayers of intercession

Lord, we pray for your peace
 for those who are burdened with stress and anxiety.
 Come into our turmoil,
 and may your presence give strength and calmness.
 May your peace, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Lord, we pray for your peace
 for those who suffer from the wounds of war, violence
 and hatred.
 May they know healing,
 and be inspired by the hope of your kingdom.
 May your peace, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Lord, we pray for your peace
 for all who bear ancient grudges or bitter hatreds,
 held and nurtured over generations.
 Wash away the memory of hurt and neglect,
 that they may know unity and wholeness.
 May your peace, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Send your peace, Lord,
 that we may think, act and speak harmoniously.
 Take away our selfishness,
 so that we can share the joys, and feel the sorrows,
 of our neighbours.
 May your peace, which passes all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.
Amen.

A prayer for those we know and love:

We pray for those close to us. 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 pray for Janet, William, and daughters, Jessica and Lucy, following the sad loss of Frank. May the whole family sense God's comfort, peace and love in this difficult time of grief.

We pray for Stephen and his family following the sad loss of his Father. We think of them and pray that they would know the comforting presence of God.

We pray for Netty as she continues with her recuperation. We pray for a full and speedy recovery and for your blessing upon her, Alan and the family.

We pray for Christine as she continues her recovery in the home, following her fall.
May Christine know God's love and blessing at this time.

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 peace and healing presence 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.**

Hymn God is working his purpose out, as year succeeds to year (R&S 573)

God is working his purpose out,
as year succeeds to year;
God is working his purpose out,
and the time is drawing near;
nearer and nearer draws the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

From utmost east to utmost west,
where human feet have trod,
by the voice of many messengers
goes forth the voice of God:
'Give ear to me, you continents,
you islands give ear to me,
that the earth may be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea'.

What can we do to work God's work,
to prosper and increase
love and justice throughout the world,
the reign of the Prince of Peace?
What can we do to hasten the time,
the time that shall surely be,
when the earth shall be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea?

Let us go out in the strength of God,
with the banner of Christ unfurled,
that the light of the glorious gospel of truth
may shine throughout the world:
sin and sorrow let us fight
to set their captives free,
that the earth may be filled
with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.

All that *we* do can have no worth
 unless God blesses the deed;
 vainly we hope for the harvest-tide
 till God awakens the seed;
 yet nearer and nearer draws the time,
 the time that shall surely be,
 when the earth shall be filled
 with the glory of God
 as the waters cover the sea.

Arthur C. Ainger. (1841-1919)

A sending out prayer

May God's goodness strengthen you.
 May God's mercy comfort you.
 May God's promise of eternal life inspire you
 with hope and love.
 In the name of the Father, Son and Spirit.

Amen

The Blessing

And may the peace and 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

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