

Christ Church, Ipswich

Sunday 9th May 2021

Sixth Sunday of Easter

with Neil

Hello, I hope you are well. Our readings today are 1 John 5:1-6 and John 15:9-17. Let us worship God:

Call to worship

Jesus said: 'No one has greater love than this,
to lay down one's life for one's friends.'
So, let us join together as friends, Jesus' friends,
to worship and serve the one who,
because of his great love, gave his all for us.

A prayer of approach

Creator God,
you have called us to worship you,
chosen us to be your friends
and invited us to extend that friendship
to your people in all the world.
May we live as Jesus lived,
serve as he served,
and love as he loved,
to the glory of your name. **Amen.**

Hymn Hallelujah! sing to Jesus,

Hallelujah! sing to Jesus,
His the sceptre, His the throne;
hallelujah! His the triumph,
his the victory alone.
Hark! the songs of peaceful Zion
thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus out of every nation
hath redeemed us by His blood.

Hallelujah! bread of heaven!
Thou on earth our food, our stay;
Hallelujah! here the sinful
flee to Thee from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,
earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the sinless
sweep across the crystal sea.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
Glory be to God on high;
to the Father, and the Saviour,
who has gained the victory;
glory to the Holy Spirit,
fount of love and sanctity.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!
to the triune Majesty.

William Chatterton Dix (1837–98) altd.

A prayer of adoration

God of relationships,
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit, together and as one,
 you draw us into friendship with you that we may draw others.
 You command us to love as you have loved, that we might inspire others.
 You fill our hearts with the passion of your heart, that we might serve others.
 You are the truest of friends, the most faithful friend,
 the most enduring – and we praise you for all you are and more.

Amen

A prayer of confession

Dear Lord, your love is so precious;
 but we have turned away from you when our lives have been easy
 – forgive us and help us to turn back to you.
 You have commanded us to love others;
 but we have turned away from them when their lives have been difficult
 – forgive us and help us to be there for them.
 You have shared with us your ministry of welcome;
 but we have turned people away
 – forgive us and help us always to be open to them.
 For the sake of Jesus, whose life and death, deeds and words have saved us.

Amen.

Assurance of forgiveness

God of hope and healing:
 for choosing us – **we thank you.**
 For trusting us – **we thank you.**
 For befriending us – **we thank you.**
 For empowering us – **we thank you.**
 For loving us – **we thank you.**
 And for forgiving, redeeming and blessing us –
we thank you, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

A prayer of praise

God of all,
 we give you thanks for the gift of friendship:
 for the giving and the receiving;
 for the opportunities and the challenges;
 for the laughter and the tears;
 for the conversations and the silence;
 for the moments and the memories.
 Draw us deeper into your love,
 and bless us with the confidence
 to proclaim Jesus as our dearest friend, teacher and Saviour.
 We ask this in his name.

Amen.

Epistle Reading 1 John 5:1-6 (NRSV)

Faith Conquers the World

5 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. ² By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. ³ For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, ⁴ for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. ⁵ Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Testimony concerning the Son of God

⁶ This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

Gospel Reading John 15:9-17 (NRSV)

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹² 'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection

In today's reading from the Gospel of John, we find Jesus encouraging the disciples to keep his commandments and, most importantly, he exhorts them to love one another as he has loved them. Jesus declares that those who do this are his friends and here, he emphasises that this is his choice rather than theirs.

We note how from the beginning of John 15 there is repetition and progression: 'abide in me as I in you' (15:4) becomes 'if you abide in me and my words abide in you' (15:7), then 'if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love' (15:10). As we noticed in last week's passage, John 15:1-8 was in many ways a meditation on abiding in Jesus, as Jesus abides in the Father. We reflected on how Jesus' words '*abide in me*' apply to us today, and how they offer us comfort and the assurance of God's presence, of our 'home' in God, of our belonging to him. We recognised all this as the precious gift of our loving God. We also acknowledged that within the fullness of what is meant by abiding, there is our part, our response, our commitment to live in God, to nurture this relationship and to love him and one another. We find that this week's reading is really a continuation of this reflection, as Jesus speaks words of devotion and intimacy, of love and profound friendship.

In fact, the motif of devotion and intimacy are a compelling characteristic of John's Gospel that resonates with us all as modern-day disciples. Today, we are those who long to abide in the love that Jesus shares with the Father (15:10). In this love, we receive Jesus' commandment as a piece of precious wisdom, as an encouragement to walk in the way of Christ as we give of ourselves and embrace the blessing of joy. The love we are thinking about here cannot be expressed in just our personal devotions but only as love for one another (15:12), a love which we are assured bears lasting fruit (15:16). It is only John's Jesus that has 'friends' (and even a favourite disciple! (John 13:23)). We find that in John's portrayal of Jesus, he is deeply human, while intimately and uniquely bound to God the Father (15:15). We are invited to not only reflect on this devotion and intimacy between Jesus and God, but also, as those who are also deeply human, we are very much aware of the wonderful possibilities for divine encounters that we might now embrace as those who seek to draw close to God today.

We hear Jesus 'loud and clear' that the abiding commandment is to love one another (15:12). We understand that the extent of that love is made emphatically clear in Jesus' prophetic declaration that no one has greater love than to lay down his life for friends (15:13). This reflection on unity and belonging moves towards a poignant and moving ending with a focus on self-giving love. There is clearly a calling here to give of ourselves as we seek to build deep and abiding friendships within our Church family and beyond. As author and scholar Diana Butler Bass writes, 'Christianity did not begin with a confession. It began with an invitation into friendship, into creating a new community, into forming relationships based on love and service'.

May I invite us all to take some time today to consider what loving one another in a way that follows the example of Jesus might look like in an 'everyday', 'real life' sense? Are there new ways in which we might we express our love and care for one another? Today, as we rejoice in Christ who calls us his beloved friends, may we be inspired to love one another as Christ has loved us and to go and bear much fruit in his name. Amen.

R&S 339 Great God, your love has called us here

Great God, your love has called us here
as we, by love, for love were made.
Your living likeness still we bear,
though marred, dishonoured, disobeyed.
We come, with all our heart and mind
your call to hear, your love to find.

We come with self-inflicted pains
of broken trust and chosen wrong,
half-free, half-bound by inner chains,
by social forces swept along,
by powers and systems close confined
yet seeking hope for humankind.

Great God, in Christ you call our name
and then receive us as your own
not through some merit, right or claim
but by your gracious love alone.
We strain to glimpse your mercy-seat
and find you kneeling at our feet.

Then take the towel, and break the bread,
and humble us, and call us friends.
Suffer and serve till all are fed,
and show how grandly love intends
to work till all creation sings,
to fill all worlds, to crown all things.

Great God, in Christ you set us free
your life to live, your joy to share.
Give us your Spirit's liberty
to turn from guilt and dull despair
and offer all that faith can do
while love is making all things new.

Our prayers of intercession

God of love, friend to those in power,
with the local elections this week we are reminded of the privilege we have in being able to engage in democracy and vote. Whatever our political leanings, we pray for those who have retained or gained places on our local councils. May they be diligent in working for the communities they serve, passionate about improving the lives of others, and open to listening to views different from their own. Equip all of our political representatives with the gifts of thoughtfulness, grace and integrity.

God of love,
hear our prayer.

God of love, friend to those in pain,
we look at the situation unfolding in India and continue to feel despair for those who are ill and dying and for those grieving for loved ones. We pray for the urgent supplies India needs to arrive quickly. We pray for more oxygen, medicine and vaccines. May countries who have plenty be generous in their response to the crisis. Please bring the people of India some signs of improvement and some signs of hope.

God of love,
hear our prayer.

God of love, friend to those in need,
we pray for all the events happening this Christian Aid Week, whether they be face to face or online. We pray that they will create a sense of connection and joy for churches and communities here in the UK and across the world as they think, pray, act and give to support the important work of Christian Aid. We pray that a spirit of joyful giving will transform communities across this nation and all over the world this Christian Aid Week.

God of love,
hear our prayer.

God of love, friend to those who are tired,
even though we are moving out of crisis mode we know that many of our medics and nursing staff are exhausted after a year of covid. Help those in the NHS who are weary and tired find rest and renewed enthusiasm for their work. There are also many members of our wider communities left with long covid symptoms, struggling with daily life. We ask for insightful research into the after effects of coronavirus and ways to help those who are finding it hard to return to normal life.

God of love,
hear our prayer.

God of love, friend to those who are struggling,
as the country opens up and some of us move back to real life meetings or going out to work we are aware that there are many for whom the pandemic has brought profound change to their circumstances. We think of those who have lost their jobs and faced financial hardship as a result. We ask for resilience in the face of such difficult times, perseverance as people seek new work and try to cope with the demands of everyday life and courage to face the challenges each new day brings.

God of love,
hear our prayer.

God of love, friend of our friends,
thank you for the gift of friendship. Thank you for the people who bring fun and joy into our lives. Thank you for the warmth friends bring. Thank you that we can once again see those we love and enjoy their company. Despite the pain and struggle this year has wrought we thank you for the friends that have helped us, stuck by us, cheered us up, listened and sympathised and helped us cope. Bless our friends and help us to look to Jesus to learn how to deepen our friendships and live the life of love he modelled.

We pray for our friends in need. We are very sorry to hear that Nick Smith's Mum has died and we pray for Nick and Meryl and all the family at this time. May they know God's comfort, love and peace. We think of Kiki as she has her appeal hearing on Tuesday 11th May at 2pm. We pray for a positive outcome, O Lord, and that you would uphold her and strengthen her. We pray for Phyllis Davies who is unwell in hospital. We think of Sheila Storey as she has her cataract surgery on Thursday 13th May. We remember before you Joan, Chikondi and all those among us with health concerns. We pray your blessings upon all our friends who are in residential care homes.

A moment of quiet for your own prayers

God of love,
hear our prayer. 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

Lord Jesus, we rejoice
that you have chosen us to be your friends.
Help us to be a friend to you by obeying your commands.
As we go out into your world,
help us to live a life that reflects your love,
by being a friend to others.
Amen.

The Blessing

And may the blessing of almighty God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be upon us and all those we love,
this day and always. **Amen.**

The Grace

Holding one another in our thoughts, 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.**

With love and best wishes,

Neil