

Worship for Sunday 9 August 2020

Benefice of Rural East York

Welcome

Welcome today for our service this Sunday 9th August, and thank you for joining us. Today we will be exploring a theme of prayer, and experiencing it in all its variety. My name is Nick Bird, and I am the priest for our group of parishes here on the edge of York.

What we miss, not being able to gather together in person, is something of the interaction. So I do invite you to make contact if this service raises questions for you, or if you have concerns of a more personal nature. My email address can be found in the notes below. But also let us know if there is something we can be doing as a church to meet your needs at home, or in terms of faith and spirituality. Unless we know differently, we are just guessing!

Each of our four churches are open once each week for Morning Prayer at 9am, and there is also a gathering for Night Prayer on a Wednesday evening at 7pm. The details for these can be found in our weekly newsletter, or you can contact me directly for further information.

As a bit of an experiment this week, I shall be hosting 'after service coffee' at 11.30am via Zoom. So if you want to meet up with other people and have a chat, click on the link below, or copy and paste the link into your browser – bring your own refreshments!

Let us pray...

Opening Prayer

Lord of all creation, we stand in awe before You, impelled by visions of the harmony of all people. We are children of many traditions, inheritors of shared wisdom and misunderstandings, of proud hopes and humble successes. Now, we meet - in truth, in courage and trust, in love and promise.

In that which we share, let us see the common prayer of humanity in that in which we differ, let us wonder at the freedom of humanity in our unity and our differences, let us know the uniqueness that is God.

May our courage match our convictions, and our integrity match our hope.

May our faith in you bring us closer to each other.

May our meeting now bring blessing for the future. Amen

Prayer of Adoration: Psalm 105:1-6 (with Taize Song 'Bless the Lord my soul')

Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.
Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.
Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
Look to the Lord and his strength;
seek his face always.
Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,
you his servants, the descendants of Abraham,
his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.

*Bless the Lord, my soul,
And bless God's holy name.
Bless the Lord, my soul,
Who leads me into life.*

Song: You're worthy of my praise (I will worship) by David Ruis

I will worship (I will worship)
With all of my heart (with all of my heart)
I will praise You (I will praise You)
With all of my strength (all my strength)
I will seek You (I will seek You)
All of my days (all of my days)
I will follow (I will follow)
All of Your ways (all Your ways)

Refrain

*I will give You all my worship
I will give You all my praise
You alone I long to worship
You alone are worthy of my praise*

I will bow down (I will bow down)
Hail You as King (hail You as King)
I will serve You (I will serve You)
Give You everything (give You everything)
I will lift up (I will lift up)
My eyes to Your throne (my eyes to Your throne)
I will trust You (I will trust You)
Trust You alone (trust in You alone)

Refrain x 3

A Confession from the Iona community:

Together, today, we face what we might not face alone
That we are greedy, but fail to love our bodies
That we are selfish, but fail to love ourselves
That we seek rest, but fail to work for peace
That we are human, but fail to love the earth
These we share in silence as we remember our own faults and failings...

Silence

God of the turning tide
Change us so that the energy of your forgiveness
Flows into bold and joyful action
Into a humility which is not defeatism
Into the strength and confidence to be vulnerable'

Collect:

Almighty God,
who sent your Holy Spirit
to be the life and light of your Church:
open our hearts to the riches of your grace,
that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit
in love and joy and peace;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Reading: Jesus Walks on the Water - Matthew 14: 22-33

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Listening Prayer: Psalm 85:8-13 (with Taize song 'Calm me Lord')

I will listen to what God the Lord says;
he promises peace to his people, his faithful servants—
but let them not turn to folly.

Surely his salvation is near those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

Love and faithfulness meet together;
righteousness and peace kiss each other.

Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
and righteousness looks down from heaven.

The Lord will indeed give what is good,
and our land will yield its harvest.

Righteousness goes before him
and prepares the way for his steps.

Homily: Jesus the man – Jesus the divine – Jesus the prayer

One of the great mistakes we make in our understanding of Jesus is to forget his humanity – the weeping, hungry, angry, grieving Jesus who enjoys time with people and time alone. We can't hold Jesus as being one who was above a bodily existence, rather gliding through life, and rarely engaging heart, mind and flesh, ethereal in his existence and above the mundane.

The other error we can make is to over-emphasise this bloke who walked around first century Palestine, dishing out comfort, food and well-timed platitudes, who had some kind of excitable spiritual life and was on speaking terms with God, forgetting Jesus the transfigured, Jesus the resurrected, Jesus the seer and healer and prophet and divine.

In chapter 14 of Matthew's gospel, from which we hear this morning, we have earlier heard of the Jesus who grieves at the news of the death of his cousin John (the Baptist), and withdraws by himself to a deserted place. The news hits him hard and he needs time alone. I get this. Some rush for the comfort of others, and some need the space. Jesus goes for the latter.

But against his preferences, the crowd follow him, and, instead of escaping further and deeper and away from the people, the gospel says he 'had compassion for them', he goes to them. His deep humanity opens himself to the needs of others, and he is soon giving again. Jesus gives time and attention, healing and restoration. And then, as we heard last week, he gives them food. Jesus understands hunger, and also the need to eat together, to share community.

But Jesus still needs his space, so he sends the disciples and the crowds away, and goes up a mountain to pray. He needs some alone time. This is human – it's been quite a day.

But Jesus is not simply human, he is divine. And we see this when, early the next morning, Jesus goes to find his friends. Inconveniently bobbing about on the water, in the middle of a storm, in the middle of a lake, Jesus joins them – taking the short cut, and frightening half to death his disciples.

But this is one of the clearest signs of Jesus' divinity – his authority over the waves and the wind, to still it, to subdue it, to walk all over it. He has power over the chaos of the water, power over the evil that was thought to live it (the demons of the Gerasene swine, when they drowned, were simply going home!).

Human and divine, God from God and man from man – that was and is Jesus.

What might seem to hold all this together in Jesus is prayer. When he is grieving, he prays. When he wants to heal or feed, he prays. Before he walks on water, he prays. When he is fearful and approaching death, he prays. His prayer flows as naturally and spontaneously as his breath. But it is also what empowers him.

Jesus' miracles, his ability to speak peace into people's lives, his calm in the storm, his divine authority over the chaos of the water and calming of the storm, is all begins in his prayer at the beginning of this bible passage.

There are many kinds of prayer, and we hear many of those as part of this service: adoration, confession, listening, intercession, thanksgiving, contemplation, meditation, silence.

Carlo Carretto in his 1970s book *Letters from the desert*, talks about how he went out into the Sahara Desert to learn how to pray. In his book he reminds us the the origin of prayer is not us – which at least takes some of the pressure off. God is so immense and powerful, he says, and I am very tiny and very, very weak. And yet (and here's the paradox) 'he who is so great should have wanted to speak to me, tiny as I am'. Carretto goes on to remind us, 'It is not I who wanted prayer. It is he who wanted it. It is not I who have looked for him. It is he who has looked for me first. My seeking him would have been in vain if before all time he had not sought me'.

Prayer is not about techniques or learning or practices or diligence or word count. Prayer is an orientation of our soul towards God in response to his turning to us. Our prayer does not originate on earth but in heaven, and to heaven we return it. As Carretto concludes, 'Prayer is the sum of our relationship with God. We are what we pray. The degree of our faith is the degree of our prayer. The strength of our hope is the strength of our prayer. The warmth of our charity is the warmth of our prayer. No more no less.'

It is the prayer of Jesus, the heart of who he was, both human and divine, that centres and empowers him, and we see this so clearly. All that he does flows out of his prayer, and nothing is separate from that prayer. And we are no different. Amen.

Intercessional Prayer

Dear Lord,

We thank you for the power of prayer. Lord when you were here on earth you constantly took time alone to pray so help us to follow your example. Thank you that as our Father in Heaven you delight in us talking to you in prayer and so we come to you now knowing you listen and will graciously hear us for where 2 or 3 are gathered in your name you are among us. We thank you for the technology that has made it possible for us still to worship together. We thank you for the answered prayers we have seen in our own lives.

Lord we pray for our world, for the people killed and injured in the explosion in Beirut this week. We think of the war torn areas especially Syria, The Yemen, Myanmar, and South Sudan where refugees and the hungry and homeless are trying to survive under such difficult circumstances and who now face the added risks of Coronavirus in areas of poverty, drought and famine. We pray for the Aid workers and charities reaching out to those in need. We ask for your protection for all these people. We ask that those individuals and countries who can afford to will respond to Aid appeals.

Lord we pray you will give wisdom and diplomacy to the politicians and leaders in authority in the decisions they make which affect so many lives.

We pray for everyone who has been affected by the Covid-19 crisis. We especially think of the NHS staff, medical staff worldwide, the care workers, key workers and scientists, the people offering support and working in food banks. Lord we pray for their continued protection against this virus as they continue to work selflessly on our behalf and seek to find answers to control its spread.

We especially remember those who have suffered bereavement who have not been allowed to say goodbye to their loved ones or unable to mourn in the usual way. We think of those who are lonely, the house bound and those still facing isolation as they are afraid of going out and mixing with others and those in care homes unable to socialise with their families as they would like to. We pray they may be surrounded by your arms of love and peace at this difficult time. Lord direct us as individuals to find ways in which we can support them in their time of need.

For those who are suffering from Covid-19 virus themselves. Lord give them strength to overcome the infection. For those who have had to face delays in their hospital treatments and for those we know ourselves who are ill and in need at this time: we remember them before you now in a short time of silence and pray they may know your healing power.

Lord we remember those in this country who are facing hardship as a result of unemployment through redundancy or closure of businesses as a result of the virus. Lord we pray they may have access to the financial support they need and assistance in finding re-employment.

Lord in this Benefice we thank you for the support we can offer and receive from each other within our villages, and for the acts of kindness we have witnessed over these recent weeks. We bring to you our Clergy, our children's and families' worker and Registered Parish Assistants and ask your blessing on them in the work they do as they find alternative ways to reach out to people and support them in these unprecedented times.

Lord above all we thank you for your protection at this time and we thank you for your immeasurable love shown to us in so many ways. Thank you that through you we may know that peace that passes all understanding.

We bring all these prayers together in the prayer that you yourself taught us:

Lord's prayer

Our Father in Heaven
Hallowed be your name
Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in Heaven
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever
Amen

Hymn - Praise, my soul, the King of heaven

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
To His feet thy tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like me His praise should sing?
Praise Him, praise Him,
praise Him, praise Him,
Praise the everlasting King.

Praise Him for His grace and favour
To our fathers in distress.
Praise Him still the same forever,
Slow to chide, and swift to bless.
Praise Him, praise Him,
praise Him, praise Him,
Glorious in His faithfulness.

Fatherlike He tends and spares us;
Well our feeble frame He Knows.
In His hands He gently bears us,
Rescues us from all our foes.
Praise Him, praise Him,
praise Him, praise Him,
Widely as His mercy goes.

Angels help us to adore Him;
Ye behold Him face to face;
Sun and moon, bow down before Him,
Dwellers all in time and space.
Praise Him, praise Him,
praise Him, praise Him,
Praise with us the God of grace.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Blessing

O God, we thank you for this earth, our home;
For the wide sky and the blessed sun,
For the salt sea and the running water,
For the everlasting hills
And the never-resting winds,
For trees and the common grass underfoot.
We thank you for our senses
By which we hear the songs of birds,
And see the splendour of the summer fields,
And taste of the autumn fruits,
And rejoice in the feel of the snow,
And smell the breath of the spring.
Grant us a heart wide open to all this beauty;
And save our souls from being so blind
That we pass unseeing
When even the common thornbush
Is aflame with your glory,
O God our creator,
Who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.

May the Maker's blessing be yours
encircling you round
above you, within you.

May the angels' blessing be yours
and the joy of the saints
to inspire you, to cherish you.

May the Son's blessing be yours
the wine and the water
the bread and the stories
to feed you, to remind you.

May the Spirit's blessing be yours
the wind, the fire
the still small voice
to comfort you, to disturb you.

And may my own blessing be yours
a blessing rooted in our common pilgrimage
the blessing of a friend.
Amen.

Many thanks to the people who contributed to the service

Revd Nick Bird - Welcome, blessing & homily
Andrew Wilson - Reading
Susan Wilson - Intercessions
Laudate music group
and David Marles for mixing the tracks
Ruth Lewis - for the Taize song 'Bless the Lord'
Everyone who contributed photos
Anna Lewis, Colin & Victoria Beale
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