

Sunday, 16 August 2020 Beckminster

Call to worship

May God be gracious to us and bless us, may he cause His face to shine on us, that your purpose may be known on earth, our saving power among all nations. Let the people praise you, let all the people praise you, O God.

STF 409

Let us build a house where love may dwell and all may safely live, a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive, Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace; here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

Chorus. All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true, where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew. Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace; here as one we claim the faith of Jesus.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word. Built of tears and cries and laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace, let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

God of all people, we come to worship you because you make us all one family, with different gifts and abilities, ages and experiences, backgrounds and insights. WE PRAISE YOU.

God of all people, we come to rejoice in your loving power which overcomes the barriers we build between ourselves. WE PRAISE YOU

God of all people, we come to celebrate together, to receive your forgiveness, to hear the good news, and to go in your name to proclaim your love. WE PRAISE YOU.

God of truth and mercy, we make our confession: We have not always maintained justice. We have not always done what is right. We have not always looked for your saving help'

We have often despised those who are different. We have refused a welcome to the stranger. We have mocked the devotions of others, and criticized their offerings and payers.

May we imitate the compassion and justice of Jesus, holding to the truth and offering ourselves to your transforming grace, May we learn to see Him in the humanity and faith of others, hearing the Spirit in their prayers and working with them to create a community where all belong.

Bible Readings:

Romans 11: 1 -2a, 29 – 32 read by Gordon Nicklin

Matthew 15: 21 – 28 read by George Tonks

Reflection

‘For All.’ Isaiah ch 56 v 1 ‘Maintain Justice and do what is right.’

Life is complicated. We have constantly to make judgement, and act on decisions we make, often on the spur of the moment, though sometimes we have a time to consider. We go out for a meal, there is a menu full of things we could eat, and we can’t have them all, so choice has to be made; or there is nothing we fancy, but we have to choose something. That doesn’t really matter, but sometimes it’s something very important, for us when we choose our careers if that’s possible, when we choose our partners, or through our wider connections we have to decide which person to employ in a position, who to give chance to, or who to make redundant. All these decisions affect others as well as ourselves.

We also are born into a group, a family, and it is there that we discover the wonder of belonging, of having people to love and be loved, to share life and experiences. As we grow, we discover that we belong to wider groups, our neighbourhood, our town, our county and country, and they become important. All this creates our culture and identity. That leads to our discovery of other cultures and identities, and then we move to making judgements and relationships beyond the very familiar, and that can lead to a richer life, or to conflict and discrimination.

We read a lesson from Romans. It features the dilemma Paul has found himself in. He was born into a strict Jewish family, and grew up as a strict Pharisee, embracing his community and proud of his faith and position as one of God’s chosen people. He loved and guarded his faith, and it led him to persecute a new and dangerous sect worshipping and witnessing to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. He saw them as a dangerous threat to his community, and embarked on a mission to persecute and destroy them. Then he met The Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, and everything changed. He became a disciple of Jesus. It took him a long time to sort out this change, and of course he became the great theologian of the New Testament, BUT he was haunted by his love for Judaism and its part in God’s plan, and the reconciliation of his old faith and the truth he had discovered in Jesus. This sort of dilemma happens when cultures clash. When people are afraid of loss in their communities, and are perplexed by differences in race, religion, and all aspects of belonging.

It is there in our New Testament lesson in Mathew’s Gospel. It is a passage that has bewildered Christians studying it. In it, Jesus is in the north of Palestine, where cultures come together. He is preaching the good news to His people, when a foreigner comes up asks Him to heal her tormented daughter. Jesus words are harsh, ‘I was sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, and to them alone.’ And ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ Could Jesus ever have said that!!! Or could it be how the Christians from whom this Gospel came, who are asserting the importance of their wish to link Christianity more closely to Judaism, the real fight going on in the early church as to whether Christian should also embrace Judaism, or is it a glimpse of Jesus’ humanity and his failure at that moment to realise the breadth of the Gospel. He listens to the woman’s response about the dogs eating the crumbs that fall, and He heals her daughter. Whatever this text means, it illustrates the way we often response to that which threatens where we

belong, and leads to barriers we erect between people, and the prejudice that is in all of us, as we seek to live in a complex world.

In the last months we have been made more aware of the prejudice in our culture, of the expressions of racism, and all sorts of forms of prejudice in our society, and the wider world. Incidents of police targeting black people without reason, the violence against black people on our streets, the drama on BBC 1 about the death of Anthony Walker which was so powerful shows the horror of it all, and the continuing of our failure to address the Windrush scandal, the failure of society to accept the testimony of young girls about sexual abuse in the Rochdale case, the failure of Governments in our colonial history, the failure to appease the Bengal famine in 1943, and on it goes.

We need to recognise the depth to which prejudice reaches. It links with our need to belong and be secure in that belonging, and it reaches out in the judgements we make each day. The true belonging is to the whole human race, to an inclusive rather than exclusive security. The deeper our

security of belonging, loving and being loved, enables us to open doors, welcome the other, and have the joy of discovering so much more about people whose lives we aren't familiar with. Our family has no limits. Christ died for me, and that must mean every human being without distinction, good or bad, near or far, of every nation, culture or religion, male and female. However, there is a bias in God's attitude to His people, it is for those who are outsiders, the vulnerable, the poor, the discarded, those who have no voice. As we are secure in God's love, our life, our discipleship is based on that too.

STF 251

Jesus Christ is waiting, waiting in the streets; no one is his neighbour, all alone he eats. Listen Lord Jesus, I am lonely too: make me, friend or stranger, fit to wait on you.

Jesus Christ is raging, raging in the streets, where injustice spirals and real hope retreats. Listen Lord Jesus, I am angry too: in the Kingdom's causes let me rage with you.

Jesus Christ is dancing, dancing in the streets, where each sign of hatred he, with love, defeats. Listen Lord Jesus, I should triumph too: where good conquers evil let me dance with you.

Offertory - Paul

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

We thank you gracious God for creating the heavens and earth, and making us in your own Image, that when we turned away from you, you sought to win us back, and sent Jesus Christ, to be the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, enduring the cross, and demonstrating His victory in the Resurrection. We thank you have created the church, for its long tradition of worship and service. We pray that we may be led by your Spirit to be faithful disciples in our generation, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We now offer our prayers for others

We pray for the needs of the world.....

We pray for the church.....

We pray for all in trouble or distress.....

We pray for ourselves in our need.....

Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **AMEN**

The Lord's Prayer

STF 416

There's a wideness in God's mercy like the wideness of the sea; there's a kindness in His justice which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind; and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.

But we make His love too narrow by false limits of our own; and we magnify His strictness with a zeal He will not own.

Benediction