

Service for Sunday 30th August 2020

Call to worship

God of love and mercy, we come to you as your people, seeking to know you more.
God of power, come amongst us, by your Spirit, that we might be transformed by our encounter with you.

Ever present God, may we go from this place, recognising you in every place and every moment. **Amen.**

Prayers

God of creation, Source of all being, the heavens declare your glory and the earth is your handiwork. For the diverse beauty of all you have made; we offer you our praise.

God of salvation, Eternal Word, you came amongst your people, and made yourself vulnerable entering into the risky business of human living; we offer you our praise.

God of life, Holy Spirit, you move in the church and in the world, calling the least and the lost into a deeper fellowship of love; we offer you our praise.

God of all grace, accept our praise, and help us to live as your people in the world. **Amen.**

Confession:

Let us call to mind all the times we have been less than we could or should have been; the times when we failed to do what God requires of us; the times when we said and did the wrong things; the times when we made plans which were not pleasing to God.

(short silence)

Let us remember that through God's grace we are loved; that through his grace we are forgiven; and that through his grace we are called to pick up our cross and follow Jesus.

Amen

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Hymn: STF 156 – From the breaking of the dawn

From the breaking of the dawn
to the setting of the sun

I will stand on every promise of your word.

Words of power strong to save
that will never pass away;

I will stand on every promise of your word.

For your covenant is sure,
and on this I am secure:

I can stand on every promise from your word.

When I stumble and I sin,
condemnation pressing in,

I will stand on every promise of your word.

You are faithful to forgive,
that in freedom I might live,

so I stand on every promise of your word.

Guilt to innocence restored;
you remember sins no more;

so I'll stand on every promise of your word.

When I'm faced with anguished choice
I will listen for your voice,
and I'll stand on every promise of your word.
Through this dark and troubled land,
you will guide me with your hand
as I stand on every promise of your word.
And you've promised to complete
every work begun in me,
so I'll stand on every promise of your word.

Hope that lifts me from despair,
love that casts out every fear
as I stand on every promise of your word.
Not forsaken, not alone,
for the Comforter has come,
and I stand on every promise of your word.
Grace sufficient, grace for me,
grace for all who will believe.
We will stand on every promise of your word.

Readings: Romans 12: 9 – 21 read by Phil Healey

John 16: 21 - 28 read by Ann Holt

Reflections

The Gospel reading from last Sunday told us that the disciples understood who Jesus was; at least for a moment. Interrogated by Jesus about the wider public's perception of his identity, the disciples said that Jesus was a prophet; and then later that he was more than a prophet too. They saw in him the anointed one of God, the one gifted with God's power, a power Jesus was then willing to turn over to his followers. We can only imagine the excitement when Jesus said: 'Whatever you bind is bound. Whatever you loosen is loosened'. This is incredible power; and this incredible power was being placed in disciples' hands. They felt that with that power, they could reshape the world. They must have been dazzled by the fact that theirs would be the generation that would bear witness to the fulfilment of so many of God's promises. They were convinced that God's anointed one would respond in a way that would transform the world and set things right. There was excitement that nothing would ever be the same from that moment forward. They felt the world was shifting under their feet.

Unfortunately, that sense of excitement was short-lived; they soon discovered that although the world was shifting, this was happening in a way they hadn't expected. The disciples quickly learnt that it wasn't enough to know who Jesus was; or to dream of a world transformed. Dreaming of that new world would require that their imaginations expand beyond their excitement about the power and influence they thought were within their grasp. "From that time on," Jesus started to explain that the Messiah would not be embraced but rejected, not crowned but executed, not empowered by might but weakened by affliction.

What a disappointment this must have been? What a baffling shift in expectations? Clearly, this was not what Peter had imagined when he dared to speak the truth about Jesus' identity. He spoke correctly though incompletely, for Peter began to seek to correct the Messiah about the nature and scope of his mission. I can imagine Peter's internal world falling apart. I can hear his words saying to Jesus: 'Listen, Jesus, this cannot be what God intends for you. There must be a different way. This is not what our deliverer ought to do. Suffering and dying is what we have all endured, prophet and ordinary person alike. You are supposed to be different. You are supposed to save us from all our enemies!'

Jesus' reproach was anything but subtle: "Get behind me, Satan!" In a matter of minutes Peter fell from the heights of recognition to the depths of rejection. Because Peter cannot imagine himself going into that direction, he tried to persuade Jesus not to go down that road either. In that way he was acting like the great deceiver: precisely because Peter is drawing Jesus away from the divinely ordained path that moves from suffering to the cross, from torture to shame.

This must have been a very painful moment for Peter; discovering that not only the way of suffering is the way of Jesus, but also that this was going to be his path and the path of all future generations of Jesus followers. The disciples were not just witnesses of Jesus' suffering but participants in it. They were called not just to talk about it; but to live it in their own bodies. That was what following Jesus looked like; it was a path that was lined with crosses and paved with suffering modelled on Jesus' passion. It was a matter of life and death for his followers as much as it was for Jesus.

Jesus concluded the conversation by reassuring them that suffering will not be the end; that the heavy and painful cross wouldn't be the end; but that Jesus would return and bring justice in his wake. Such justice is not merely the paying off of old debts or the settling of bitter scores. Instead, this judgment is a promise of deliverance from suffering and all that is wrong in our world. It is the promise of a new world and a new future in which justice blooms, a future in which the hungry are fed and the imprisoned are comforted as we read in Matthew 25:31-46.

We find ourselves in the same situation as these disciples who thought that following Jesus would give a short cut to heaven; to a new world that is free from suffering, challenges and illnesses. Jesus tells us as he told them then, that suffering and persecution and disapproving stares are part of what it is to follow Jesus. In fact, the kingdom is not something that will come at the end of everything, it breaks through our lives in great and small ways. This is what drives us into a hopeful future even when our present troubles are engulfing us. After all, Jesus walked this path before us. Jesus knew too well rejection and loathing. He has gone before us. Now, we will follow him in faith. The world we are called to be disciples is this one, we cannot speak to it with honesty and integrity without opposition which sometimes can cost us friends and family members.

In conclusion being able to follow Jesus requires us to move into the reality of what discipleship entails. Confessing that Jesus is the Messiah is only one step. Saying the words "Jesus is the Messiah" requires us to live a life that knows suffering and pain. This kind of life has a future and hope in the coming of the Lord, the one who was, is and will always be.

Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we come to you as the one who created the laws and offered grace in abundance.

Lord, we pray for our Christian brothers and sisters around the world,
We lift them to you as they seek to follow the commandments of your gospel and great commission,
May they be strengthened and emboldened for the mission you have called them to,
Cleanse and mould your church into the likeness of Christ.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Bring peace and safety to our world, in particular to the places of the world where laws have been leveraged for revenge and gain.

Open paths of reconciliation and heal the brokenness,
Repair the war-torn cities and countries and make a way for those who have been displaced to find a place to call home again.

We pray for the 65 million plus refugees around the world who are on their journey.
Lord, whose Son became a refugee and had no place to call his own; look with mercy on those who today are fleeing from danger,
Bless those who work to bring them relief.

Lord, bring healing and reconciliation to marriages and peace to those who have experienced broken relationships.
Lord, repair trust and build bridges of communication so love may flow.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Lord, teach us to love our neighbour,
In a moment of silence, we think of those who we would consider a neighbour and place them into your hands

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Lord, teach us to be quick to forgive and acknowledge our own mistakes.
Above all else, inspire us to live in the likeness of your Son Jesus Christ.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**. Amen.

Offertory Prayers

Hymn: STF 504 – May the mind of Christ my Saviour

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self-abasing,
This is victory.

Blessing

Go from this place inspired,
Go from this place renewed,
Go from this place with the Spirit of God alongside, within and all around you,
Go from this place, a child of the Living God. **Amen**