

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
8th Sunday after Trinity 2 August 2020

The service this morning and the comments are from Sheila. Intercessions sent from Richard.

Welcome everyone.

Wrestling with God

My name was Jacob

I wrestled with a man on the slopes of the hillside,
the danger of reprisal held me guiltily at bay;
desolate, I struggled, remembering God's promise;
I wrestled with a man till the breaking of day.

I wrestled with my self on the slopes of the hillside,
I struggled to wrench stature from the treachery of my past;
out of joint, unbeaten; my new-found strength appalled me;
I wrestled with my self till the dawn came at last.

I wrestled with my God on the slopes of the hillside,
I laid hold of his blessing; face to face, I feared to die;
naked then, I knew God, I knew, yet he preserved me,
and newly named I limped, 'Israel' blazed on the sky.

Lois Ainger © 1993 Stainer & Bell Ltd & The Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes (UK)

Our opening hymn is 'All people that on Earth do dwell', sung here at the Old Royal Naval College Chapel, Greenwich. Words appear on the screen. (The Music was originally developed in the mid sixteenth century in a psalter for use in the Calvinist churches of the city of Geneva, and originally intended to be used for Psalm 124. The English translation by William Kethe, a Scottish minister in exile in Geneva at that time was more closely associated with Psalm 100, which is the title the tune now bears.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xM6Ke4IKJM>



*On website of West
Concord Union Church*

Opening Prayer

Crowd-gatherer,
Beach Preacher,
Storyteller,
tell us stories.

Tell us stories that challenge and reform us,
for we are in serious need of reforming.

Our hearts are far from you,
and we are failing our neighbour at every turn.

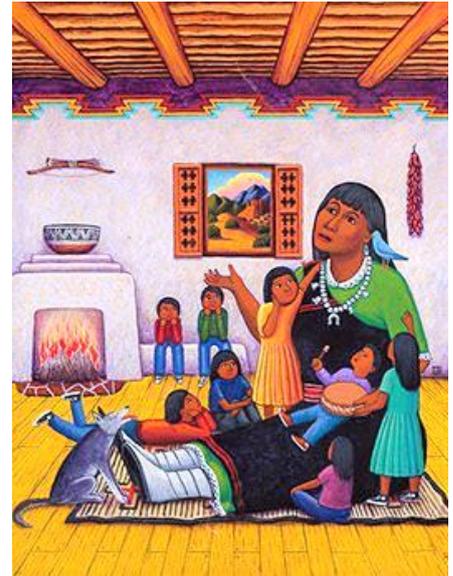
Remind us who we are, O God.
Remind us to whom we belong.

Tell us stories that
strengthen and sustain us,

We need to be reminded what it means
to love.

Lift up for us the stories of the one who loved sacrificially
to the point of death
and help us put into perspective the sacrifices we are asked to make
for the stranger in our midst.

Tell us stories that nourish us and produce in us a harvest of hope,
for we are hungry for hope in these trying times.
Shine the light of your truth into our darkness
with your stories, we pray,
and lead us into tomorrow with the reassurance that
no matter what
we belong to you.



Julie Gvillo is Commissioned Pastor

Prayers of penitence

Merciful God

For the things we have done that we regret
Forgive us

For the things we have failed to do that we regret
Forgive us

For all the times we have acted without love
Forgive us

For the times we have reacted without thought
Forgive us

For the times we have failed to forgive
Forgive us

God of all time forgive us and enable us to lay down our burden of regret.
Amen

Reading

The OT reading continues the stories of the patriarchs and in the Gospel this evening we have the feeding of the five thousand.

Jacob returns home

Today we have our final story about Jacob in which he again encounters God by night, but this time it is not a dream with a word of assurance, but a prolonged struggle. The first meeting had taken place as he fled from the wrath of his brother Esau. Now Jacob prepares to return to meet Esau, unsure of his reception.

Genesis 32:22-31

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome."

²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip.

New International Version

Reflection

Jacob makes elaborate preparations to meet his brother. The story does not say that he is sorry for the way he cheated Esau all those years ago nor that he is trusting God who had promised to bless him and to bring him home. Instead we read of the plans Jacob makes, first sending messengers to announce his arrival, then praying for protection before organising the gift of many animals to go before him and his family. (Genesis 32:3-21)

Then we have the pivotal story of a stranger meeting him in the dark, of an even wrestling match that only ends with a below-the-belt injury and of a significant conversation and change of name. Jacob, the deceiver, the cheater, when in pain and recognising his defeat will not let go until he receives a blessing. Before this is given, he receives a new name, a new identity, no longer the deceiver Jacob but Israel, the one who struggled with God. Only then can he receive the gift of blessing, but to know God's name or to see his face is not permitted. The mystery and hiddenness of God is not to be controlled or understood by humans.

Though Jacob has a new name and a limp, he is still fearful and cautious as he approaches Esau and his 400 men, bowing low before him with his family spread out behind him but 'Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him: he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him.' (Gen 33:4) Did Jesus remember this when he spoke of the father running to meet his returning prodigal son? (Luke 15:20) Jacob introduces his family and presses Esau to accept the gift of livestock for he says, 'for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favourably.' (Gen 33:10) Esau has accepted Jacob and forgiven him which for Jacob is like seeing God, receiving God's blessing.

This story illustrates for us that receiving blessing, forgiveness, a new identity from God does not mean a life without struggle – the limp. Nor does it mean that we can continue to hold grudges and resentment against others but seek to forgive and be reconciled. Paul writes about this in 2 Corinthians 5:16-21. The assurance of being a new creation in Christ, that God has reconciled us to himself, must lead us to seek reconciliation with others. Yet this new creation is not without difficulties, as he indicates earlier in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, acknowledging that he suffers in order that the life of Jesus may be seen in him. Another New Testament passage takes up the theme of seeing (or not seeing) the face of God and being reconciled with our brothers and sisters:

'No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us..... Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers and sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 John 4:12, 20-21, NRSV)

I have taken these ideas linking the various New Testament passages from Walter Bruggemann's Interpretation commentary on Genesis (which Chris Bryan gave me in January). I will conclude with his final remarks on this passage.

'What does it mean to be children and heirs of that man – crippled and blessed, bowed down and forgiven? More than one answer will be given. But all the answers must pass through the prism of the Crucified One. He is the one who knows fully about limping and blessing, about bowing down and forgiving.' (Bruggemann, 1982, p273-4)

Song

The God of Abraham praise

Words by Thomas Olivers, based on a Jewish doxology. Traditional Hebrew melody; adapted by Meyer Lyon. This hymn is often sung triumphantly, but here there is no singing, and the music is played more reflectively. The words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laYcKwVxQU>

Creed

I believe in God who is my father and mother,
master of dreams and reality,
giver of life and love,
source of diversity, change, and creation.
Who travels with me;
walking by my side no matter where I go
or who I am or who I become.

I believe in Jesus who is my friend and saviour.
Who came to earth as a baby,
joining me and all humankind in a journey through life and death,
leading us by the hand,
carrying us when we fail,
always and ever with us until we all reach a new creation.

I believe in the Holy Spirit who is the inspiration and guide on my way.
Who comes for me no matter where I am or how long it takes.
Who reaches out and gathers me in no matter what I do.
Who fills my heart and soul and mind with God's presence,
assuring me that I am loved and never alone.

Lisa Frenz 2012

Intercessions (thank you Richard))

As Jacob wrestled with God,
and God blessed Jacob,
so we pray for the blessing of God
on others and on ourselves,
as we wrestle with doubts and difficulties
and witness the weary wrestling of others.

When we witness a friend wrestling
with the grief of bereavement,
we pray for the blessing of your presence
in the turmoil of their feelings...

When we witness a colleague wrestling
with the fear of expected redundancy,
we pray for the blessing of your strength
to carry them through the dark times ahead...

When we witness an infected nurse wrestling
with the very disease they were alleviating in others,
we pray for the blessing of your hope
to hold them under the shadow of your wing...

As we witness our entire nation wrestling
with the rancour over Brexit,
we pray for the blessing of wise counsel
to bring a just and workable way ahead...

As we witness our own selves wrestling
with the contradictions and confusions of the human condition,
we pray for the blessing of untiring compassion
that we might contribute to the answers to these prayers.

We offer these prayers in the name of Christ who, through his wrestling in the wilderness
and in the garden of Gethsemane, brought us great blessings. Amen.

The Peace

If alone, smile and hug yourself (God does). If otherwise, share the Peace
as appropriate.

A short Spiritual Communion

The Book of Common Prayer reminds us that if we offer ourselves in
penitence and faith, giving thanks for the redemption won by Christ
crucified, we may truly 'eat and drink the Body and Blood of our Saviour Christ', even when
we cannot receive the sacrament physically in ourselves.

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

O God,
help me to trust you,
help me to know that you are with me,
help me to believe that nothing
can separate me from your love
revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

An offertory prayer

We may not be in church, but we can still offer ourselves and our talents to God.

Blessed are you, God and creator of the universe,
as we offer you our activities, thanksgivings and our life.



We present ourselves, and our world, as we are and as you can make us,
for everything in heaven and on earth is yours,
and of your own do we give you. Blessed be God for ever.

As we prepare for communion you might like to access 'The Table of the Lord', words by Richard, music by Nigel and sung by the Langford Singers. The words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCZmrj81t8o&feature=youtu.be>



Because there is no Breaking and Sharing we can have only Spiritual Communion with Christ. I'm sure you can find a way to use a few minutes of silence or conversation to enjoy this, and make it a sacramental moment.

Giving thanks for Christ's death and resurrection you may wish to say

Thanks be to you, Lord Jesus Christ,
for all the benefits you have given me,
for all the pains and insults you have borne for me.
Since I cannot now receive you sacramentally,
I ask you to come spiritually into my heart.
O most merciful redeemer, friend and brother,
may I know you more clearly,
love you more dearly,
and follow you more nearly, day by day. Amen.
(after the Prayer of St Richard of Chichester)

Post Communion Prayer

Go before us, Lord, in all we do
with your most gracious favour,
and guide us with your continual help,
that in all our works
begun, continued and ended in you,
we may glorify your holy name,
and finally by your mercy receive everlasting life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sending out

We thank you, God,
for calling each of us to live in holiness and love.
Help us to embrace this calling with faith,
and share your love with all.

Blessing

May the Lord bless us and keep us;
the Lord make his face shine on us,
and be gracious to us;
the Lord turn his face towards us
and give us peace;
Amen

Our closing song is 'Great is thy faithfulness.' Apparently from Mont-St Michel. Words are on the screen. Click on pink icon bottom left of picture to start.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0580km3>



This painting is by Paul Gauguin in 1888: 'Vision after the Sermon (Jacob wrestling with an Angel)', painted when he was living in Brittany.

The painting is divided into two parts by the large diagonal tree-trunk, an arrangement taken from Japanese woodcuts. The foreground is filled by group of women, dressed in traditional Breton costumes, as they return from the Mass. The background depicts Jacob's battle with the angel.

Gauguin suggests that the faith of these women enabled them to see miraculous events of the past as vividly as if they were occurring before them.

Coffee Break

Hedgehog

Last Thursday night, I was in the garden at about 10.00, doing a few Tai Chi exercises. I was rather in absorbed in 'diagonal flying' when I heard a rustling and a snuffling, about a foot away. There was just enough light to see two hedgehogs, on the edge of a pile of leaves and twigs I had left to (hopefully) build up the garden population of mini-beasts. They were completely unfazed by my, and later Richard's, presence, and we sat beside them for about half an hour as they rooted around with extreme concentration, snuffling and snorting as they went. How delightful that we are living alongside these unassuming creatures.

Betsy

The Hedgehog

The hedgehog is a curious beast:
On slugs and snails he likes to feast,
And can be prickly, to say the least.

He far prefers the dark to light,
He snuffles in the leaves at night,
And when he startled, curls up tight.

He hibernates in winter's freeze
In little dens, or holes in trees,
Along with his attendant fleas.

Although his life seems very odd,
The path that each hedgehog has trod
Remains a path well-known to God.

Richard



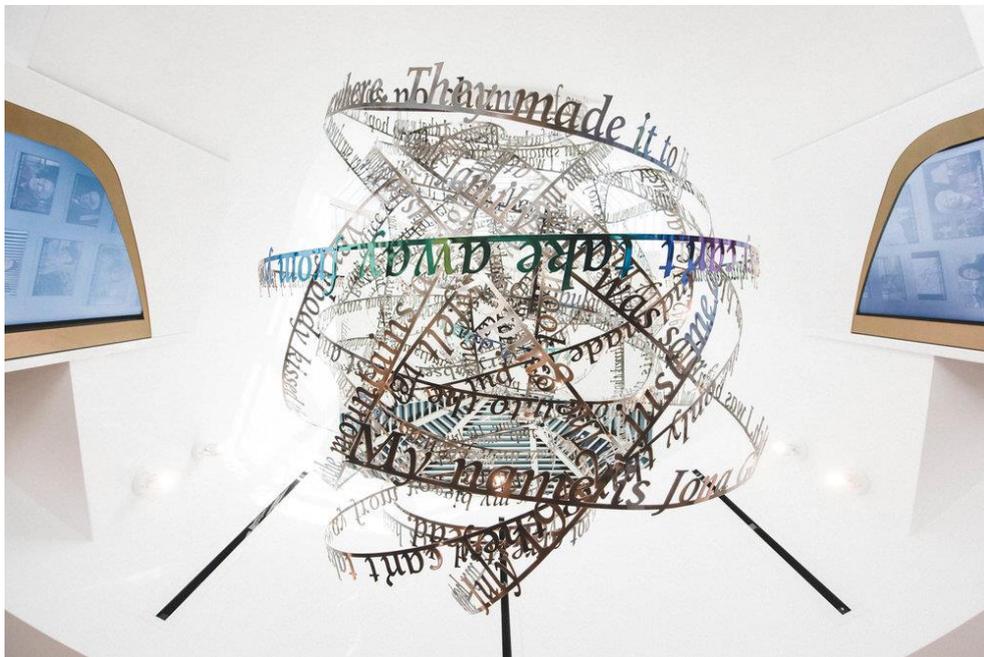
St Olaf's Day

July 29 was St Olaf's Day. Olaf, originally a pagan, was converted to Christianity whilst in Normandy. He returned to Norway determined to unite the country under his rule and to impose Christianity upon it, with his axe if necessary. His style of rule did not go down well with everyone, and Olaf was forced to flee the country. He was killed trying to stage a return to power at the battle of Stiklestad in 1030. Reported miracles at his tomb encouraged pilgrims, and he was canonised first locally, then formally by Pope Alexander III in 1164. As well as being one of our Parish's patron saints, he is the patron saint of Norway and the Faroe islands.

Commemoration

Doreen has asked that we commemorate that it is 21 years ago this Saturday that Mike died, and also to remember all other members of the Parish who have passed on in the intervening years.

Almighty and eternal God,
from whose love in Christ we cannot be parted,
either by death or life:
hear our prayers and thanksgivings
for all whom we remember this day;
fulfil in them the purpose of your love;
and bring us all, with them, to your eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen



'Remembering our Father's words' Stainless steel sculpture 2018 by Nicola Antony, and a tribute to the story of Jona Goldrich, a survivor of the holocaust who escaped from Poland and finally settled in Israel.

The sculptural form is similar to that of memory: you can delve into it at any point, but one part of the story may obscure another.

Please scroll down for night prayer

Night Prayer

If you are able to do so, you might wish to light a candle near a window.



Feeding and Fragments

Our service this evening is based around the feeding of five thousand people with five loaves and two fish (and without any Deliveroo in sight!) This is the only miracle of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels.

You might like to begin this time of reflection with the hymn 'O for a closer walk with God', sung quietly to images from the countryside. Words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-wWVpafJX8A>

Opening Prayer

God of our hopes and dreams,
we are empty, and long to be filled;
we are hungry, and long to be fed;
we are lost, and long to be found.
Gather us into your love,
and pick up the pieces of our lives,
just as Jesus gathered up the fragments
of the five loaves and two fish
that remained after feeding the five thousand.
Call us anew to eat our fill
and to find our true nourishment in Jesus,
the bread of heaven.

Prayer of Confession

We come believing in our emptiness,
believing that we will never have enough,
believing that what we have is unworthy.

We come fearful of sharing,
fearful of losing our tenuous grip on security,
fearful of touching and knowing the pain of others.

We come overwhelmed by the hunger,
overwhelmed by the suffering of children near and far,
overwhelmed by the endless tales of senseless violence, greed, and death.

We come aching from the weight of the responsibility,
aching from the chilling challenge of knowing our abundance,
aching from the gnawing awareness that we have much to share.

We come clinging to our meagre lunches;
bless them, and us.
break them, and us.
share them, and us.

(written by Katherine Hawker, on Liturgy Outside. <http://liturgyoutside.net/>)

Reading

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (New International Version) Matthew 14: 13-21

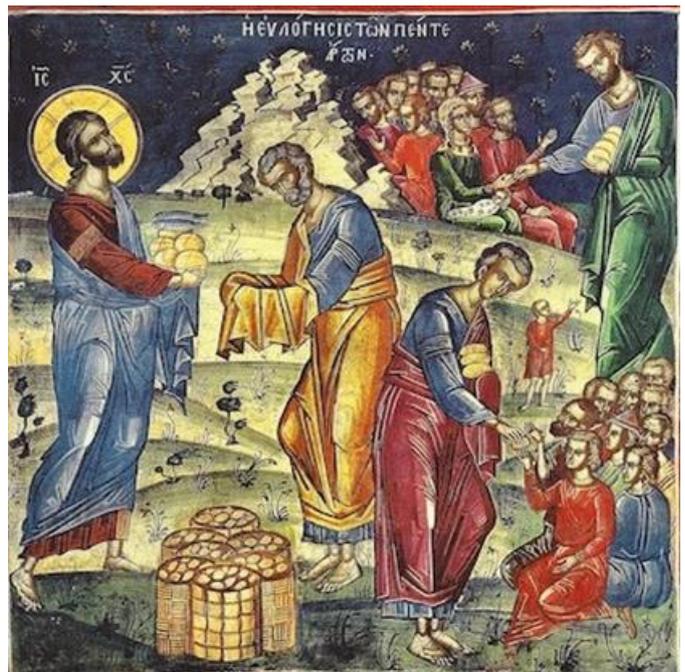
¹³ When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. ¹⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

¹⁵ As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food."

¹⁶ Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat."

¹⁷ "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered.

¹⁸ "Bring them here to me," he said. ¹⁹ And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. ²⁰ They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. ²¹ The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.



*Greek Orthodox icon 16th Century
from Mount Athos*

Now we have 'Break thou the Bread of Life', sung by a group from St Kitts, in the West Indies, with a true Caribbean flavour!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zv0Kh5UK4q4>

Reflection

This Evening's reflection is shortened and adapted from an address by Revd Kate Tuckett, of Holy Trinity, South Wimbledon.

Jesus feeding 5000 people is one of those miracles we hear about a lot. It defies comprehension and it calls on us to believe that something inexplicable happened. But whether or not Jesus molecularly multiplied the bread and fish, or whether the crowds opened up their stingy lunchboxes and shared their sandwiches and their bags of crisps with their neighbours, more significant is what the disciples must have learned – namely that there was more available to them than what they themselves were bringing to the table.

5000 people is a lot of people. It's not a surprise that the disciples wanted them to go away and fend for themselves. They have nothing but five loaves and a couple of fish. But Jesus says 'I can work with that'. There's not only enough to feed all of them. There's more than enough.

It is easy to contrast the smallness of our own offering, and the insignificance of our abilities or the inadequacy of our treasure against the greatness of whatever need we face, and wonder if they could ever be worthy to be brought before God.

And yet every parable about God's kingdom, every teaching Jesus ever had about how God creates something glorious starts with something small. Never once did Jesus say the kingdom of heaven is like a FTSE 100 company full of shiny happy shareholders. It's always something small, over-looked, insignificant, organic – these are the things that reveal the glory of God.

And when received with open hands and with hungry hearts, the signs and wonders of Jesus never cease. This is God who never runs out of holy things. The God who multiplied wine at a wedding, turned five loaves of bread and a couple of fish into lunch to feed five thousand with baskets of leftovers, who like a shepherd, leaves his flock in search of a single lamb.

We have the choice, every day, to join in the revelry, to share the picnic, drink the wine of underserved grace. To do this we need to know our hunger, our inadequacy, that we cannot do it by ourselves. We need one another, and we need God.

Our Faith

I believe in God,
the giver of grain and bread,
and in Jesus Christ,
the bread of life broken for us,

and in the Holy Spirit,
God's nourishing power in every grain and loaf.

I believe that Christ is to be leaven in us,
so that we may offer the bread of life
to the hungers of every human heart.

(This creed was written by Alvin Brightbill (adapted), and posted on the Long Green Valley Church of the Brethren website. <http://rockhay.tripod.com/>)

Intercessions

We pray for those who are physically hungry—whose stomachs are empty.
We think especially of the people who are facing critical food shortages;
who are suffering the effects of malnutrition and starvation;
and watching helplessly as loved ones die.

Lord, in Your mercy...

We pray for those who are empty emotionally—
who are lonely and long for companionship and love,
who are caught in the grip of depression,
or overwhelmed with grief.

Lord, in Your mercy...

We pray for those who are spiritually empty—
who are troubled, but don't know where to turn;
who long for purpose and meaning, but don't know where to look;
who need You, but do not yet know You.

Lord, in Your mercy...

God, we praise You for Your abundant gifts in our lives.
Pour out Your Spirit on us as well.
Fill us with Your compassion and love,
so that we would willingly share some of our abundance
with those who have need.

Lord, in Your mercy, open Your hand.
Pour out Your Spirit, so that we may be filled.

Christine Longhurst

Song

This is a Taizé chant: Jesus Christ, Bread of Life. The verse is repeated five times.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPRtFg9aFA>

Jesus Christ, Bread of Life,
Those who come to you will not hunger.
Jesus Christ, Risen Lord,
Those who trust in you will not thirst.

Closing prayers

Dear God,
Remind me to
share
whatever
is in my basket
today.
You will do the rest.
Amen.
(*Revd Karla Miller revgalsblogpals.org*)

St Olaf's Day

Olaf had a vision of how his country should be governed and the tenacity to see it through, even though it cost him his life.

Lord God
We thank you for the life of St Olaf, and his quest to develop and maintain Norway as a Christian country. As we have seen in our readings about Jacob, you are still able to use the imperfect nature of humankind.

We pray for all the churches who bear Olaf's name and their congregations, many of whom will be unable to hold a Patronal Festival in their churches this year.

May you be able to use us, despite our human failings to advance your kingdom.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The peace of God
be over me to shelter me,
under me to uphold me,
about me to protect me,
behind me to direct me,
ever with me to save me.

The peace of all peace
be mine this night
in the name of the Father,
and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

*We bring worship to a close with Bee on her flute playing Come Holy Ghost our souls inspire
The words are below after notes on the writer and translator.*

<https://www.parishofcentralexeter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Come-Holy-Ghost-Converted-2.mp3>



Attributed to Rabanus Maurus

Rabanus Maurus (c. 776-856 and picture) became Abbot at the Benedictine Abbey of Fulda in 822 and in 847, archbishop of Mainz.

It was translated into English by John Cosin, a native of Norwich, and scholar of Caius College, Cambridge; Prebend of Durham, 1624; Rector of Branspeth, 1626; in 1660, Dean and then Bishop of Durham. His 'Collection of Private Devotions for the Hours of Prayer,' much offended the Puritans, who styled it 'a book of Cozening Devotions.'

Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
and lighten with celestial fire.
Thou the anointing Spirit art,
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart.

Thy blessed unction from above
is comfort, life, and fire of love.
Enable with perpetual light
the dullness of our blinded sight.

Anoint and cheer our soiled face
with the abundance of thy grace.
Keep far from foes, give peace at home:
where thou art guide, no ill can come.

Teach us to know the Father, Son,
and thee, of both, to be but One,
that through the ages all along,
this may be our endless song:

Praise to thy eternal merit,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Thanks

*Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these services:
Especially to Sheila for the morning reflection, Richard for the intercessions, Richard, Betsy
and Doreen for Coffee Break. Other material taken or developed from various websites and
blogs is normally identified in the text.*

