

Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
12th Sunday after Trinity 30 August 2020



Hold fast to what is Good

Welcome everyone.

In our service this morning we continue in Paul's letter to the Romans, with reflections from Sheila, and then in Matthew with thoughts from Chris Bryan for Night Prayer. Intercessions are from Jessica.

We begin our service this morning with 'Jubilate' a well-known song, based on Psalm 100. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nukqkr29DP8>

Affirmation.

Another psalm, this time Psalm 118, lies behind these opening words.

Though we have known hardship and pain,
though life has not always turned out as we had hoped,
we will stand here and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

Though life becomes more complex,
the deepest questions remain unanswered,
and the mystery of faith deepens, we will say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

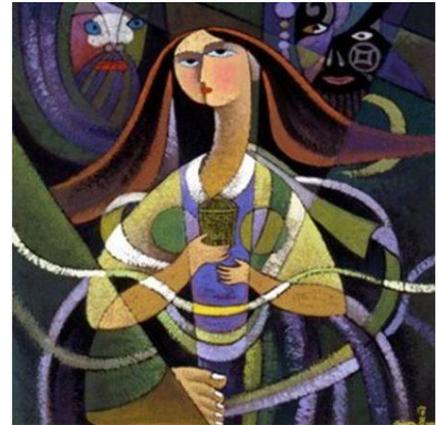
And though the pain of the world
often seems more than we can bear or address,
we will stand firm in our faith and say:

God's steadfast love endures for ever!

(written by Ann Siddall, and posted on the website of the Stillpoint Spirituality Centre. <http://www.stillpointsa.org.au/>)

Confession

Transforming, renewing, life-shaping God,
through Paul you challenge us to do many things:
Paul says: 'Let love be genuine;
hate what is evil,
hold fast to what is good;
love one another with mutual affection;
outdo one another in showing honour.
Do not lag in zeal,
be ardent in spirit,
serve the Lord.'



We do our best. We really do.
And sometimes we succeed,
but sometimes we fall short.
Which is why we pray
that in your grace and mercy,
we take this chance
to learn and come round at it again.
Help us God! Forgive us God!

God is at work in us,
renewing our minds and hearts,
transforming our lives.

Through grace and love God forgives us,
picks us back up,
and leads us back out for another try.
We are forgiven, we are loved, we are renewed!
Thanks be to God! Amen.

(Adapted from worshipofferings.blogspot.com)

Hymn: 'Put peace into each other's hands' by Fred Kaan, sung during lockdown by a virtual choir from Victoria Methodist Church, Bristol. Words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpWAq5XhB3w>



Reading

Romans 12:9-21

Love one another

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (*New Revised Standard Version*)

Reflection

Paul is practical and pastoral. Following the challenge last week to respond to God's great love and mercy with our lives offered to God and our minds renewed, he now gives some general words of exhortation - encouragement and commands. These focus on the relationships between the members of the different small house churches in Rome, as there are divisions which he discusses in more details in chapters 14 and 15. He wants to show how love – the *agape* – *self-giving love* that Jesus showed, and commanded his followers to do likewise, may be worked out in practise. He knows that these principles – where love is sincere and not a pretence - can transform relationships and lead to 'the formation of communities of love and justice that participate in God's mission in the world.'

Those of us who have been Christians for many years may feel that we know how we should live as Christians – that we should 'love one another' – but what does that love mean particularly at this time of a global pandemic? Various exhortations that Paul gives us here furnish challenges for us.

Weep with those who weep. When the rising death toll began to spread across the world and people started the 'blame game' the only real response at first was one of *lament*. To indeed pour out our grief at all the suffering – for the individuals who have died and their families, for the inequalities in our society and across the world that have been highlighted and will increase, for all that is wrong in the world that this pandemic has brought to the fore.

Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. This calls for *patience* which for activists, like myself, is difficult. The "waiting and not knowing" must be endured while trying to maintain faith in God who gives new life and who calls us to be signs of that new

life. However, 'persevering in prayer' and 'rejoicing in hope' should help towards being patient.

In the *CMS Prayerlines* a couple working in Madagascar began a reflection with a quote from a George Herbert poem *Bitter-Sweet* which ends "All my sour-sweet days/I will lament and love." As they lamented the human cost of the pandemic they wrote 'in our impotence we watch and wait and lift those affected to the Lord.' Yet they could see sweetness in their situation as well, for example appreciating nature, and less activity enabling them to get to know their neighbours better. They posed these two questions "What can we do to show our love for people here? How can lament overflow into love?" Unable to perform the ministry they expected what could they do but bring the situation to God - and they encouraged us to do the same. Since writing this piece they have had to return to the UK.

Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Here we come to the practical aspect of doing what we can. Throughout history, Christians have been pioneers in caring for others, in providing healthcare and education. It is one feature which distinguished communities of believers from their contemporary societies, in the love they showed to each other and to those beyond their communities. This was documented in a 1996 book *The Rise of Christianity* by Rodney Stark showing how the way Christians showed compassion by nursing the sick during the plagues of the 170s and 250s, contributed to the spread of the faith. Tom Wright (in *God and the Pandemic*, 2020) quotes this and then mentions how the 'emperor Julian, in the late 4th century, complained that the Christians were much better at looking after the sick, and for that matter the poor, than the ordinary non-Christian population.' Though life is very different today, the challenge is the same not only to care for the poor but also to critique a society which has such inequalities.

Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. We can only show such love when we are filled with the spirit, when our love of God for all that he has done and given to us has not dimmed, and when we are thankful and dependent on God.

I find one of the collects for the daily *Common Worship Morning Prayer* – short prayers which gather our thoughts at the end of morning prayer - is both memorable and appropriate to conclude with today.

*Eternal God and Father,
you create us by your power and redeem us by your love,
guide and strengthen us by your Spirit,
that we may give ourselves in love and service
to one another and to you;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Song

'Let us praise God together'. The version here is music only but the words are on the screen. I think the music improves after the first verse!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ka3OaZsCX0>

Creed

We believe in Jesus Christ who,
though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.

And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

(From Philippians 2:5-11)

Intercessions *(thank you Jess)*

As members of God's family, let us pray to our heavenly Father:

Dear Lord, we pray today and always for your blessing on every group of Christians worshipping today all over the world, especially for those who pay a heavy price for their faith, who daily experience hostility from their governments, employers and neighbours or who have to keep their faith secret. We pray for your church and ask that it may always provide a solid foundation on which we can anchor our lives.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, you created us to be stewards of your creation but with the free will you gave us we are chopping down forests, polluting the air, poisoning the waters, destroying the places where animals live and pursuing them to extinction. Help us to change our ways, so that we look after this wonderful world and make it the way you want it to be.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.



Merciful God, we pray for the sick throughout the world, not only those who have contracted covid19; we pray for the lonely and distressed, especially for those tormented by fear arising from the pandemic. We pray for healing and wholeness in their lives and in ours. Bring comfort to those grieving loved ones who have died and peace to those fearful and uncertain as the virus continues to evolve and spread. We also pray for governments and authorities who are trying to develop strategies to contain and deal with the epidemic and those continually on the front line to deal with the sick and troubled, who may be risking their own mental and physical health.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Dear Lord, at this particular time, give our own government discernment and right-thinking when considering the future of our children, and support families and children as we come to the beginning of a new school year.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Everlasting God, we thank you for the gift of your Son and we thank you that your Son gave to Peter, the disciple who is so like so many of us in the way he behaves and what he says, the keys to the kingdom. It helps, in time of trouble, to know that we can get things wrong or be too outspoken and still be loved.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Faithful God, forgive us when we only turn to you when things trouble us, when we forget to thank you for your blessings and bounty. Help us to recognise all the wonderful things in your world for which we should be grateful and send us out into the coming week ready to show our gratitude in all we do and say.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(Developed from website of the Anglican Chaplaincy, Costa Blanca.)

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 Taizé chant 'In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, sung by members of St David's choir plus friends.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9XLM7tA2Nxq&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

God of all creation,
in Christ we are reconciled,
and so we ask for your uniting Spirit
to help us to overcome all our divisions
that we may live in peace.



Sending out

In living for others, we find life.
In loving others, we find the love of God.
In seeking justice, we find and create peace.
In finding Jesus, we find the example of how we are to live.

Go, loving Jesus,
loving your neighbour as yourself,
and live into the way of Christ.
(*Rev-o-lution.org*)

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 'Longing for light'. Words are on the screen.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caA4sIXkD44>

Scroll down for Coffee Break

Coffee Break

31 August: Commemoration of St Aidan of Lindisfarne.



You may well have joined the many who have crossed the causeway that links Northumberland to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne. This is where Aidan founded a monastery as his base to restore Christianity to the kingdom of Northumbria.

Probably born in Ireland he became a monk at Iona. The monastery on Iona, founded by St Columba, was also the home in exile of a young noble from Northumbria, Oswald, who had become a Christian. In 634 Oswald was able to gain the throne of Northumbria and was determined to restore his kingdom to Christianity, so asked for missionaries from Iona. After a poor start with the man they sent, Colman, who alienated too many people, Aidan found himself the man on the spot.

Aidan chose Lindisfarne as his base as it was close to the royal capital of Bamburgh. He became a successful and well-loved evangelist, founding churches, schools and monasteries throughout Northumbria, and gained a reputation of his charity to the less fortunate especially helping to pay for the freedom of slaves.

Aidan died on 31st August 651, but the work of his monastery grew under his successors, notably St Cuthbert, and became famous for its work on illuminated manuscripts, the most well-known being the Lindisfarne Gospels.

Helen Evans made the crossing to Lindisfarne in 2009, and like many others the experience left a mark. This is her poem.

Night Crossing

The causeway's unlit,
the tide's an hour gone

and there's nobody here
to illuminate

the salt-worn poles
of the Pilgrims' Way

or to prove
that the tarmac goes on.



Scroll down for Night Prayer

Night Prayer

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



Take up your cross and follow me.

Opening thoughts

"Lord, I can't go on," he said. "I have too heavy a cross to bear." The Lord replied, "My son, if you can't bear its weight, just place your cross inside this room. Then, open that other door and pick out any cross you wish."

The man was filled with relief. "Thank you, Lord," he sighed, and he did as he was told. Upon entering the other door, he saw many crosses, some so large the tops were not visible.

Then, he spotted a tiny cross leaning against a far wall. "I'd like that one, Lord," he whispered. The Lord replied, "My son, that is the cross you just brought in."

(Author unknown. On scrapbook.com)

Prayer of penitence

O God, save me from myself, save me from myself;
this frivolous self which plays with your creation,
this vain self which is clever about your creation,
this masterful self which exploits your creation,
this lazy self which soothes itself with your creation;

this self which throws the thick shadow of its own purposes and desires
in every direction in which I try to look,
so that I cannot see what it is that you, my Lord and God,
are showing me.

Teach me to stand out of my own light,
and let your daylight shine.

(Austin Farrer, 1904–1968, English Anglican scholar)

We now have the song: 'Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord' Words appear on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=egPS5aZZHrg>

Reading Matthew 16: 21-28

Jesus Predicts His Death

21 From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.

22 Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.

28 "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

Reflection

This morning's gospel belongs very closely with the gospel story we heard last week. Last week, you may remember, we heard Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" and Peter's response—what we sometimes call his "confession": "You are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God". To which confession Our Lord said, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven." So far, one might say, so good! But what does it *mean* to be God's anointed? What does it *mean* to be Son of God? This, the evangelist tells us, is what Jesus now proceeded to show the disciples. It would *not* be the triumphal progress for which I dare say they were hoping—I know it's what I would have been hoping for! No, it would be something quite contrary to that.

"From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."

Peter, very understandably, is appalled by this.

“And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, ‘God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you. ’But he turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.’”

This is a terrible moment. No one else (other than Satan himself) is called “Satan” in the entire gospel narrative: none of those we might think of as its “villains” —not Caiaphas, nor Pilate, nor even the traitor Judas. For Peter alone is reserved the title “Satan”— “Adversary”— for that is what the Hebrew word *satan* means. And indeed, Jesus’ “Get behind me, Satan!” must put us in mind of the “Away with you Satan!” with which he earlier dismissed his adversary at the time of his being tested in the wilderness, at the beginning of his ministry (Matt. 4.10).

Poor Peter! In almost no time at all, it seems, he has gone (as we say) from hero to zero. “Stumbling block”! The Greek word is *skandalon*, whence we get our English “scandal”. It is a very strong word indeed, and means “trap” or “snare”. So Peter, who had earlier been told that he was the “rock” upon which the church would be built, the church that would be stronger than the gates of Hades—that is, stronger than death—is now told that he is also another kind of rock—a rock that gets in the way and trips you up. Faced with what Paul would call “the stumbling block” of the cross (1 Cor. 1.23) Peter has *himself* become a stumbling block! What on earth has he done to merit this terrible rebuke?

It is not so much that the ways of God are inscrutable, and therefore beyond Peter. Of course they are that, but we must not use that as an excuse to avoid what is actually quite straightforward—as straightforward in its way as the prophet Micah’s, “He has told you what is good— and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6.8). The straightforward essence here is that the way of God’s son, God’s anointed cannot be a way of triumph unaccompanied by pain, because (as Jesus pointed out to Satan in the episode that we call “the Temptation” [Matt. 4.1-11) it is the way of obedience to God, which is to say, the way of love. In this present world that means a way of pain, greater or lesser. As C. S. Lewis said, “The only place outside of heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell.” Jesus’ love is perfect, and it will bring him to his cross. And he knows it.

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.’”

Those who of us who want to follow Jesus—and I stress, as does the evangelist’s Greek, “*want to (thelei)*”: for it is always a matter of our free choice—those of us who want to take that path must do our feeble best to emulate such love in our own lives, doing what we can to take up and bear gracefully whatever “cross” is laid upon us, always remembering that the essence of true humanity is, as the old play has it, to “love thyself last” (Shakespeare and Massinger, *Henry VIII* III.ii.521).

That is what it means to follow Jesus. That is why, when Jesus says, “get behind me” to Peter he is actually assigning him the place where we all need to be—in truth, the only place where we *can* be with any degree of either realism or safety: *behind Jesus*. And as close behind him as we can get! Then, when he comes in the glory of his Father to *face* us as our judge, we may by his grace be able to raise our faces to his and look into his eyes. God grant us that! Amen.

Reflective song

We now have a song: ‘Take up thy cross, the Saviour said’. The original poem was written by Charles William Everest when 19 years old, and published in 1833. He later became an Episcopal priest. This setting is based on the hymn tune, “Distress,” set by Larry Shackley. The words appear on the screen, accompanied by pictures. Rather than try to sing along with an unfamiliar tune, this works well as a meditative piece.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8cXv_yLfv4

Prayer

Almighty God,
by your Holy Spirit
you have made us one with your saints
in heaven and on earth:
Help us to see your presence
burning in the hearts of others;
grant that we may be united
in a fellowship of love and prayer;

give us the courage to pick up our cross
and respond to the needs of the world,
give us the stamina to follow you,
to be your hands and heart in the world;
enable us to witness to your grace and mercy.
We pray all this through the love your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

(written by Terri, and posted on RevGalBlogPals.)

Creed

As followers of Jesus,
the one we name as the Messiah
we remember his story.
Born of the young woman Mary,
raised in a backwater town,
he came out to share your vision for the world.

He modelled your Kingdom,
lived by its values,
and in doing so enraged those with power.

Knowing what was to come,
he promised that we would not be left orphaned;
that an Advocate, the Holy Spirit
would be there to sustain us always.

Then he was arrested, tried, convicted, executed.
But the story was not over.
You, God of power in weakness,
you raised him from death
and he returned to breathe hope and life
into his fear-filled followers,
into us.

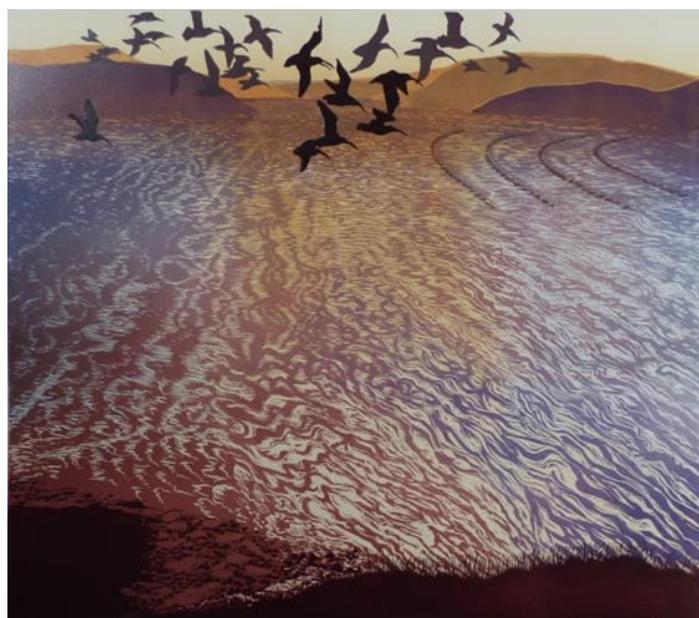
(Worshipofferings.org)

Meditation and prayer

This prayer was written by Wang Weifan, (1927-2015), who was Professor at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, China

My Lord is the source of Love;
I the river's course.
Let God's love flow through me.
I will not obstruct it.
Irrigation ditches can water but a portion of the field;
the Great Yangtze River can water a thousand
acres.
Expand my heart, O Lord,
that I may love yet more people.

The waters of love can cover vast tracts,
nothing will be lost to me.
The greater the outward flow,
the greater the returning tide.
If I am not linked to Love's source,
I will dry up.
If I dam the waters of Love,
they will stagnate.
Can I compare my heart with the boundless seas?
But abandon not the measure of my heart, O Lord.
Let the waves of your love still billow there!



Returning Tide by Julia Manning

Closing

Having visited China for the meditation we are now closing in St Petersburg, Russia, for Rachmaninov's Vespers: 'Blessed is the man'. This is sung in The Church of the Saviour on Spilled Blood, built in 1881 on the spot where Tsar Alexander II was assassinated. The pictures are of the church. An amazing place.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WMLUJDQbk_I

Blessing

May Christ who calls you to take up your cross,
give you strength to bear your own and one another's burdens.
May Christ give you grace to grow in holiness,
to deny yourself, and to take up your cross and follow him.
And may the blessing of God our Creator,
Redeemer and Giver of life be with you always.
(Anglican church of New Zealand)

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these services: Especially Sheila for the morning's reflection, Jess for intercessions, Chris for evening reflection, Nigel for communion music (plus others you may have recognised!). Other material taken or developed from various websites and blogs is normally identified in the text.



*Evening on the Yangzte
River, China*