

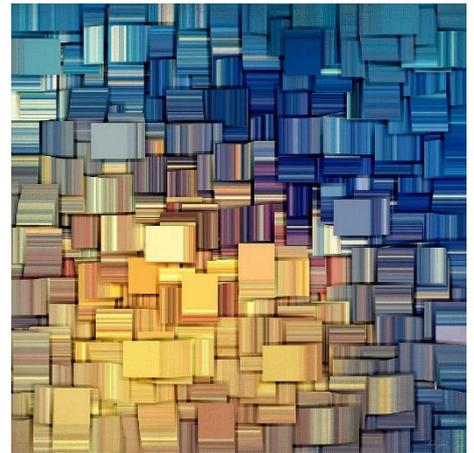
Parish of Central Exeter

Morning Worship and Spiritual Communion
16th Sunday after Trinity 27 September 2020

Forgetting what lies behind....

Welcome everyone.

We continue with readings from Philippians, with reflections by Sheila. Our intercessions are from Caroline. For Night Prayer we stay in Matthew's Gospel.



We begin our service this morning with 'Be thou my Vision'. This is a more vigorous version than some.

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

Call to worship

We live in volatile times.
It seems as if things are changing rapidly and often for the worse.
We feel hope only to have it dashed by another action or event.

We live in uncertain times.
We aren't sure of the right thing.
Messages from Government seem to create confusion rather than clarity.

We live in complex times.
Nothing seems simple.
Our heads spin as we face challenges.

We live in ambiguous times.
Everything seems inexact,
one path seems right but then again
maybe another path is the better way.

We may well yearn for times gone by,
times when the answers seemed simple
and solutions to problems were clear.

But maybe God is calling us
To use our gifts
to find different answers.

Prayer of Confession

God you have given each of us many gifts,
but sometimes we cannot recognize
what gift we have to share,
so we hide it under a bushel.

God you remind us that all gifts are needed,
but sometimes we let ourselves be convinced
that some gifts are more special than others.

God you call us to work, to live, to love together as parts of one body,
but sometimes we decide that membership in the body
is limited by our understandings.

God, for the times we have ignored or mislabeled Your gifts,
for those times we have cut another off from the body,
We offer words of repentance,
we ask for forgiveness and grace.

...time of silent prayer...

Words of Assurance/Forgiveness

God is the giver of many gifts.
God is the Creator of the one body.
God is slow to anger and quick to forgive.
God helps us to share and honour the gifts of all,
God helps us to heal the wounds and reunite the body.
We are forgiven, loved, and accepted.
Thanks be to God! Alleluia! Amen

(posted by Rev Gord on his blog, Worship Offerings. <http://worshipofferings.blogspot.ca/>)

Psalms 25 v 4-7 NIV (Part of one of the Psalms appointed for today)

Show me your ways, Lord,
teach me your paths.

⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Saviour,
and my hope is in you all day long.

⁶ Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.

⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth
and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me,
for you, Lord, are good.

Worship Song

Teach me thy way

The song below is based on the Psalm above. It may not be a familiar one either for words or tune. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LKPhjvn3tIA>

Prayer of illumination

Spirit of God,
who danced at Creation's birth,
dance with us now
as we read your Word,
that we may be changed,
renewed
and empowered for mission, Amen

Reading

Reading Philippians 3:4b-16

If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. ⁷ But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹² Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained.

English Standard Version (ESV) ® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Reflection

Where do you come from? What school or university did you go to? What do you do? These are common questions when meeting people, but they can lead to assumptions, barriers and prejudice. Too often in society status is linked to educational and family background. The “old boys’ network” still exists in some circles and sadly discrimination on the basis of background or other factors is also commonplace.

Paul had impressive pedigree and he had relied on it. In his defence before King Agrippa, recorded in Acts 16, he says that since childhood he has lived as a law-abiding Jew, trained as a Pharisee, and had then zealously opposed the name of Jesus of Nazareth. All this had changed when he had a personal encounter with the risen Jesus on the road outside Damascus. Such a turn-around took time for him to absorb and integrate into a new way of thinking. It also took time for the first followers of Jesus, all faithful Jews, to recognise that the new way of life in Jesus was for Gentiles as well, who did not have to keep all the Jewish customs.

Paul uses strong language here to show the contrast between his former life based on regulations and his new life based only on faith. I think of phrases from hymns ‘nothing in my hand I bring’ or the chorus ‘only by grace can we enter...not by our human endeavour’ which remind me that it is God’s action alone that enables me to be a Christian. I find verses 10 and 11 more difficult to say and prefer to move onto verses 12-16. Here Paul’s words are an encouragement to me to remember to live in the present - not something I am good at.

He reminds us that we can forget the past, in the sense of being overwhelmed with remorse for what we have done. Nor need we be anxious about the future as we entrust ourselves to God’s mercy. Instead we keep going remembering the words from Phil 1:6 that ‘God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.’

As I write this reflection on Wednesday 9 September, the morning prayer reading is Acts 11:19-end where we read of the first Jewish followers of Jesus spreading into more Gentile areas. Barnabas is sent from Jerusalem to Antioch to investigate what is happening. He travels to Tarsus to find Saul and together they live in Antioch for a year teaching and encouraging the people. Luke records that it is here that the followers are first called Christians (v25-26). Martyn Percy, in his reflection on the passage, discusses what the name of Christian means and I quote his final paragraph.

‘That is our calling: to become like Christ. To cherish, care, console – as Christ did. To serve, share and surrender – as Christ did. To be an embodiment of the love of God – following the example of Christ, that supreme exemplar of the love of God poured out in one whole person for the whole of humanity.’

I think Paul would affirm Martyn Percy’s words, that is our calling. I conclude with one of the alternative collects which reminds us that though we are to use our God-given abilities and talents, we remember their source. When we are struggling, physically or emotionally, then we can rest in God alone.

Almighty God, you search us and know us:
may we rely on you in strength
and rest on you in weakness
now and in all our days,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (*Alternative collect Trinity 13*)

Song

We now have the song: 'And now, o Father mindful of thy love'. It's sung here by the choir of Marlborough College. Words are below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bTBkw994IR8&t=66s>

And now, O Father, mindful of the love
that bought us, once for all, on Calvary's Tree,
and having with us him that pleads above,
we here present, we spread forth to thee
that only Offering perfect in thine eyes,
the one, true, pure, immortal Sacrifice.

Look, Father, look on his anointed face,
and only look on us as found in him;
look not on our mis-usings of thy grace,
our prayer so languid, and our faith so dim:
for lo, between our sins and their reward
we set the Passion of thy Son our Lord.

And then for those, our dearest and our best,
by this prevailing Presence we appeal:
O fold them closer to thy mercy's breast,
O do thine utmost for their souls' true weal;
from tainting mischief keep them white and clear,
and crown thy gifts with strength to persevere.

And so we come: O draw us to thy feet,
most patient Saviour, who canst love us still;
and by this food, so awful and so sweet,
deliver us from every touch of ill:
in thine own service make us glad and free,
and grant us never more to part with thee.

Affirmation of faith

Ours is a faith focused on love.
The one we call God is
the very definition of love.



Ours is a faith of spiritual growth.
The one we call God is
an ever-creating, ever-evolving breath of love.

Ours is a faith of action.
The one we call God provokes us to
speak, demand,
and create justice for all peoples
especially the poor, oppressed, and marginalized.

We are the imperfect who gather
to learn and grow into a people
more in-tune with the one we call God.
We gather to love, grow, and act.
Amen.
(*Liturgybits.com*)

Intercessions

Creator God, we believe when we speak in good faith that our prayers will be heard.
We bring, in that time of prayer, our hopes and fears, our joys and concerns.
We seek to be close to your grace now.

All around us we see the beauty of the changing season. Our hearts may rejoice but we
know that our earth is deeply troubled by the carelessness and greed of humankind.

We pray that not only those in authority but that all people may endeavour to do whatever
they can to restore balance in nature and respect once again what once was paradise, the
world you gave us.

All around us we see confusion and perplexity in the face of a world caught up in a
pandemic. People are deeply troubled facing an uncertain future.

Help us Lord to put down fearfulness in favour of trust, to assist each other however we can
as we recognise that we are one family regardless of race, colour or gender, knowing that
we are God's children in need.

Be with us Lord as we learn from the past, are fully aware of the present and travel into the
future with hope not despair, trust not suspicion, connected not divided, and above all
rejoicing in your unfailing love.
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 'If ye love me, you will keep my commandments' an anthem by Thomas Tallis sung here in a virtual recording by The King's Singers. The music and words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y1WwNSfCom8>



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.

Post Communion Collect

God of the different way:
You are not bound to human hierarchies and understandings.
Help us to grow out of our restricted habits
of thought and action
and into the extraordinary and expansive patterns
of Your Kingdom
that we may become agents of change
and healing in the world. Amen

Commission & Benediction

As you end this time of worship
remember that you are not leaving God's presence.
God is close at hand.
He hears the cry of all who call on His name.
He honours those who honour Him,
listening to their prayers and coming to their aid.

So go from here with joy and confidence,
to love and serve God and one another.

Our final hymn: *'Lord, the light of your love is shining', sung and danced enthusiastically here by a group from Lipa City, Philippines. Hope it gets you moving too!*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qURAcHTSsN4>

Scroll down for Coffee Break

Coffee Break

Picked any blackberries this year? We had a few from our garden, and currently I bear a few scars from cutting them back and chopping up the thick stems for the recycling bin.

If you still have some to pick – then be careful, because we are approaching Michaelmas – the feast of St Michael and All Angels, on Sept 29. The story goes that this was the day on which Michael expelled Lucifer, the devil, from heaven. He fell down to earth and landed in a very prickly blackberry bush. So Satan cursed the bush, and spat on it, (other options less palatable for a Sunday service sheet are available in different parts of the country,) to make the fruit unfit for eating. So, pick blackberries before Michaelmas to make your Michaelmas Pie!

In the past Michaelmas was important as a Quarter Day when rents were due, and hiring fairs for labourers and servants would be held. In the middle ages this was the time when the peasants of each manor would elect someone to be the reeve or manager for the year.

Blackberry eating by Galway Kinnell

I love to go out in late September
among the fat, overripe, icy, black blackberries
to eat blackberries for breakfast,
the stalks very prickly, a penalty
they earn for knowing the black art
of blackberry-making; and as I stand among them
lifting the stalks to my mouth, the ripest berries
fall almost unbidden to my tongue,
as words sometimes do, certain peculiar words
like strengths or squinched,
many-lettered, one-syllabled lumps,
which I squeeze, squinch open, and splurge well
in the silent, startled, icy, black language
of blackberry -- eating in late September.



Scroll down for Night Prayer

Night Prayer

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

More U-turns?

We prepare for worship

May the Lord almighty grant us a quiet night and a perfect end.

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Let the slowly changing leaves of autumn speak quietening words to our inner-most selves.

In the silence
we look inward at ourselves:
the advantages we have been given,
the opportunities we have seized.
May we have a sense of gratitude for the gifts that are ours:
knowledge, skills, insights.

Yet may we also be nudged
to see new perspectives,
to give back,
to reach out,
sharing our talents, our riches, and ourselves
with those who are discouraged, disheartened, or simply unaware.

May we be more open, tolerant and charitable toward one another
and all with whom we share this globe
of love and laughter and tears.

May we be filled with
new passion,
new resolve, to take the next step,
risking the way of Jesus.
So be it.



We listen to a Song

'Bogoroditse Djevo', music by Sergei Rachmaninov (1915) sung in the original Church Slavonic by Voces8. English translation below.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=30&v=qj-U9ybSPHk&feature=emb_title

Rejoice, virgin mother of God,
Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb,
for you have borne the Saviour of our souls.

Translation by Barry Johnston

We seek forgiveness

We confess it is easy to claim to follow you
and much harder to act on it.
Forgive us when we forget
that Jesus showed us the way.
Remind us that though it is hard,
you make our journey possible.

Thank you for your unending love
and your relentless presence. Amen.

The Lord's prayer

God, lover of us all, most holy one.
Help us to respond to you.
To create what you want for us here on earth.

Give us today enough for our needs.
Forgive our weak and deliberate offences,
just as we must forgive others
when they hurt us.

Help us to resist evil and to do what is good.

For we are yours, endowed with your power
to make our world whole.

Amen.

(Lala Winkley)

Reading Matthew 21: 23-32 NIV

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

²³ Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?”

²⁴ Jesus replied, “I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁵ John’s baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or of human origin?”

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn’t you believe him?’ ²⁶ But if we say, ‘Of human origin’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.”

²⁷ So they answered Jesus, “We don’t know.”

Then he said, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

The Parable of the Two Sons

²⁸ “What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work today in the vineyard.’

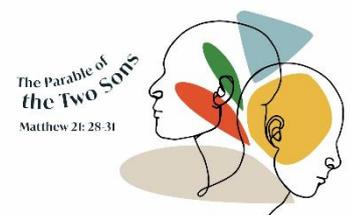
²⁹ “‘I will not,’ he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ “Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, ‘I will, sir,’ but he did not go.

³¹ “Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

“The first,” they answered.

Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.



*The Parable of the
Father and his Two
Sons in the Vineyard.
Georg Pencz 1534*

Engraving.

*Metropolitan Museum
of Art, New York*

Reflection

The question the religious leaders ask Jesus is not a genuine enquiry, but intended as a trap. Jesus turns it back on them by asking his question about John the Baptist. In explaining why they decline to answer, Matthew reveals the hypocrisy behind the whole episode. The religious leaders are simply trying to protect their power and position, rather than investigating what lies behind Jesus's and earlier John's teaching.

This places the leaders on the same trajectory as their predecessors throughout Jewish history who rejected God's messages sent through the prophets. This enables Matthew to justify why what becomes the Church will see its mission as bringing God's love to everybody. (See ahead in v 41 'And so I tell you,' added Jesus, 'the Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce proper fruits.)

Jesus then goes further to press his message home with the parable of the two sons.

We don't realise today how public life was in Palestine at this time. Don't imagine this is some private conversation between the father and his sons. This will be in earshot of others. The son who says 'Yes' to his father would be regarded as having done the honourable thing, even though he didn't do what he said, because publicly he has shown obedience. The son who says 'No' is dishonourable, because he is publicly disobeying a valid instruction. (Remember the commandment: Honour thy father and mother.)

But Jesus does not ask about honour – the ideal, but about the real – what actually did happen, and who in the end obeyed the father. He then takes this back to the issue of the teaching of John the Baptist in the earlier verses. The second son (Yes Dad) equates to the religious leaders, and the first (No Dad) to the tax collectors and prostitutes.

The religious leaders claim they honour God in performing their duties, but refuse to accept John as a messenger from God. The honourable word is not enough. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21).

As so often in the Gospels, the tables are turned: 'dishonour' can be overcome. It is the changes (U-turns if need be) in the mind set as well as in behaviour that matter. The tax collectors and prostitutes were well aware of their limitations and the 'dishonourable' nature of their work, but responded (to both John and Jesus), recognising that a new reality was possible. These people, says Jesus are 'entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you,' (v 31). So Jesus does not close the door on the religious leaders. But they (and we?) need to rethink their position.

We listen to a song

Although not a song with any religious intent, nonetheless the words are relevant for the reading this evening. Song by Sister Hazel: 'Change your mind'. Words are on the screen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71KdkbT7FKA>

We pray for others

This day, we also take time to look around, to look:
beyond our selves,
beyond words and roles,
beyond past hurts and future worries...

To embrace those who are hurting,
those who suffer the erosions of time or the inflictions of illness,
those who struggle to break free from unhealthy patterns of behaviour
or to heal crippled relationships.

May we be prompted to be more expansive and more inclusive
as we accept our responsibility
to make God's reign visible
through gracious generosity.
(Silence)

This is our prayer. Amen.
(*rexae74@gmail.com*)

To think about

I always wonder why birds
choose to stay in the same place
when they can fly anywhere on the earth,
then I ask myself the same question.



Commission and benediction

Go out from here
as workers in God's upside-down kingdom,
where the last are first and the first are last,
where needs are met in miraculous ways,
and there is grace enough for all!

And may the blessing of God,
the love of Jesus Christ,
and the presence of the Holy Spirit
surround you and sustain you in the coming days.
Amen.

Reflective music

Our closing music is from Bee, who has written this setting of David Adam's Celtic Blessing for voice and piano. Music only – no video. Words are below.

<https://www.parishofcentralexeter.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Celtic-Blessings-converted.mp3>

The blessing of him who stilled the storm,
The blessing of peace and a deep, deep calm,
The blessing of joy come to your mind,
The blessing of love help you unwind.
Peace in your dealings,
Peace in your living and
Give God praise. Amen .

Thanks

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to these services: especially Sheila for the morning's reflection, Caroline for the intercessions, and Bee for the closing music.

Other material taken or developed from various websites and blogs is normally identified in the text.

