

Parish of Central Exeter

10th Sunday after Trinity 8 August 2021

Live in love

The Gospel reading this morning proclaims Jesus as 'the Bread of Life', and the Letter to the Ephesians explains how we need to 'live in love'. The reflections on this reading are from Sheila, and the intercessions are from Jess. Many thanks to you both.

Welcome everyone.

Preparing for worship

Call to Worship

We are called to live in love.

**We cannot do this alone,
we dare not try this alone,
so we gather as God's people.**

We are called to love our neighbours as ourselves.

**We come to build up Christ's Body,
in humility and gentleness,
with patience and love.**

We are called to speak words that give grace to those who hear.

**We rejoice in our oneness in Christ;
we would share the grace offered to us.**

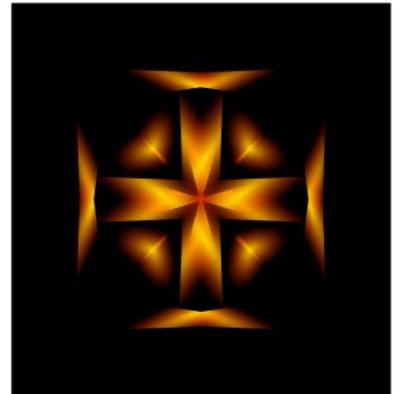
We are called to put away falsehood, bitterness and anger
And to live as God's family.

**We gather as God's family
seeking to be fed by the Bread of life.**

Opening Prayer

Lord,
the eyes of all look to You in hope;
and You give them what they need.
You open Your hand
and satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.

We, too, turn to You again, longing to be filled—
to eat of the Bread of Life,



to drink from Your life-giving streams,
to taste Your goodness and live.

May the time we spend together in Your presence
nourish our hearts and minds;
may it strengthen our relationship with You,
and renew our commitment to live in this world as Your faithful disciples.

For You alone are God,
the Source and Sustainer of life.

In Jesus' name, Amen.
(Christine Longhurst, re:Worship)

Gathering Hymn

'Be thou my Guardian and my Guide.' Sung here by the choir of Sidney Sussex College.
Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFpaP-BGG4A>

An act of confession

Loving God, present and near.
You are beyond our words and our understanding.

Help us to remember that You are at once
infinite, boundless, timeless and eternal
but, at the same time intimately entwined with our lives.
You are with us no matter where we find ourselves.

When we have forgotten You
Lord, have mercy.

When we have failed to speak words of love
Lord, have mercy.

When we have neglected the need of another
Lord, have mercy.

Loving God, present and near
help us to recognise Your presence and nearness with us
as we worship together.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*(written by Thomas Sutcliffe, and posted on the Church of Scotland's Weekly
Worship website.)*

Assurance of Pardon

(inspired by Ephesians 4:32)

Now that we have let go of the pain, the bitterness, the anger of our lives,
let us be kind, tender-hearted, and gentle towards each other,
forgiving as God has forgiven us.

We are God's beloved children,
and will model God's grace and love in our hearts.
Thanks be to God! We are forgiven! Amen.

A collect for today

Bread of life,
you taught us to put away bitterness and anger,
and with tender-hearted kindness
to share the fruit of our labour with the needy.
Strengthen us by your grace,
that in communion with you,
we may forgive one another
and live in love as Christ loved us. Amen.

(from Revised Common Lectionary Prayers)

Gospel Reading

John 6: 35, 41-52

The bread of life

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

⁴¹ At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴² They said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I came down from heaven'?"

⁴³ "Stop grumbling among yourselves," Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."



Israelites collecting Manna in the desert. World Chronicle, Regensburg, c 1400. (Getty Museum).

Worship music

'I am the bread of life'. This hymn is in our hymn books, though quite a difficult one to sing. Words are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wGb5fZVnxdY>

New Testament Reading

Ephesians 4:25-5:2

²⁵ So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbours, for we are members of one another.

²⁶ Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, ²⁷ and do not make room for the devil. ²⁸ Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. ²⁹ Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. ³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. ³¹ Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, ³² and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you. **5** ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Reflection

During the last lockdown the models in White Stuff shop windows held cards with various imperatives including 'Be Kind'. Seeing this every time I walked past, I wondered how many people noticed them or thought about them. We can have all sorts of good intentions but are these reflected in our behaviour. When life is stressed, we can forget to be kind and tender-hearted or compassionate. In healthcare 'compassionate care' is recognised as vitally important and is an element of care that can slip under pressure.

At the July Schwartz Round (an opportunity where healthcare professionals listen to different stories and share their feelings, not trying to fix something but to be reminded of our common humanity and need for compassion) we heard about the compassionate eyes of one nurse. Only her eyes were visible with all the PPE in the intensive care unit but even so she could still convey compassion to someone as she slowly regained consciousness after days on a ventilator due to covid 19.

The ethical imperatives given here are ones that many people would agree with – speaking the truth, honest work in order to share with those less fortunate and avoiding bitterness, anger and arguments. Here Paul sets the standard higher, 'be imitators of God' (5:1) while at the same time showing that it is not due only to our own efforts. That is good news since we know that we fail frequently. In the immediate previous section Paul reminded people to put away their former way of life (4:22). Instead, they were to be renewed in their minds and clothed with a new self from God created in the divine image (4:23,24).

Here are the behaviours to be expected of those who are renewed and living the new life and it is a call to holiness. This was the plan for Israel, the people of God, called to show a different way of living. From the earliest days of the church, small groups of believers were identified as those who cared for each other and for others in their settlements. In the centuries since then Christians have often been at the forefront of sharing with the needy and compassionate care. Though we know also all the failures of individuals and the institution which sadly has continued and severely weakens the witness of the church.

Each of us may find one phrase from this passage which resonates with us today. It may not be any of the commands about what to do or not do, though they are important, but rather remembering that we are 'beloved children' – accepted into the family of God. Or focussing on the thought that 'God in Christ has forgiven you'. I find the phrase 'your words may give grace to those who hear' a real challenge. When I speak with people in the hospital are my words bringing grace - comfort, hope, love or are they waffle, ignoring what is needed at that moment. Thinking about this reminded me of a prayer by Stephen Cherry where he concentrates on the act of listening before speaking.

A Pastor's Prayer

Open my eyes,
open my ears,
open my wisdom,
that I might see, hear

and in some way understand
the people I encounter this day.

Let me connect with their energy
and pain,
their purpose
and intention.

Let me, connect with their energy
attend simply and deeply, noticing
just enough.

Let me look and listen with
sufficient calm,
 sufficient kindness,
 sufficient humour,
that something might unfold in their depths;
 that something might be eased;
 that something might be freed.

Let my looking,
 let my listening,
 let my hearing,
be for others a small liberation this day.

And let others liberate me by their attention,
when I am locked within.

Cherry, Stephen (2015), *Barefoot Ways*, SPCK



Worship music

‘There’s a wideness in God’s mercy’, sung here at St Mark’s Maida Vale. Words are on the screen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJwft3SY_PU

Intercessions

In the power of the spirit and in union with Christ, let us pray to the Father:

Dear Lord, we pray for our parish. We ask for your guidance for those who lead us. Strengthen and uphold them when they grow weary in their work. We ask for your blessing on all of us as we seek to grow a church community that welcomes visitors and strangers and provides help and nourishment to people in every kind of need:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for your whole creation, for our brothers and sisters throughout the world and for their lives to be respected regardless of creed or colour, gender or sexuality, wealth or status, and for responsible sharing of precious resources and the conservation of our fragile and beautiful world. We pray for our government and all world leaders and the responsibilities that they have in bringing justice and peace to all. In a moment of silence, please pray for any country that is in particular need of God's help at this time.

We pray that the people in this country will continue to do what is right to reduce the risk of coronavirus spreading more widely and having an adverse effect on the wonderful work being done by the NHS:

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for the hungry in our world - may they receive the help that they need - and for those who hold the power to feed others - let them be guided by your grace; and we pray for those who sit at a table of sickness, loneliness, grief or fear - may they know your nourishing love. In a moment of silence, please pray for anybody who is on your mind today who is in need of God's healing power:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Loving God, we pray for those who are mourning the death of someone close and dear to them, either recently or at this time of year. We thank you for those who have travelled before us on the way of the cross and are now at peace in your eternal presence. Help us always to be mindful of your promise that the road of faith will lead us to your heavenly kingdom. In a moment of silence, let us remember our dearly beloved Mike Hatt, who died 22 years ago last Sunday. We also remember Jean Bosco, the Director of the Kimbilio Centre in the Congo, who died from Covid a few days ago, and thank God for the work of that Centre:

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Faithful God, fill our hunger with the food that lasts, and enable us to share your love with people that we meet during the week ahead.

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

Amen.



The Lord's Prayer

Loving Creator we honour you,
and we honour all that you have made.
Renew the whole world in the image of your love.
Give us what we need for today,
and a hunger to see the whole world fed.
Strengthen us for what lies ahead;
heal us from the hurts of the past;
give us courage to follow your call in this moment.
For your love is the only power,
the only home, the only honour we need,
in this world and in the world to come.
Amen. *(Paraphrased by Sarah Dylan Breuer)*

Affirmation

Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. John 6:41-51

They
murmured.

Bread?
Down
from heaven?
We know his mother and father.
They live
down the street!

This is not about knowing,
but believing,
Jesus
says.

Believe
that I love you
and want to be a part of you forever.

What better way than
to be your
food?

Jesus, we believe.
Be our food.

(written by Anne Osdieck, and posted on The Sunday Website of St. Louis University.)

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.

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.

As we prepare for communion you might like to listen to the Langford Singers with 'Bread is Broken', words by Richard, music by Nigel.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-WUE5nrlw4>

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 our pilgrimage,
you have willed that the gate of mercy
should stand open for those who trust in you:
look upon us with your favour
that we who follow the path of your will
may never wander from the way of life;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.



Commission & Benediction

Go out and imitate God, living in love.
Put your hope in God's Word
and let your own words be truthful and constructive.
May sin rouse your anger,
..but never let anger cause you to sin.
Don't allow any room for evil.

And may God always hear your voice.
May Christ Jesus raise you to new life;
and may the Holy Spirit nourish you for the life of love.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord,
....**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

(Nathan Nettleton)

Closing Hymn

'Help us accept each other Lord' – you may not have met this hymn before. The words are by Fred Kaan, and are on the screen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PwunC61clqA>

