

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 14 August 2022 – 9th Sunday after Trinity

The service can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley Benefice for the 9th Sunday after Trinity, which has been put together by Liz Howlett and draws on liturgy from the Iona Community.

O God, you summon the day to dawn; you teach the morning to waken the earth.

Great is your name, great is your love.

For you the valleys will sing for joy, the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Great is your name, great is your love.

To you the monarchs of earth shall bow, the poor and the persecuted shall shout for joy: **Great is your name, great is your love.**

Your love and justice shall last for ever, fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise.

Great is your name, great is your love.

1 O thou who camest from above
The fire celestial to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!

2 There let it for thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Hymn: O thou who camest from above
3 Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up the gift in me—

4 Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) Public Domain

Prayer of Confession and Absolution

In the beauty of the earth, in the silence of our hearts, in the community of your church, in all acts of grace and kindness, in forgiving from the heart and in worship from the soul, your Spirit confirms the truth in which we seek to live.

If knowing this, we have failed to love you, our Maker, been hesitant to follow your Son, and suspected the power of your Spirit, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

If we have desired comfort more than devotion and if we have satisfied our wants more than we have served your will, Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

If we have limited our company to those like us and if we have restricted our conversation to matters of no consequence, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God, who sent your Holy Spirit to the life and light of your Church; open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading Hebrews 11: 32 – 12: 2

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that

they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Gospel Reading Luke 12: 49 – 56

Jesus said, “I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and what constraint I am under until it is completed! Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.” He said to the crowd: “When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, ‘It’s going to be hot,’ and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time?”

Reflection

Every week, early on a Monday morning, I get an email which explores the gospel reading set for the coming Sunday service. So, last Monday, an email came through which had today’s gospel reading as its focus. The emails come from a group of writers who are committed to nurturing and enabling peace in the world. The idea of this writing group came originally from someone who is a member and was for a while the leader of the Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland. I wonder if you have heard of Corrymeela – it is well worth having a look at their website to see the sort of inspirational work that they have been involved in over the past 50 years. In that time Corrymeela has reached out to people in all communities across Northern Ireland, to Catholics and Protestants, lay people and clergy, young and old, people of different genders and sexual orientation, with an aim to bringing people together and building greater understanding between those who are different. One of their initiatives, for example, is to provide programmes for young people that enable them to tackle sectarianism. As their website states, *‘In our increasingly divided world, Corrymeela is a movement of people rallied around one inspirational idea: ‘Together is better’.* Really good work is being done, but good news doesn’t make it into the TV news all that often, so Corrymeela is probably not as well known amongst the general population as it deserves to be. So, I receive these weekly emails that offer comment and exploration on the gospel readings. There are two interesting points here – the first one is about the name of the writing group that sends the emails. It may seem surprising but they are called the ‘Spirituality of Conflict’ writing project. We might think that they would be called something like ‘the peace builders’ writing group, but no, their name is the ‘Spirituality of Conflict’ project. What those in Northern Ireland (and in other places with much conflict) have learned is that peace will never be nurtured into being if the differences between people are ignored or stamped on. The other main point they make is that actually the bible itself is full of conflict – and just to be clear, this isn’t only or even mainly conflict that becomes violent – there are loads of disagreements and differences of opinion in both the Old and New Testaments – and those who write the emails believe that we can learn a lot from exploring the bible from that perspective. What can we learn from these biblical situations and the way conflict is handled that will help us in our quest for peace and goodwill for all?

Jesus was clear eyed about conflict being a factor in human life and about bringing it into the open. He sees this going on, not just in the world in general, but within his own group of disciples who are travelling with him. They argue, for example, about who is the greatest amongst themselves. Some of them ask Jesus directly if they can have the top places in the heavenly kingdom and the rest are annoyed, not because the question is ‘wrong’ but because others got to ask it first! Jesus’ approach is instructive here, for he moves towards the conflict and asks them about it, rather than ignoring it or forbidding it. And in this way conflict becomes an opportunity for learning, as Jesus takes a small child and says whoever receives such a one receives him and the One who sent him. An important reminder that God’s kingdom is an upside down kingdom, in which the smallest, least important person

is the one closest to God.

And in today's gospel reading, Jesus is looking into the future, and he can see that conflict will come because of his death and resurrection and because of the decisions people will make about following him. It isn't that he is deliberately setting out to cause division or family break up, or that he is requiring his followers to do this, but that this will very likely be an outcome for those who commit themselves to him. We can imagine the first hearers of this gospel, coming together to worship on a Sunday morning, somewhere in the far flung reaches of the Roman Empire, and looking at one another and nodding when they hear these words of Jesus. This was their experience. There would have been Jewish Christians in this little group of worshippers who would have no contact with their own families and former friends because of their commitment to Christ and to their gentile Christian brothers and sisters. They would likely have been told, perhaps by their own relatives, or familiar Jewish religious leaders that they could no longer attend their own synagogue as a result of the choice they had made to follow Christ. And there would have been gentile Christians hearing these words too, and some of these may well have found that they were now on the outside of their usual society because their Christian faith called them to treat rich and poor alike.

It isn't just those who lived way back who experience these divisions. I know of Iranians in this country today who have become Christians and as a result must avoid meeting their family, or letting them know where they live, for their own safety. And when I was at the Church Army Training College many years ago, one of the Sisters on the staff there – from a white English family – had been told by her father that if she proceeded with joining the Church Army she would no longer be welcome in the family home. That was a very painful unintended outcome of a decision she felt she must make.

We humans seem to find difference very hard to accept. It is easier to get along if everyone is the same and that is how splits can occur, so a group can feel more comfortable when those who are seen as different are excluded. And of course, it isn't just places like Northern Ireland that have conflict. Conflict is everywhere where there are human beings! It isn't necessarily the conflict, or difference of opinions or beliefs that is the problem. Problems arise through the way in which conflict is handled or mishandled.

And churches can find conflict particularly difficult to live well with – perhaps because the deep message of our faith is about bringing peace and reconciliation on earth – perhaps some of us feel sometimes that we of all people shouldn't have differences and shouldn't get angry with one another for having different viewpoints and wanting different goals. What the Corrymeela Community experience suggests to me is that a first step towards nurturing peace is to recognise the differences, accept that conflict is part of the human condition and that it can be an opportunity for learning and for drawing closer to God.

I'd like to finish with a prayer written from within the Corrymeela Community:

Where there is separation there is pain. And where there is pain there is a story.

And where there is a story there is understanding and misunderstanding, listening and not listening.

May we turn towards each other, and turn towards our stories, with understanding and listening, with argument and acceptance, with challenge, change and consolation.

Because if God is to be found, God will be found in the space between. Amen.

Hymn: Dear Lord and Father of mankind

1 Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re-clothe us in our rightful mind;
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

2 In simple trust like theirs who heard
beside the Syrian sea
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee.

3 Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease;
take from our souls the strain and stress,
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace.

4 Breathe through the heats of our desire
thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;
speak through the earthquake, wind and fire,
O still small voice of calm.

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) Public Domain

Prayers:

Let us pray.

For the healing of bodies and minds we pray: for a holy healing which deals with both pain and its causes; for healing which deals with both abuse and depression, as well as anxiety and dementia, a healing which leads to new love for body and mind, which leads to a new care for the whole person. Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For the healing of relationships, we pray: for a holy healing which will not make things nice, but will make things possible; for the mending of love which has been fractured and for the holding in brokenness of those for whom love has been undermined by deceit.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

For the healing of our world we pray: for a holy healing, for the tearing down of cruel barriers and the building of bridges for peace; for the growth of reverence for our planet; for replacing what the wealthy want with an abundance of what the world. needs.

Lord, hear us. **Lord, graciously hear us.**

So we pray, so we trust, so we will do in Jesus' name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
And forgive us our trespasses,**

**As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen**

Closing Responses

From where we are, to where you need us,

Jesus, now lead on.

From the familiarity of what we know to the wonder of what you will reveal,

Jesus, now lead on.

To transform the fabric of this world until it resembles the shape of your kingdom,

Jesus, now lead on.

Because good things have been prepared for those who love God,

Jesus, now lead on.

1 In Christ there is no east nor west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

2 In him shall true hearts everywhere
their high communion find;
his service is the golden cord
close binding humankind.

Hymn: In Christ there is no east or west

3 Join hands, then, children of the faith,
whate'er your race may be;
who serves my Father as his child
is surely kin to me.

4 In Christ there is no east nor west,
in him no south or north,
but one great fellowship of love
throughout the whole wide earth.

William A Dunkerley (John Oxenham) (1852-1941)