

**THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:
Telephone Service for Sunday 19 September 2021 – Trinity 16**

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett, and can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this service for the Bride Valley churches. It is good to know that we are joining together in worship this morning in homes around the valley. Although separated physically, yet we are united through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

Psalm 54: 4

Behold, God is my helper; it is the Lord who upholds my life.

Hymn: O for a thousand tongues to sing

1 O for a thousand tongues to sing
my dear Redeemer's praise,
the glories of my God and King,
the triumphs of his grace.

3 He speaks; and, listening to his voice,
new life the dead receive;
the mournful, broken hearts rejoice;
the humble poor believe.

2 Jesus - the name that charms our fears,
that bids our sorrows cease;
'tis music in the sinner's ears,
'tis life, and health, and peace.

4 My gracious Master and my God,
assist me to proclaim
and spread through all the earth abroad
the honours of thy name.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788) Public Domain

Invitation to Confession

We come together to receive the forgiveness of a new day.
We come together to rejoice in the freedom to begin again.
We come together to receive mercy from our heavenly Father.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

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

Lord of creation, whose glory is around and within us: open our eyes to your wonders, that we may serve you with reverence and know your peace at our lives' end, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

First Reading

Jeremiah 11: 18 - 20

It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew; then you showed me their evil deeds. But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. And I did not know it was against me that they devised schemes, saying, "Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, so that his name will no longer be remembered!" But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously, who try the heart and the mind, let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause.

Mark 9: 30 - 37

They went on from there and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know it; for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him. Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

Reflection

'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.'

Jesus asked his disciples, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest.

I wonder how many similar scenarios are being acted out each morning. Children squabbling over who can sit in the 'best' seat in the car going to school, but falling silent and glaring at one another when mum asks them what all the row is about. Newly promoted Cabinet ministers jockeying for position, and trying to trump what their neighbour at the Cabinet table has just said, but not voicing the desire they feel to 'come out on top' – I am sure that never happens!

Isn't it interesting that the disciples fall silent when Jesus asks them directly about the reason for their arguing. None of them wants to own up because they know this isn't what Jesus is about. He has been teaching them, more than once now as they travel together, that he will be betrayed and killed and after three days rise again. But they just don't understand – perhaps they can only hear about the betrayal and the death – and are afraid to ask him what he means. They want to be part of something successful and they want to know that they will have the top jobs in the success story. 'I'm the king of the castle, get down you dirty rascal!'

I find it really interesting too how Jesus reacts to his arguing followers: he waits until they return to their base in Capernaum before he gets involved in the situation. He doesn't wade into the argument when the disciples are all steamed up and desperate to outdo each other. Instead he addresses the issue a bit later, when they have cooled down and there is therefore more chance that they will be able to hear what he is saying, and learn more from the experience. For Jesus realises that the argument has taught him something too – his disciples need more help from him to understand what he is really all about.

And so, in the calm of the indoors, away from the heat of the road, Jesus asks them a question. Jesus asks hundreds of questions in the gospels (and answers very few himself!) Asking good questions is a great way to enable learning. As we have seen, this question goes to the very heart of the issue – and silence is the telling response. Into that silence, Jesus speaks and acts to show that the values of the kingdom of God are the reverse of what they might be expecting. Did you want to be the greatest? Do you want to be on top of the pile? Do you think you are someone important? Watch out, because you could find yourself at the bottom! 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all'. Such very difficult words for the disciples to hear and perhaps for us too – who wants to be last? Who wants to be a servant of others? Not them! Not us? But that really is the way to greatness in God's kingdom. And Jesus offers them another way of looking at things. He brings a child into their midst and takes it in his arms – a moving picture of tenderness. I wonder what we can learn from a child. A child knows that she isn't fully grown and that she has lots to learn. A child has little in the way of defences – he can be easily be overpowered and carried away by someone bigger and stronger. A child will pick up very quickly whether the big people in her life accept and love her as she is and the messages she receives then will stay with her and can shape her ongoing life for good or ill. How we treat children and others who are vulnerable in our families, our communities and our society as a whole is so important. The pandemic has brought this to the fore over the last 18 months. Many of us will know people living in care homes. For many residents, relatives and staff it has been a desperate time and the shortages of PPE and other equipment has been stark. There has been concern too expressed by those with learning disabilities that even though many of them are more vulnerable to Covid, yet they have received less care – in some cases in hospital, their lives have been deemed less valuable than those of the able. It is as if the pandemic has shone a light into parts of our society that are more often in the shade and easily overlooked. The image of Jesus with the child in his arms suggests to me that the spotlight should not be turned off when the pandemic subsides and at last we are in a position to live with Covid as we do flu.

Many people of all faiths and none would share a humanitarian concern that the most vulnerable in our society are cared for with dignity and compassion. For those who seek to follow Christ day by day, the words that Jesus says whilst holding the child give an even greater significance to our treatment of others. For what he says is this,

'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' By welcoming a child in Jesus' name, by welcoming someone who is vulnerable, not 'on top of the pile', we are welcoming God. Perhaps we can get a greater sense of what Jesus is saying by playing a little. Could we imagine that he said, 'Whoever welcomes one such member of royalty in my name welcomes me'? Think of all the care and the energy expended when a royal is expected in town. I wonder what sort of welcome Jesus has in mind for children.

'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.' Amen.

Hymn: Take this moment, sign and place

1 Take this moment, sign and space;
take my friends around;
here among us make the place
where your love is found.

4 Take the little child in me
scared of growing old;
help me here to find my worth
made in Christ's own mould.

2 Take the time to call my name,
take the time to mend
who I am and what I've been,
all I've failed to tend.

5 Take my talents, take my skills,
take what's yet to be;
let my life be yours, and yet
let it still be me.

3 Take the tiredness of my days,
take my past regret,
letting your forgiveness touch
all I can't forget.

John L Bell (born 1949) and Graham Maule (1958-2019)

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Prayers

Jesus said: 'Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

Help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Unless you change and become humble like little children, you can never enter the kingdom of heaven.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

Help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful; love your enemies and do good to them.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

Help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Love one another, as I love you; there is no greater love than this, to lay down your life for your friends.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

Help us to follow.

Jesus said: 'Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples, and I will be with you always, to the end of time.'

Saviour, we hear your call.

Help us to follow.

God of mercy, **you know us and love us and hear our prayer: keep us in the fellowship of Jesus Christ our Saviour.**

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**

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with you
and guide you on your way at every change and turn;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among *you* and remain with *you* always.

Amen.

1 Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown,
in you and you in me?

2 Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?

Hymn: Will you come and follow me

3 Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?

4 Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

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Invitation to Confession adapted from *Praying with the Earth: a prayerbook for peace*, John Philip Newell, Canterbury Press (2011)