

Sunday 6th June 2021 -Ordinary 9th
Deacon Sally Wheadon

We invite you to spend a few moments with God, using this short act of worship that has been prepared for you to use knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Opening Music – “In the garden”

Welcome

Opening Prayer:

In our meeting together, let us remember that we worship you, the God who created this world, who spoke through his prophets, led his people from captivity to liberty, healed the sick, fed the hungry and was faithful even when rejected. You want all people to be drawn to your love and grace, to know your forgiveness and the joy of your salvation. Therefore let us put aside all that hinders and join together in worship and praise.

Amen

(The Act of Prayer – John Birch)

Hymn – StF 099

All creatures of our God and King,

lift up your voice and with us sing,
alleluia, alleluia!

O burning sun with golden beam,
thou silver moon with softer gleam:

*O praise him, O praise him,
alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!*

O rushing wind that is so strong,
and clouds that sail in heaven along, -
O praise him, alleluia!

O rising morn, in praise rejoice;
and lights of evening, find a voice:

O flowing water, pure and clear,
make music for your Lord to hear,
sing 'Praise him, alleluia!'

O fire, so masterful and bright,
giving to all both warmth and light:

Dear mother earth, who day by day
unfolds rich blessings on our way,
O praise him, alleluia!

The flowers and fruits that bloom &
grow, let them his glory also show:

And all who are of tender heart
forgiving others, take your part,
sing, 'Praise him, alleluia!'

All who long pain and sorrow bear,
praise God, and on him cast your care:

And now, most kind and gentle death,
waiting to hush our fading breath,
O praise him, alleluia!

You homeward lead the child of God,
and Christ the Lord the way has trod:

Let all things their creator bless,
and worship him in humbleness;
O praise him, alleluia! - Praise,
praise the Father, praise the Son,
and praise the Spirit, Three in One:

William Henry Draper (1855-1933) based on
Laudato sii, O me signore St Francis of Assisi's

Canticle of the Sun - Used By Permission.

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Prayers: Adoration

Your word is trustworthy;
generation after generation has seen
your truth break through this world into
hearts and souls, where it can grow,
blossom and glorify your name. Your
love is everlasting; generation after
generation has been blessed by putting
faith in you, walking in your footsteps
and living lives that simply, humbly,
glorify your name.

Confession

Forgive us, Lord, when our lives are so
busy that our eyes are diverted by the
temporary pleasures of this world and
away from eternity.
Forgive us, Lord, when we fail to take
responsibility for our actions,
and look to shift blame onto others and
even onto You. Forgive us, Lord, when
we try to resolve things in our own
strength instead of turning to you.
Keep our eyes on you, Lord,
our strength and refuge,
for on your mercy we can trust and
depend.

Thanksgiving

For love that values even us,
so undeserving, so prone to failing, so
hesitant in our faith. We offer our
grateful thanks. For love that blesses
and guides us who often wonder,
whose faith is tender, who constantly
need your help, we offer our grateful
thanks. For love, without which we
would be nothing, but, when
possessing, are everything, we offer our
grateful thanks. Amen

(The Act of Prayer – John Birch)

Psalm 130

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O
LORD. ²Lord, hear my voice! Let your
ears be attentive to the voice of my
supplications!

³If you, O LORD, should mark
iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope; ⁶my soul
waits for the Lord more than those
who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the
morning. ⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast
love, and with him is great power to
redeem. ⁸It is he who will redeem
Israel from all its iniquities.

Song: Singing the Faith 657

You give rest to the weary,
you bring strength to the weak;
as they wait in Your presence,
there is grace for their need.

*So I'll wait, I'll wait;
yes, I'll wait I'll wait for You.*

I will say of the Lord,

'He is my refuge.'

I will say of the Lord,

'He is my strength.'

*I will say of the Lord, 'He is my
shelter, my hiding place.'*

You can come in the silence;
you can come in the noise.
Bringing peace in a moment,
bringing comfort and joy.

*I will say of the Lord,
'He is my refuge.'
I will say of the Lord,
'He is my strength.'
I will say of the Lord, 'He is my
shelter, my hiding place.'
I will come to the
source of all creation;
I will drink from the well
that never dries.
I will draw from the One who won't
grow tired, the Lord of all.*

*Nathan Fellingham (born 1977), Louise
Fellingham (born 1974) & Mike Busbee
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Bible Reading: Genesis 3:8-15

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, 'Where are you?' ¹⁰He said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.' ¹¹He said, 'Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?' ¹²The man said, 'The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.' ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, 'What is this that you have done?' The woman said, 'The serpent tricked me, and I ate.' ¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent, 'Because you have

done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.'

Song – Singing the Faith 656

When the bonds of love are breaking, hands that linked withdraw and hide,
eyes that once had met in candour now, distrustful, turn aside,
God of healing, reconcile!

When our tongues are silent, sullen,
closing doors through which love came, or, when words
are fiery arrows
wounding others with their flame,
God of healing, reconcile!

When the bridges that we travelled
have collapsed and left a void,
when the chasm seems to widen,
separating souls once joined,
God of healing, reconcile!
God, in Christ you crossed the chasm
when our hearts were far from you!
Grant us grace to reach to others,
broken bonds repair, renew!
God of healing, reconcile!

Hermann G Stuempfle (1923-2007)

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Sermon

I don't know if any of you have been following the tv series 'The Pact.' Having watched all the episodes on BBC I-Player, I was tempted to give a summary of the story. However, I'm conscious that some of you may not have seen it yet so I don't want to spoil it for you. All I will say is that it is about four women who decide to play a prank which goes disastrously wrong. But instead of owning up to what they did straight away, they try to cover it up. And so they start lying and the little lies become big lies. They have no peace by day or night until it becomes a living nightmare. The police start to narrow in on them and, of course, eventually the truth comes out.

And this is a familiar storyline isn't it, not just in many tv dramas but sadly in real life too and it all goes back to the time of creation in the Genesis story we heard this morning, a story of things going wrong in the Garden of Eden.

Eden is portrayed as a land of flourishing relationships; flourishing relationships between people (Adam and Eve, made for each other as partners, who, up until the time the serpent appears, live together in unashamed nudity);

flourishing relationships between humans and the natural world (we see a picture of humans working in the garden, living off its produce, naming and living alongside the animals); and flourishing relationships between humans and God (God walks among them in the garden planted for them). It is a land where Adam and Eve are provided with an abundance (Adam works but he does not toil, and his and Eve's needs are met in the garden). It is a land in which human beings participate in God's creative action (God plants the garden, but Adam is set to till it, working with what God provides to further its flourishing). There is harmony and a sense that all is as it should be. No wonder the Garden of Eden is referred to as paradise!

But something goes horribly wrong. Something happens that ruptures those relationships and diminishes that flourishing. And that something was that Adam and Eve ate the fruit of a tree that they had been forbidden to eat from, it was the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In Genesis Chapter 2 it says "God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you

shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

God doesn't tell Adam why the tree is there or what's wrong with gaining the knowledge of good and evil. I guess some people would see God's placing a restriction on the fruit of that tree as some kind of test for Adam and Eve but I prefer to see it as more of a warning because God knew that to eat the fruit of that tree would be dangerous for them and lead to dire consequences. For me, when God asks Adam "Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" rather than speaking in an angry voice, I imagine God speaking in a very anguished voice indeed. Because eating from the fruit of the tree that they had been forbidden to eat is exactly what Adam and Eve did and it did, indeed, lead to dire consequences not just for them but for the generations to come. This is what Christians refer to as 'the fall' or original sin.

And already we can see the consequences of Adam and Eve's action. Whereas before they were perfectly at ease with God walking in the garden, now they had a guilty conscience and so God's presence brought fear such that they hid from him among the very trees that God

had provided for them. They used God's gifts to them as a barrier to separate themselves from him.

And when God asked Adam if he had eaten from the tree, I sometimes wonder what would have happened if Adam had just come clean immediately and said "Yes I did, I'm so sorry, I take full responsibility, please forgive me." But instead he tries to shift the blame, he says "she gave me the fruit from the tree." We see here selfishness for the first time. Adam is clearly thinking that if anyone's going to get in trouble, it's not going to be him. Instead of protecting his wife, he accuses her in an attempt to exonerate himself. But not only does Adam throw Eve under the bus to coin a popular phrase, he actually turns around and blames God. He reminds God that God had given him the woman in the first place so ultimately, to Adam's way of thinking, it must be God's fault. And hasn't that been the case all through history? Instead of human beings taking responsibility for their own actions, they look to shift the blame and when they can't find anyone else, they blame God.

But, in turn, Eve also looks to shift the blame and so she blames the

serpent. She says the serpent tricked her. But actually did the serpent trick her? The serpent told her that she wouldn't die if she ate from the fruit and she didn't, well not straight away. The serpent told her that when you eat of the fruit your eyes will be opened and sure enough their eyes were opened and they realised that they were naked. When God asks "Where are you?" Adam doesn't say "I was afraid because I disobeyed you," he says "I was afraid because I was naked." And hence we see shame in the garden for the first time.

The definition of shame is seeing ourselves as we imagine others see us – it's an internalized version of the external scrutiny we imagine ourselves to be under. It is a form of knowledge, self-knowledge (this is what I look like) but it's a knowledge without love. Shame is a knowledge that sees accurately but judges harshly, a knowledge that consists in unforgiving, unrelenting scrutiny of ourselves. Adam and Eve begin to see themselves rightly as finite, weak and unreliable. Sadly, they no longer see the vocation for which they are created, to glorify God as creatures and to participate in the life of God as creatures. Instead they seek to stand in the place of God and then condemn themselves for

not being gods. Instead of seeing themselves as part of God's good creation, all they see is that there is a gulf fixed between them and their creator.

So what is to be done? Well God hints at the solution in verse 15 of our reading where he says to the serpent "he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." You see, even before the world began, God the creator whose is bound in love to his creation had a rescue plan in place. When the time was right God sent his only Son Jesus into the world, not to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. In Romans 5, Paul contrasts Adam and Christ and he says "Therefore, just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous."

Jesus, through his faithfulness and obedience even to the point of death has bridged the gulf that was fixed between us and God. The Bible tells us that when Jesus died on the cross the curtain that separated the

people from the inner sanctuary in the temple where God was believed to dwell was torn in two so that we can once more enter into God's presence and have a right relationship with him.

When we offer our lives to Jesus, when our lives are taken up into his life, our lives will begin to be transformed. As we draw closer to him, not only are we given the strength to overcome the temptations that, although seemingly harmless, stop us from flourishing and having life in all its fullness but we will have a right relationship with God and we will become the people that God created us to be. We were not created to serve our own interests, we were created to serve others and when we do, that is when we will experience abundance of life.

When Christians talk about 'being saved,' lots of people think that it only relates to what happens to us when we die, and yes, Jesus does say that who every believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life but salvation is also about the here and now. I leave you with a simple but profound definition of salvation that I discovered in a book of one minute sermons – it simply said salvation is being returned to

factory settings. God loves each and every one of us and wants us all to flourish and have life in all its fullness for all eternity. If you haven't already, why not offer your life to Jesus today and experience the love, the joy and the peace that can only come from a having a right relationship with God.

Song – *(Irish Presbyterian Hymnbook 423)*

Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus
thank you Lord, for loving me.
Thank you Jesus, thank you Jesus,
thank you Lord, for loving me.

You went to Calvary, there you
died for me
thank you Lord, for loving me.
You went to Calvary, there you
died for me
thank you Lord, for loving me.

You rose up from the grave, to me
new life you gave
thank you Lord, for loving me.
You rose up from the grave, to me
new life you gave
thank you Lord, for loving me.

You're coming back again, and we
with you shall reign
thank you Lord, for loving me.
You're coming back again, and we
with you shall reign
thank you Lord, for loving me.

Author unknown (Irish

Prayers of Intercession

Loving and eternal God, our prayers for others challenge us and move us and bring us ever closer to your presence.

We pray for those so overburdened with wealth and belongings that their lives are a constant worry...

We pray for those so starved of food and deprived of comfort and even basic amenities that their lives are a constant worry...

We pray for those near to us who need our prayer because of neglect or trauma, illness or death...

Eternal God, you hear our prayers, you know our yearnings and desires and you know those for whom we pray. We commit them and ourselves, our living and our dying, into your hands.

Amen. *(Sourced from Roots)*

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father

Song – Singing the Faith 051

Great is thy faithfulness,

O God my Father, there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not, as thou hast been thou for ever wilt be.

Great is thy faithfulness!

Great is thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see; all I have needed thy hand hath provided - great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter,
and spring-time and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above, join with all nature in manifold witness to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, - thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine,
with ten thousand beside!

Thomas O Chisholm (1866-1960)

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Sending out prayer and blessing

Loving God, you sent your Son into your world to gather us all up into your kingdom. Be with us, as we hear and respond to your call to make more followers of you.
Amen.

*The Blessing of God Almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and for evermore. Amen.*

Song to play out -

I give to you all I have

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZGPgGLR9iPI>