



Sunday 6th September 2020

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This service has been prepared for you to use at home. We pray that as we join together, wherever we are, we will be united through words, music and images as we worship God.

Together we come to worship, individuals gathered as one in the name of the Lord.

Prayer

Loving God, calm my heart and still my mind.
Fill me with a spirit of understanding.
Let me be slow to take offence and quick to forgive.
As water finds its way through cracks,
let your peace find its way through hardened hearts.
let your grace flow through all our dealings,
your love flow through all we do together,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Hymn: King of Glory, King of Peace (StF 56 / H&P 499 / MP 397)

1] King of Glory, King of Peace,
I will love thee;
And that love may never cease
I will move thee.
Thou hast granted my request,
Thou hast heard me;
Thou didst note my working breast,
Thou hast spared me.

2] Wherefore with my utmost art
I will sing thee,
And the cream of all my heart
I will bring thee.
Though my sins against me cried,
Thou didst clear me;
And alone, when they replied,
Thou didst hear me.

3] Seven whole days, not one in seven,
I will praise thee;
In my heart, though not in heaven,
I can raise thee.
Small it is, in this poor sort
To enrol thee:
E'en eternity's too short
To extol thee.

George Herbert (1593-1633)

The Lord's Prayer

Ezekiel 33: 7 – 11 NLT

“Now, son of man, I am making you a watchman for the people of Israel. Therefore, listen to what I say and warn them for me. If I announce that some wicked people are sure to die and you fail to tell them to change their ways, then they will die in their sins, and I will hold you responsible for their deaths. But if you warn them to repent and they don't repent, they will die in their sins, but you will have saved yourself.

“Son of man, give the people of Israel this message: You are saying, ‘Our sins are heavy upon us; we are wasting away! How can we survive?’ As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness, O people of Israel! Why should you die?”

The prophet has been called to be a watchman for Israel, someone who sees and points out the nation's failings so that they can mend their ways. God reminds Ezekiel that however unpalatable it is to point out another's wrongdoing, it is the prophet's call and it is the way that both will receive God's blessing. But Ezekiel is also to remind the people that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather wants all people to turn and live together in a community founded on his values. The passage is about calling out sin where we see it in the hope that an individual will turn and mend their ways. Our gospel reading from Matthew 18 shares a similar message.

Matthew 18: 15 – 20 NLT

"If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offence. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If the person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. Then if he or she won't accept the church's decision, treat the person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector.

I tell you the truth, whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.

I also tell you this: If two of you agree here on earth concerning anything you ask, my Father in heaven will do it for you. For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them."

Hymn: There's a quiet understanding (StF 36)

1] There's a quiet understanding
when we're gathered in the Spirit,
it's a promise that he gives us,
when we gather in his name.
There's a love we feel in Jesus,
there's a manna that he feeds us,
it's a promise that he gives us,
when we gather in his name.

2] And we know when we're together,
sharing love and understanding,
that our brothers and our sisters
feel the oneness that he brings.
Thank you, thank you, thank you, Jesus,
for the way you love and feed us,
for the many ways you lead us;
thank you, thank you, Lord;
thank you, thank you, Lord.

Tedd Smith (b 1927)

Reflection

Before we look more closely at our gospel reading, I think it is worth noting that those words from Matthew 18 are embedded in a chapter that deals with humility, with not causing others to sin, with God's love for the lost, and with the serious consequences of being unmerciful. You might like to read the whole of chapter 18 to get a feel for the context of the uncomfortable words of our reading. They are uncomfortable because they suggest dealing with a problem in a way we would rather avoid. Let's be honest, none of us really likes confrontation and we are more likely to grumble to our friends about someone who's offended us, than to go to the person concerned and talk it over with them. Yet that is exactly what Jesus is urging us to do here.

Jesus suggests a four-fold plan of action to deal with such matters. A plan that must be seen in Matthew's wider context of understanding one another's viewpoint; of dealing with matters with compassion and in love; and of knowing there is always hope for the one lost sheep. Firstly, Jesus says, try and sort it out quietly, one to one. That takes courage, as well as prayer and humility, and can lead to a better understanding between both parties. But it may not change the situation and the advice is to then take one or two others from the community with you. This is not, I believe, the opportunity to take your mates along but to discern those who will have an open view and maybe even give you a reality check about your own view. Finally, if there is still no change in the person's behaviour the community as a whole is to address the problem. And, if that still makes no difference and there is still no acknowledgement of wrongdoing, the individual is to be treated as an outcast.

If that sounds harsh, we should remember that Jesus is not talking about trivial matters here - a minor disagreement, the sharing of a different view, or a personality clash. This is referring to behaviour that has real implications for the whole worshipping community; things that would bring the church into disrepute. In recent times, an example of such a matter would be the way in which certain Churches have dealt with issues of child abuse within

the church. The wrongdoing of individuals that should have been called out and wasn't, and as a result the Church was damaged.

This whole chapter is about the church and relationships within it, though the use of the word church doesn't refer to the formal church as we know it today but rather to smaller groups, possibly very similar to the classes that John Wesley established in the early days of Methodism. People who met regularly to study God's word and pray together. People who were accountable to one another in the way they lived out their faith and who, in God's love and grace, challenged those who were falling short of the mark and encouraged them to live by God's values.

And if this is still making us feel uncomfortable perhaps the last words of the reading act as a reminder of the importance of how we live as Christian individuals and with one another in Christian community. Where two or more are gathered in his name, Jesus is there, at the heart of it all. The church is not a club, it is the kingdom of God. How we live matters. How we talk about one another matters. How we talk about the church matters. How we react to the world around us matters. How we live matters, because we are living the kingdom of God.

Think about a time in your life when you've been offered advice. Did you accept that advice or not? What were the consequences?

When someone sees things differently from you; behaves differently from you; believes different things from you; how do you react?

Personal prayer

Sometimes, O God, I wish I was on my own, not troubled and disturbed by those around me, not jostled and tussled this way and that, but just left to my own devices. But I am not just me, I am part of your church, I am part of your kingdom. Help me to live your kingdom values. Give me patience with those around me; love and compassion for those in need. Help me to understand those whose views are different from mine; and, above all else, give me a yearning to do your will. Amen

Prayer

Eternal and ever-living God,

we pray for those who need our prayers today:

those who we see around us every day and with whom we share our lives...

our families and friends, both near and far...

for strangers and communities we will never meet or know...

We pray for those who live with different values to our own...

for those who cause grief and chaos in society...

for those who find it hard to see the other point of view...

We pray for those who are ill, at home or in hospital...

for those who face physical pain every day or are struggling with mental anguish...

for those who feel crushed by the death of a loved one.....

and for those who are forgotten, unnoticed, unloved, unmissed...

Lord, in your abundance of mercy,

hear these and all our prayers for your name's sake. Amen

Hymn: The Church's one foundation (StF 690/ H&P 515 / MP 640)

1] The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is his new creation
By water and the word;
From heaven he came and sought her
To be his holy bride;
With his own blood he bought her,
And for her life he died.

2] Elect from every nation,
Yet one o'er all the earth,
Her charter of salvation
One Lord, one faith, one birth;
One holy name she blesses,
Partakes one holy food,
And to one hope she presses
With every grace endued.

3] 'Mid toil and tribulation,
And tumult of her war,
She waits the consummation
Of peace for evermore;
Till with the vision glorious
Her longing eyes are blest,
And the great church victorious
Shall be the church at rest.

4] Yet she on earth has union
With God the Three in One,
And mystic sweet communion
With those whose rest is won.
O happy ones and holy!
Lord, give us grace that we,
Like them, the meek and lowly,
On high may dwell with thee.

Samuel John Stone (1839-1900)

Blessing

May the love of God be yours.

May the gentleness of Christ be yours.

May the peace of the Spirit be yours.

And may the Trinity bless you today and always. Amen

*Original material Rev Liz Singleton
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Youtube - a recording of this week's service is at: <https://youtu.be/kRIJkRp3PU>