

SUNDAY 17 MAY 2020 – THE SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
READINGS AND REFLECTION

Psalm 66 vs 7-18

7 Bless our God, O you peoples; ♦
make the voice of his praise to be heard,

8 Who holds our souls in life ♦
and suffers not our feet to slip.

9 For you, O God, have proved us; ♦
you have tried us as silver is tried.

10 You brought us into the snare; ♦
you laid heavy burdens upon our backs.

11 You let enemies ride over our heads;
we went through fire and water; ♦
but you brought us out into a place of liberty.

12 I will come into your house with burnt offerings
and will pay you my vows, ♦
which my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.

13 I will offer you fat burnt sacrifices
with the smoke of rams; ♦
I will sacrifice oxen and goats.

14 Come and listen, all you who fear God, ♦
and I will tell you what he has done for my soul.

15 I called out to him with my mouth ♦
and his praise was on my tongue.

16 If I had nursed evil in my heart, 
the Lord would not have heard me,

17 But in truth God has heard me; 
he has heeded the voice of my prayer.

18 Blessed be God, who has not rejected my prayer, 
nor withheld his loving mercy from me.

**Glory to the Father and to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit;
As it was in the beginning is now
And shall be for ever. Amen.**

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is included here,
is copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2000 and published by Church House Publishing.

COLLECT

God our Redeemer,
You have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

POST COMMUNION PRAYER

God our Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life:
may we thirst for you,
the spring of life and source of goodness,
through him who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.
Amen.

Acts 17.22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said,

"For we too are his offspring."

Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

John 14.15-21

(Jesus said)

'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.'

Reflection on the Gospel

This week Peter offers our reflection

Just picture the scene: Our Mark has been going out with this girl Becky for some months now. You come home one afternoon to find them entwined in the front room and, as you approach, you hear Mark say, "So, babe, d'you really, really love me? OK, then y' gotta do what I tells you, innit?...." Imagine your reaction: you're taken aback, a bit troubled, even shocked. This doesn't sound right at all. Now read John 14.15 - 'Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments"' and ask yourself, what's the difference? On the face of it, both versions say the same thing. Love equals obedience to the direction, the commands of another.

Yet our reaction to the imaginary Mark talking with his girlfriend was one of shock and alarm: what did he want her to do? Was he a drug dealer? Did he want her to be a mule? When we hear the Gospel reading what do we feel? Not alarm or shock, certainly, but perhaps not anything very much!

Now, Chapter 14 of John's Gospel is part of the long section all the way from Chapter 13 to Chapter 17 that we call 'the Farewell Discourse'. Taking the Last Supper as his cue, John inserts this long reflection on just what it is that Jesus gives to his disciples (and to us) - before he goes to his death on the cross. It is here that Jesus promises the gift of the Spirit, the Spirit of truth; here that Jesus tells us "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life". So it will be important that we read this verse carefully, in the context of the whole farewell discourse. Now, we remember that moment during the last supper: Jesus takes a towel and washes his disciples' feet. That was a shock to them, especially to Peter! But Jesus says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (15.12)

In word and in action, Jesus is inviting us to be joined to him, to find our way by choosing his way, to discover the depths of love by loving others as Jesus loves us all. Jesus here is talking to all his disciples together. This is about us, not just me. And this verse is the invitation to do as Jesus says - to love others as he loves us, helped by the promised Spirit. Now we see that, far from the threat we feared in the imaginary Mark's words to Becky, Jesus is simply telling it as it is: If you love me - if you allow yourself to trust, to have faith, to know that you are already held and loved, - then you too will find yourself growing in love for others, you will 'keep my commandments'. So, as we sing our hymn today let us pray together, "Come down, O Love divine, seek thou this soul of mine!"* Amen.

Peter cr

** This hymn was chosen by Mrs Stella Beale, of the Mission Church and Leaton congregation, for our weekly phone worship, Sharing the Light in the Loop. If you don't happen to have a hymn book at home, you might like to search for it on Google or YouTube. Or listen to our recorded worship on 0174 3298285!*