

The Five Alive Praying Together on a Sunday

Sunday 27th September 2020 – Trinity 16

*You may like to light a candle as a visible symbol of Jesus
being present with you.*

The Lord is with us.

Blessed are you, Lord God, creator of day and night:
to you be praise and glory for ever.

As darkness falls you renew your promise
to reveal among us the light of your presence.

By the light of Christ, your living Word,
dispel the darkness of our hearts
that we may walk as children of light
and sing your praise throughout the world.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
Blessed be God for ever.

Amen.

That this evening may be holy, good and peaceful,
let us pray with one heart and mind.

Keep a moment of quiet

As our evening prayer rises before you, O God,
so may your mercy come down upon us to cleanse our hearts
and set us free to sing your praise now and for ever.

Amen.

Reading: Philippians 2: 1-13

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,

who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Reading: Matthew 21: 23-32

When Jesus entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" But if we say, "Of human origin", we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

'What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." He answered, "I will not"; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, "I go, sir"; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Reflection

“The Second Calling” by Hans Reinders is a story about the forming of a community of people on the edge of a village near Seville, southern Spain. The residents of the House of Bethany work together, eat together, laugh together and cry together, celebrating the life that God has given them. Most of all, they learn together.

Though a novel, the story is based upon the life of a L’Arche Community with people who have different abilities for learning, but all learn, and they learn from each other – all discover a second calling.

There is Antonio, a talented artist and potter from Seville, who had worked in a ceramics factory all his life. He had come to live in the community to set up the pottery workshop. And there is the softly speaking Joaquin, a blind young man of 14, without family. The story paints a lovely scene of Joaquin’s first day in the pottery, and Antonio’s welcome:

“Hello son” he said, taking Joaquin’s hand in his for a jovial handshake. “Welcome to our workshop where we make pots, bowls and vases”. Interrupting himself for a second to see if there was any response, he saw the boy was listening, but remained silent.

“I hope you don’t mind but I am going to need a lot of help from you, Joaquin. I know what pottery looks like, but I have no clue what it is like when you cannot see anything. The same is true for my crew here. So, you need to teach us what it is to be blind. When you do, I promise we will teach you how to make a decent pot. Do we have a deal?”

Joaquin’s face showed the beginning of a smile the smile got bigger, and he nodded, “Yes, we do”.

The Second Calling is a novel with many messages, among them, how to live and learn, and how each person can discover a second calling through

their own gifts and being open to and receiving the gifts in others. The Second Calling is a book about humility.

Humility is a strange virtue to understand or explain. It is tempting to think that being humble is thinking badly of yourself in comparison to others; or of putting yourself down below others; or acting mildly. Humility is not, being a doormat, nor thinking of yourself as not good enough. C.S. Lewis wrote *“The thing about a truly humble person is not that they think less of themselves, but that they think of themselves less”*.

Paul’s letter to the Philippians seems to further complicate our understanding of humility. He writes *“in humility regard others as better than yourselves”*. If though we read that in the context of the wider passage, I think, we see humility in the sense - of living in a way that has the interests of others before our own – putting their needs above our own as Jesus showed – and recognising we like all others around us, have much to learn. Humility is identifying oneself as one like others who get things wrong, need to say sorry, and start again.

Paul’s letter is hard to understand again, when he says of Jesus, *he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself”*.

“Emptied himself” of what? Being divine?

No, Jesus was always divine, He became a human being, but he did not stop being divine. Yet his divinity was not a reason to exploit others – just the opposite. Though of God, and without sin, Jesus identified with sinners. He stands in line with the sinners waiting to be baptised by John. Henri Nouwen writes of Jesus’ humility at his baptism - *“As Jesus starts his ministry, he chooses to enter into solidarity with sinful humanity”*. John tried to dissuade him, but Jesus replied, *“Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfil all righteousness”*. (Matthew 3: 13-17).

Jesus chooses the way of humility to begin his public ministry. Though without sin himself, he comes with the many sinners seeking baptism and a new start. And God affirms his choice when God speaks from the heavens *“This is my Son, the Beloved”*.

All the way through his earthly life, Jesus chose the path of humility. Yet, he certainly was not meek or mild. He was not submissive. He challenged the injustices he saw around him. He called to account the leaders of his day. He spoke the truth kindly but clearly – he was not rude to people, but I think it would have been uncomfortable at times, to have been in his presence when he was teaching. The story today from Matthew’s Gospel, when Jesus tells the chief priests and the elders of the temple that *“the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you”* shows how the man of humility and compassion dealt with those who exploited their positions of trust.

At the end of his earthly life, the power of God comes through Jesus on the cross. Emptied in the sense that on the cross, Jesus shows us *“self-giving love”*. He went all the way in identifying with humanity – even death on a cross – as Isaiah wrote:

He was despised and rejected by others, a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely, he has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. (Isaiah 53: 3-5).

Far from humility being weak and powerless, humility allowed God’s love and mercy to flow. Though God was with him; and Jesus was of God, what had to come, came through his *“emptiness of the cross”*.

“Being empty” takes many forms – some helpful, some less helpful. I think a message we can take from this passage from Paul’s letter to the Philippians, is how we can be helped to put the need of others before our own, is to look to Christ, and to ask in prayer, for the grace to be of the same mind as Christ, and to have the same love as Christ, and to act in the way Christ acted with others – identifying ourselves as in need too alongside others, recognising the healing that comes when we let God’s love and mercy to flow.

In *The Second Calling*, as well as Antonio and Joaquin, and other residents of the House of Bethany, there is Ramón – the founder of the community and it’s leader. His discovery comes through the challenges of caring for one who has severe behavioural issues. There is a lovely moment, and a somewhat amusing one, when Ramón seeks spiritual direction from the wine-drinking Mother Chiara, in the convent. She teaches Ramón to know what God is doing in sending all the people he meets on his path. She shows him that the creation and life of the House of Bethany is not a question of whether it is God’s work, or the work of a human being – certainly not his work alone – nor dependent on Ramón’s work alone – rather, through God being present in the people that are living and learning together. Recognising the gifts in others, with those gifts we have ourselves, as being from God, and from where God’s work will be done as his love and mercy flows.

Keep a moment of quiet to reflect before praying.

Prayers

Prepared by Jean Ounsted

Heavenly Father help us let the same mind be in us that was in Christ. Help us each look not to our own interest, but to the interests of others, and enable us to work for your will.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Bless the work of your Church throughout the world and in our diocese.

We pray for Bishop John and Bishop Martin, for our priests, for Sarah Gary, and Emma, for our retired priests Nancy, Frank and Stephen, and for our ALMs. As we continue to pray for Sue Hiscocks as she starts her work among us as a Reader in our parish, we pray for all those in any kind of ministry, lay and ordained, and especially at this time for those ordained in the Cathedral yesterday as deacons, and those being ordained as priests in their churches today. Support them all in their calling and commitment and the task they undertake. Give us all grace to serve you in serving others.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for our world giving thanks for its beauty and bounty. Help us to be more careful of its resources and to work for a fairer distribution of its abundance. We pray for leaders and those in authority that they may respect all people, be guided by wisdom, act with integrity, and that their decisions are taken with humility and humanity.

Lords in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Lord, as we move to a worsening of the Covid-pandemic, we pray for all who will be most affected by the risks and restrictions. We think of those more susceptible to the virus, the many who have been isolated already for many months or separated from family, and all who are facing financial

difficulty and unemployment. We pray for health workers caring for patients in all settings, for all working to supply the needs of the nation, and for researchers seeking to secure an effective vaccine. Give us hope and courage and keep us in your strength in the months ahead.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We give thanks for our community and for the support systems within our villages. May we be ever aware of the needs of our neighbours and ready to serve them. We ask you to be with our children and young people as they settle back into school and college, finding new ways of relating to each other and to their learning.

We pray for the two couples married yesterday in Fladbury Church, Emily and Edward, and Caprice and Lee, and for all wedding couples entering married life at this time, many having to change long cherished plans but still wanting to make their vows. Give them your love in their lives together.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are sick, distressed or wearied by ongoing illness or frailty, and for those who care for them and support them. We pray for all who feel alone or who are fearful or depressed. We think especially of those known to us and those known only to you. May they find compassion and understanding, and feel the power of your healing love.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayer.

We pray for those who mourn, while we give thanks for the lives of all who have died, remembering those who have faithfully witnessed to you by their words and deeds. As we honour their memory, give us grace to serve like them and grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

Merciful Father,
accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

(Pause).

Collect for Trinity 16

O Lord,
we beseech you mercifully to hear the prayers
of your people who call upon you;
and grant that they may both perceive and know
what things they ought to do,
and also may have grace and power faithfully to fulfil them;
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.

Collect for St Michael and All Angels

(on 29th September)

Everlasting God,
you have ordained and constituted the ministries
of angels and mortals in a wonderful order;
grant that as your holy angels
always serve you in heaven,
so, at your command,
they may help and defend us on earth;

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.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Hymn

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
to receive the food of your holy word.
Take your truth, plant it deep in us;
shape and fashion us in your likeness,
that the light of Christ might be seen today
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
all your purposes, for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
in the radiance of your purity.
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
that will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (b1974) and Stuart Townend (b1963)

We pray

Lord, you have brought us through this day
to a time of reflection and rest.
Calm us
and give us your peace to refresh us.
Keep us close to Christ
that we may be closer to one another
because of his perfect love.
In his name we pray.
Amen.

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