

Service of the Word 6 September 2020

Pentecost 14

Welcome

Good Morning and welcome to our Service. *The times they are a changing* as the old saying goes. Autumn is now well and truly with us here in the Scottish Highlands. Days are that ever changing mixture of rain and sunshine so you never quite know which jacket to put on when you venture out. This changing of the season is a time for reflection on what has past and a time of anticipation for the future. This year as the pandemic continues to alter our familiar ways of life it continues to be a time of uncertainty. We are not good with uncertainty so it continues to be a time of anxiety for all of us, even when the depth of that anxiety and uncertainty remains unacknowledged. Today we gather our voices present and virtual in praise of the God who is our only sure source of certainty.

Gathering

We are gathered together as the family of God
to offer praise and thanksgivings
to ask forgiveness of our sins
to hear and receive God's holy Word
to pray for the needs of the world
and to seek God's grace
that through Jesus Christ our Lord
and in the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to God's service.

Penitence

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

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

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

O Lord, all we long for is before you;
and our deep sighing is not hidden from you.
But we acknowledge our wickedness;

we are filled with sorrow at our sin.
Be pleased O Lord, to deliver us;
O Lord, make haste to help us.
May the Lord forgive what we have been,
help us to amend what we are
and direct what we shall be,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Praise

Glory to God in the highest,
and peace to God's people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King,
almighty God and Father,
with God the Son, Jesus Christ,
and God the Holy Spirit,
we worship you, we give you thanks,
we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,
Lord God, Lamb of God,
you take away the sin of the world;
have mercy on us;
you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Almighty and eternal God,
make us grow in faith, hope and love;
and that we may be worthy of your promises,
cause us to love what you command;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, world without end. Amen

First Reading Psalm 149

Praise the Lord.
Sing to the Lord a new song,

his praise in the assembly of his faithful people.
Let Israel rejoice in their Maker;
let the people of Zion be glad in their King.
Let them praise his name with dancing
and make music to him with tambourine and harp.
For the Lord takes delight in his people;
he crowns the humble with victory.
Let his faithful people rejoice in this honour
and sing for joy on their beds.
May the praise of God be in their mouths
and a double-edged sword in their hands,
to inflict vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples,
to bind their kings with fetters,
their nobles with shackles of iron,
to carry out the sentence written against them –
this is the glory of all his faithful people.
Praise the Lord.

Second Reading Ecclesiastes 3.1-8

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

Reflection

The first Monday in September is Labour Day in the United States. It is a holiday much like the August Bank Holidays here in the United Kingdom. It marks, unofficially, the end of summer. School starts up again, folk go back to work and generally turn their attention to the autumn and winter holidays; Halloween, Remembrance, Harvest Thanksgiving and Christmas. The other unofficial turning point for this turn of seasons is Starbucks serving pumpkin spiced latte! As a child our family holiday or vacation always ended on Labour Day as we made the long journey home. A question which was asked frequently on that journey is one every parent is familiar with: Are we there yet?

In church circles the time at the beginning of September is when we turn our attention to planning for the big festivals coming our way over the next few months. Already you can find count down to Christmas apps calculating how many sleeps to the festivities. Are we there yet?

This plaintive question has taken on a new meaning as the coronavirus pandemic continues to disrupt our lives. The heroic work of lockdown has now changed into a prolonged period of disillusionment and frustration. Are we there yet? How long before things get back to normal. We are worn out and wanting this to be over, despite knowing that we are in this for the long haul and that it might be a very long time, if ever, before anything like normal returns.

My parents answer to the holiday journey question was *we will get there when we get there*. So I guess the the covid answer is *it won't be over until it is over*. We can't change that. And that may not a bad thing however uncomfortable it feels just now.

Listening to people in this post lockdown time of disillusionment and frustration helps me to understand that some rather important things might be happening. After the heroic efforts of lockdown we should be trying as best we can to restore our energies. We should

be getting ready for whatever lies ahead. Our energy levels individually and collectively are low, very low, which hopefully should lead us to rest more. Unfortunately, rather than rest and restore there is a kind of frenetic activity going on for some to get away, have a holiday while others are simply frantically trying to hold it all together. So the stresses of lockdown are replaced not with restoration but with an equally stressful attempt at relaxation or survival. The arrival of the pandemic and period of lockdown was traumatic for each of us personally, as a church congregation and as citizens of our own countries and the wider world. It is only after a period of time that the full impact of these events begins to register with us. Are we there yet? is a fair question to ask but the simple answer is no we are not there yet by a long shot.

The writer of Ecclesiastes speaks words of wisdom to help us restore our balance as we navigate the coming months when more familiar and comforting seasonal events will change beyond all recognition. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: There is a time and we are not there yet. The only certainty just now is uncertainty - that things will be different, things will change quickly and often without warning. Our celebrations of the upcoming big holidays will not look or feel the same as they did last year or in the past. They will perhaps be simpler, less elaborate than before which is no bad thing. Or there will be more frantic efforts to restore normality which will only deplete our already low energy levels even further. Balancing things, simplifying things helps us to focus on what is important, what really matters to us. Simplicity and balance focus our hearts and minds on the Kingdom of God rather than the kingdoms of the world. Simply accepting that this is a time for uncertainty may be the first step back to some kind of balance in our lives. Accepting changes to what we have expected in the past may be the first step to navigating this new and uncertain future. The writer of our Psalm balances praise for God's goodness with genuine anger for oppression and injustice in the world.

Are we there yet? The answer lies in accepting that we have travelled so far, so fast we still need time to let our souls catch up

with us to restore our balance and our faith in certainty of God's love.

Apostle's Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by
the power of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.

On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Let us pray, for the church and the world, thanking God for the blessings in
our lives*

Intercessions

Blessing

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,

Forever and ever. Amen

Act of Dedication

Almighty God,
we thank you for the gift of your holy word:
may it be a lantern to our feet,
a light upon our paths,
and a strength to our lives.
Take us and use us to love and serve all people
in the power of the Holy Spirit
and in the name of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Praise

You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; *
you renew the face of the earth.
You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; *
you renew the face of the earth.
May the glory of the Lord endure for ever; may the Lord rejoice in all his
works.
You renew the face of the earth.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.
You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; * you renew the face of the earth.

Blessing

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and
minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ our
Lord: And the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy
Spirit, Be with you and all those for whom you have a care this day and
evermore. Amen