

Service of the Word 5 July 2020

Pentecost 5

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to our service. Today feels special for a couple of reasons. Here in Scotland we can now travel more than 5 miles for leisure or recreation for the first time in over 100 days. Lots of people are out and about just now not deterred by the cool, wet and windy weather. The joy this simple freedom brings into our lives is really quite amazing. A good reason to echo our Psalm this morning and give thanks for all the beauty which surrounds us even when it seems dull and grey outside. We also celebrate the anniversary of our National Health Service founded 72 years ago today. Three months ago most of us took this service for granted. It was always there, part of our lives that we were free to use and to complain about. Today we echo our Psalm again in thanks for this most extraordinary gift of a health service open to all. The depth of compassion, care and kindness shown by our Health Service staff, including all those working in hospitals, in care homes, in outreach services and clinics continues to be simply amazing. Since the pandemic began we have really begun to appreciate what before we took for granted; the freedom to leave our homes and a Health Service that cares for us. This morning we join our voices in praising God for gifts which now recognise that we can all too easily lose.

Gathering

We are gathered together as the family of God
to offer praise and thanksgiving
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

Lord God, let the world be ordered in peace,
according to your will;
that your people may be free to worship you with joy;
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 145 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.
2 Every day I will praise you
and extol your name for ever and ever.
3 Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no one can fathom.
4 One generation commends your works to another;
they tell of your mighty acts.
5 They speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty –
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
6 They tell of the power of your awesome works –
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
7 They celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
8 The Lord is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
9 The Lord is good to all;
he has compassion on all he has made.
10 All your works praise you, Lord;
your faithful people extol you.
11 They tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,
12 so that all people may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.
13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.
The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises
and faithful in all he does.
14 The Lord upholds all who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.
15 The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at the proper time.
16 You open your hand

and satisfy the desires of every living thing.
17 The Lord is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.
18 The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
19 He fulfils the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.
20 The Lord watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
21 My mouth will speak in praise of the Lord.
Let every creature praise his holy name
for ever and ever.

Second Reading

Matthew 11: 25-30 The Message (MSG)

Jesus broke into prayer: “Thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth. You have concealed your ways from sophisticated people and know-it-alls, but spelled them out clearly to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that’s the way you like to work.” Jesus resumed talking to the people, but now tenderly. “The Father has given me all these things to do and say. This is a unique Father-Son relationship, coming out of Father and Son are intimacies and knowledge. No one knows the Son the way the Father does, nor the Father the way the Son does. But I’m not keeping it to myself; I’m ready to go over it line by line with anyone willing to listen. “Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out? Come to me. Get away with me and you will recover your life. I will show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you will learn to live freely and lightly.”

Reflection

Part of this morning’s gospel reads like the introduction to a self-help book or Your Tube video on improving your life. **Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out?** Get this book, watch this video and you will recover your life. If only it were that easy I hear you saying. How many of us have been tempted by that quick fix solution to our troubles. Just now most of us are, at least part of the time; tired, worn out or burned out by news reporting, government guidance, political wrangling . . . and the list goes on, including

the push and pull of family life in lock down. I had a meeting with the Bishop and other clergy earlier this week, on the now infamous ZOOM, of course. By the end of the two and a half hours I had simply lost the will to carry on! Everything was too much. This week I should have been packing for a month long holiday in the United States with my family and instead I am looking at literally dozens of tired, worn out, burned out faces in a ZOOM gallery on my computer. So I retreated to my armchair, turned on a couple of heaters to ward off the chill and lost myself in classic Wimbledon tennis matches by day and solving mysteries with Inspector Montalbano in sunny Sicily by night. I confess there may also have been snacks and wine involved in this retreat from reality.

I had read and started reflecting on this morning's readings, Psalm 145 and Matthew's gospel well before that ZOOM meeting but afterwards the message of both simply went out of my head for most of the rest of the week. I stopped looking at scripture and went instead for the self-help quick fix solution to not just being tired, worn out, burned out myself but to having to spend time with other clergy in the same state. It took a while to recover myself but then two phrases lodged in my head which have helped me to see things differently.

The first was something that was said in one of the Scottish Government briefings explaining that the task now was **to make normal safe for everyone; to make normal safe for everyone**. Not to make a new normal but to look carefully at what has gone before and do it in a new way that is safe for everyone as the pandemic continues to be with us. It is not about reinventing the wheel but about learning from others how to tweak the wheel, so to speak, so that it is safe for everyone to resume their lives in as normal a way as possible. So I have been watching this morning how the shops, hairdressers and hospitality venues in England have been using the guidance to make their places safe for people to visit again. There seem to be two approaches. One is very clinical, rigid and sterile with lots of official looking signs, floor markings and other safety and hygiene features. The other approach is to make the place feel as it did before while still ensuring that all the guidelines for hygiene and distancing are strictly adhered to. That certainly gives **me** food for thought about how we at St Paul's will re-open our church for worship in, I hope, the not too distant future. How we will continue to support those who are unable to get to our church building to still be a vital part of our worshipping community. So re-opening is not just

about stopping one thing, these podcasts, and starting another, gathering in a building. We have to make church normal yet safe for each and everyone of us.

***** part 2

The second phrase comes from this morning's gospel where Jesus invites us to **learn the unforced rhythms of grace**. Our lives now have a new forced rhythm, the rhythm forced by the pandemic that continues to engulf our world. The rhythm that dictates that we have to approach every aspect of our lives differently, in a way which keeps both ourselves and others safe. It seems to me that as Christians, as people of faith in Jesus Christ, we need to recover, to rediscover an unforced rhythm of grace in this new way of life. The grace to raise our voices in praise for God's many and gracious gifts as the writer of our Psalm does. Thanking God for literally everything blessing in our lives. These blessings are still there we just lose sight of them when we are tired, worn out and burned out by circumstances way beyond our control.

If find the image of **the unforced rhythm of grace** both hopeful and soothing. The grace to give thanks to God; the grace to accept my total dependance on God, the grace to place into God's hands everything that troubles my soul. We find it so hard to surrender control to anyone, even to God, that the rhythm of grace does not come easily to us. And yet, here in these words of Jesus is that solution we so desperately seek for ourselves, for our lives, for our world. I know myself well enough to know that there will be more times of retreat from reality ahead. More times when I will simply lose the will to carry on and want to bury my head in the sand. I hope and pray when those times come that I will remember Jesus call to live my life in the **unforced rhythms of grace. The unforced rhythms of grace which will help us to make normal safe for everyone. Amen**

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