
Service of the Word

Easter 6 17 May 2020

Gathering and Greeting

Good Morning, and welcome to our Service for this sixth Sunday of Easter. It has been a particularly difficult week for many of us I know. For me the talk of lifting lockdown, of coming out of our social isolation, with all the mixed messages in the media; for me this has been really, really hard to listen to. Not just because we are still in lockdown in Scotland but because of all the fear and anxiety the idea raises in me. For some of us it is scary, very scary to think of even venturing out to a shop, a petrol station, or anywhere where there are more than the couple of people nicely distanced from each other. The news this weekend is full of fear; fear that people will venture out but in large number. Fear that small rural communities in our country's beauty spots will be overwhelmed by visitors. Fear that Wales and Scotland will have border patrols to deter visitors from England. The fear of each other is becoming more scary than our fear of the Covid-19 virus. I wish I knew what the answer was to face this fear but I am no wiser than any of you. I too listen to the experts trying to follow the best advice. I do know that fear is not of God and perhaps as we walk this week with Jesus towards his leave taking and our celebration of Ascension on Thursday; perhaps we can find solace for our very real, very normal fears.

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 and Forgiveness

Return to the Lord, who will have mercy:
to our God, who will richly pardon. *(Isaiah 55.7)*

A time of silence is kept,

Penitential Psalm

**I confess my iniquity:
and am sorry for my sin.**

**In you, O Lord, have I fixed my hope:
You will answer me, O Lord my God.**

**O Lord, do not forsake me:
be not far from me, O my God.**

**Make haste to help me:
O Lord of my salvation. (From *Psalm 38*)**

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. (*SEC Daily Prayer 1988*)

Praise

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Rejoice, then, even in your distress.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

He called us from our darkness into the light of this day.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!

PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD

Collect of the Day

Let us pray,

Lord God, from whom all good things arise:
grant such grace to those who call on you,

that, by your inspiration,
we may ponder those things that are right,
and, by your guidance, do them;
through Jesus Christ, our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you,
in the unity the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen

Our first reading is read by Jeremy

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: ‘People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: to an unknown god. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship – and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

‘The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. “For in him we live and move and have our being.” As some of your own poets have said, “We are his offspring.”

‘Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone – an image made by human design and skill. **30** In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.’

Our second reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 14, beginning at the 1st verse

“Don’t let this throw you. You trust God, don’t you? Trust me. There is plenty of room for you in my Father’s home. If that weren’t so, would I have told you that I’m on my way to get a room ready for you? And if I’m on my way to get your room ready, I’ll come back and get you so you can live where I live. And you already know the road I’m taking.”

Thomas said, “Master, we have no idea where you’re going. How do you expect us to know the road?”

Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him. You've even seen him!"

Philip said, "Master, show us the Father; then we'll be content."

"You've been with me all this time, Philip, and you still don't understand? To see me is to see the Father. So how can you ask, 'Where is the Father?' Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak to you aren't mere words. I don't just make them up on my own. The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act."

Reflection

Words are very dangerous things. I thought long and hard before I chose to use the Message translation for this morning's Gospel. Not just because it uses *rooms* instead of the more traditional *mansions* in the Father's house but also because it uses *road* instead of *way* in Jesus' description of himself. It is a brave, or foolhardy, preacher who messes with much loved scripture passages in a way that will probably upset someone. I chose this translation for one verse which simply leapt out at me when I first read it; *The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act*. I quite simply fell in love with that verse and I have been carrying it in my heart all week.

It came to mind when the various government spokespersons were debating what the word *alert* actually meant in the new UK, or not so united Kingdom, advertising campaign for our coronavirus fight. *The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act*. What does it mean to craft our words so that they carry a divine message? What does it mean to listen to each other's words and hear a divine message within them?

One word I hear a lot when talking to folk, on the telephone or across the Wifi is FINE. When asked many, but not all of us, respond: *I am fine*. But are we really *fine*? Or does that one simple word contain a multitude of feelings and emotions? Feelings and emotions that are common to many of us but unique to each one of our own life and circumstances. *I am fine* might contain layers of *fineness*. *I am fine* might hide feelings and emotions that we don't have words for, or words that we are afraid to speak because speaking those words might let the feelings out into the real world. In our Gospel this morning both Thomas and Philip are brave enough to speak the words that all the other Disciples are probably thinking. Thomas says: *Jesus we don't have a clue about where you are going? Going! how can you be going away. We are scared of losing you again, it hurts, it is hard and frankly I don't*

want any part of it. Good old Thomas honest and outspoken to the core. Philip is more circumspect in his choice of words but just as concerned for their future. *Look Jesus, just show us; show us this Father you keep talking about; show us God and then we will feel safe, secure and content. Please just show us.*

The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act. Jesus words to his disciples, Jesus words to us are divinely crafted. Trust me, believe in me, follow me, I won't leave you. I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. I am here in the midst of all of it; the fear, the anxiety, the isolation, the joy, the compassion, the kindness. I am present with God in each divinely crafted word and you, each one of you, are present with me. So let us be done with *I am fine*. We are not fine. We are each one of us struggling with our own feelings, and every one of those feelings is perfectly normal. In some of our conversations let us reveal those levels of *fineness* that lie hidden from each other. In the spirit of Thomas and Philip I will dare to speak a few words that others may recognise or resonate with. I am sad, I carry a sorrow which anyone who lives miles, in my case thousands of miles, from their family will understand. Sorrow not just that I cannot hug them here and now, but a deeper sorrow that I may never hug some of them again. When I say *I am fine* that is mostly true but under that *fineness*, just below the surface lies this sorrow. It is real and needs to see the light of day once in a while. Not every day or in every conversation but just once in a while. Whatever feelings lie beneath your *fineness* remember that *The Father crafts each word into a divine act.* And we sometimes in the middle of this pandemic we need to speak the hidden feelings and to listen for them when we speak to each other. *The Father who resides in me crafts each word into a divine act.*

Affirmation of Faith

Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus:*
the divine nature was his from the first:
Yet he did not grasp at equality with God;*
he emptied himself and became like a slave.
Taking the nature of man
he was revealed in human form;*
he humbled himself and became obedient
even to death, death on a cross.
Therefore God has raised him on high,*

and has given him a name above every other name;
So that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow,*
in heaven, on earth, and in the depths;
And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord;*
to the glory of God the Father. (from *Philippians 2*)

Intercessions

Conclusion and Blessing

Lord's Prayer

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,
for ever and ever. Amen.

Responsory

This is the day that the Lord has made; *
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
This is the day that the Lord has made; *
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

I shall not die, but I shall live,
and recount the deeds of the Lord.
This is the day that the Lord has made.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.

This is the day that the Lord has made; *

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Prayer

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. Amen. (*Common Worship*)

Blessing

God the Father, by whose glory Christ was raised from the dead, strengthen you to walk with him in his risen life, the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and all those for whom we have a care; this day and evermore.

Amen