

Service of the Word 7 June 2020

Feast of St Columba

Welcome

Good Morning, and welcome to our service for the feast of St Columba. Well actually it is Trinity Sunday but I have taken the liberty of leaving that great theological feast aside this year and turning instead to celebrate the great saint, Columba, who is credited with bringing Christianity to Scotland. Incidentally he is also alleged to have been the first person to record seeing Nessie, aka the Loch Ness Monster. I turned to Saint Columba because these strange and unsettling times we are living through call for heroes and stories. I find it hard to concentrate on anything too complex. Most of us are living in a state of brain fog just now. So stories are good because they speak to our feelings rather than our intellect. Stories also contain deep truth you just come at it in a different way. So today we journey with Columba who interestingly had a lot to say about the Trinity.

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, who called your servant Columba from among the princes of Ireland to be a herald and evangelist of your kingdom: grant that your Church, remembering his faith and courage, may so proclaim the gospel, that people everywhere will come to know your Son as their Saviour, and serve him as their king; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end Amen.

First Reading

Isaiah 61:1-4 New International Version - UK (NIVUK)

The year of the Lord's favour
The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour
and the day of vengeance of our God,
to comfort all who mourn,
and provide for those who grieve in Zion –
to bestow on them a crown of beauty
instead of ashes,
the oil of joy
instead of mourning,
and a garment of praise
instead of a spirit of despair.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
a planting of the Lord
for the display of his splendour.
They will rebuild the ancient ruins
and restore the places long devastated;
they will renew the ruined cities
that have been devastated for generations.

Second Reading

Matthew 5:13-16 The Message (MSG)

“Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavours of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the rubbish.

“Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a basket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

Reflection

So who was this St Columba? Well he was born in December 521 in County Donegal, Ireland. He was a member of the Clan O'Donnell, and was of royal descent. Columba was educated at a monastic school by among others St Finnian. In 560 a dispute arose over a copy Columba had made of St Finnian's book of psalms. The result was Columba's instigating a rebellion against the King culminating in a battle at which three thousand men were killed. Following the battle, as a penance, Columba was sent away from Ireland to preach the Gospel in order to convert as many to Christianity as had been killed at the battle and never again to look upon his native land.

In 563 Columba and 12 companions left Ireland, landing eventually on Iona on 12 May 563. The island was granted to Columba for the establishment of a monastery. At this point Columba was 42 years old and for many years journeyed from Iona across the Highlands and Island preaching the gospel. St Columba died in the monastery he has built on Iona, on 9 June 597.

How does Columba's story help us today? Well he faced hardship, much of his own making and for which he paid the heavy price of exile. He allowed himself to become a light for the Gospel. His story is one of the triumph of hope over adversity. But most of all Columba's story was one of reconciliation and repentance. That is the part for me speaks most clearly to the situation we find ourselves in today. It has been a long, hard week for me. Watching the news, not watching the news because I could not bear it. As a child of the 1960's I grew up with the racism that is so deeply rooted in American society. It has taken many years and many hard lessons to relearn the history of the country of my birth. Because I am white much of the racism was just part of normal, everyday life. We lived on the west coast so it was not as visible in society as in the southern states. But the racism was there none the less. I listened to the stories I was told at school, in history class, stories from my family and my friend's families. Stories with a strong bias towards the white, western European experience.

I was in my twenties before I realised that there were many, many other stories which I was never, ever told. Stories that never appeared in history books, or at least not the ones I was encouraged to read. At University my part time job brought me in to contact with a nurse of Japanese descent who had been interred with her family during the Second World War. Taken forcibly from their home one day immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbour, sent across the state to a former military base and kept there, as prisoners, until the end of the war. Only to return home to find that they had lost everything, house, jobs and any hope they may have had of returning to

normal life. After listening to her story I began to seek out other people to hear their stories. It was an eye opener for sure!

Not a single one of us is immune from racism; each of our hearts is stained with a prejudice, however small, against someone who is not quite like us. It is tempting to hide that away; to not bring it out into the light. But Jesus is clear we need to be the light. We need to be the source of God colours bursting forth into our world. So we need to face our own sins of racism and prejudice and hold them up to God for forgiveness. Unless we can do that hard thing; share our stories and listen to the stories of others with compassion; unless we can listen for understanding when their experience is so very different from ours. Unless we can learn to see our world differently then there will be no real change.

Like many other Americans I wept tears of joy when Barack Obama was elected President. Like many other Americans I wept tears of deep sorrow when his successor took office three years ago. Having an African American president did not change the deep rooted racism in American society. It gave hope but the events of this last week show there is still a long, long way to go. And here too as in every country across the world there are wrongs which need to be put right; stories which need to be shared. The Windrush scandal, the Grenville Tower fire, the children abandoned in refugee camps by the UK government - these are our home grown racism.

In the Message translation of Matthew's gospel Jesus tells his disciples to bring God colours into the world. That is what preaching the gospel is all about - bringing to life God colours in our world. This is such a powerful image for our time; a time when colour is at the heart of what ails our society. Jesus tells his disciples to open up with others, to tell their stories which gives others space in return to share their own stories. These are not stories about some perfect life; rather they are stories about sin and repentance; about forgiveness and reconciliation. Columba understood that; he preached from his own deep sinfulness and need to find restoration in the grace of God.

There are no easy answers here but the journey begins with a willingness to share, genuinely share, the experience of others. A willingness to learn new stories and let go of ones that no longer hold the truth. We can only be the light of the gospel, shining brightly on the stand, high on the hill above the city, we can only be all that in power of God, Father Creator, Son Redeemer & Holy Spirit Sustainer. Amen

Affirmation of Faith

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.

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