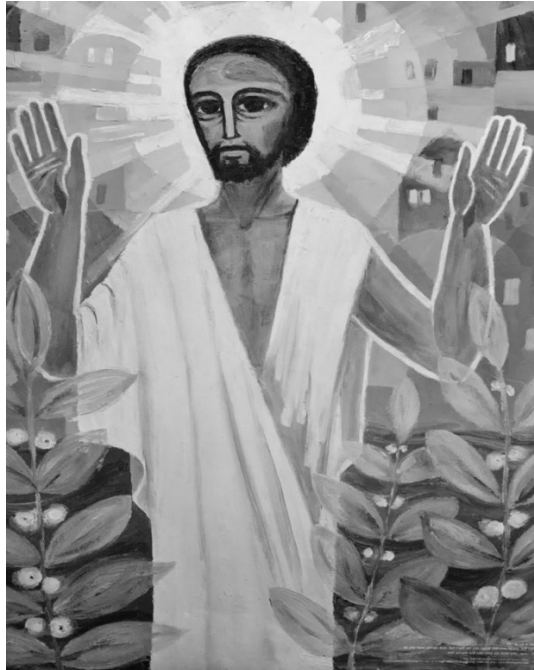


Sunday, 9 May 2021
The Sixth Sunday of Easter (Rogation Sunday)

Please use this material with the Easter order of Service



Collects

God our redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us he may raise us
to eternal joy;
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.

(or)

Risen Christ,
by the lakeside you renewed your call to your disciples:
help your Church to obey your command
and draw the nations to the fire of your love,
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

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Readings

Acts 10:44-end

Gentiles Receive the Holy Spirit

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

John 15:9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Sermon Abide in my love

John 15.9-17

Some children become very wrapped up in long imaginative games; their really good friends are the ones who are on the same wavelength, who enter their world with them and contribute their own ideas without disrupting the whole imaginative scheme of things. When you

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see two children playing like this, neither of them has to be the boss (although they can play at that game, if they both choose); neither of them has to say what should happen – even if the imaginative impetus did come from one of them in the first place. They are, in the deepest sense ‘friends’, on the same adventure together. They’re on the ‘same wavelength’.

Jesus says to those who follow him, in today’s Gospel, ‘I do not call you servants any longer, because a servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from the Father’. (John 15.15).

In Westcott House theological college, where I used to teach during the 1980’s, there’s an icon of Christ which looks down the chapel from the back wall of the sanctuary. Jesus carries a book, on which is written other words from our Gospel today: ‘You did not choose me, but I chose you.’ (15.16). It’s not a message just for the Twelve who accompanied him during his ministry, nor even just for those who have been selected nowadays for ordination training, but for all of us. Every morning in the chapel service, we sat in front of that icon, and the message sank into us.

What a message to reflect on in our lives! We have been chosen by Christ to be on his wavelength, to share the adventure of life together. We have been chosen to be his friends. We may quite often refer to ourselves as Christ’s servants – and there’s a truth in that. But the deeper truth is that we are called to be his friends – you, me, each one of us, in all our diversity and difference; friends of Jesus!

What puts us on the same wavelength as Christ? The bible, yes; prayer, yes; the Spirit of God, yes; but lying behind all our choices to make room for those things in our lives, is the choice to want to do the same thing as Jesus is doing in the world.

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I phrased that carefully. I didn't say 'The choice to do the same thing...', but 'The choice to want to do the same thing...' We are weak and fallible, we know. Many conflicting desires and pressures afflict our hearts. We are even fickle about what we want on the surface, 'in the moment – but somewhere, deep down, we make fundamental choices about what we really want – or even, what we want to want, even though so many other things push us off course. When I was licensed in this diocese the then-Bishop of Ely came and preached, and he said that my job in preaching would be to help people 'want to want to love God'. I hope that makes sense to you – it made sense to me then, and still does, especially when I look into my own heart, crowded with tumultuous desires as it is.

So – to want – or, to want to want, to do the same thing as Jesus in the world? What is that? What was he doing when he spoke to his disciples, what was he doing when he laid down his life on the cross? What is the profound thing which puts his plan and purpose in a nutshell?

Surely what he is always doing is loving the world. And that's why his definition of abiding in him and being his friend is given terms of abiding in his love, which means loving in our turn. '...abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love...this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you...' (15.10 and 12)

This is what we have to want – or to want to want, at least. But loving isn't easy, not if we seek to do it by ourselves, in our own strength like servants doggedly following the commands of a master. We've got to take this idea of abiding in Jesus, being fused with him like branches on a vine, really seriously. He's offering us the sap of life, the Holy Spirit, to do what we couldn't possibly do by ourselves in the way of loving. We do our little bit – the bit that shows the motion of our will in the direction of wanting what he wants. I think we do it especially when we pray - maybe prayers something like this:

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‘Lord, I’m praying for someone I really, really don’t like. Someone who seems utterly remote from me in mentality and experience. I’m praying for someone who irritates me intensely or who has wounded me deeply – someone for whom I feel no love at all. But let the sap of your love, the guidance of your Spirit, the purposes of your heart for that person rise up in me. Let me move from my own all-too-limited point of view and be stretched in my imagination to see and pray for that person as you see them. And then, when I act, may it be in you, with your strength and your love. Lord, help me to do this thing together with you, as your friend, as someone who seeks to abide in you as you in me. Please pray in me, Lord; please act in me, and love in me, Lord I put my trust in your promise that then my joy will be complete, and my loving miraculously fruitful – because we do it together.’

I end now with a story that some of you may already know about Corrie ten Boom who was arrested, during the war with her sister Betsie, for hiding Dutch Jews from the Nazis. She survived the horrors of a concentration camp, although her sister died there, and went on to astonish the world by forgiving her tormentors. and travelling around the world to preach the message of forgiveness.

She herself was particularly put to the test in 1947 while speaking in a Munich church. At the close of the service, a balding man in a gray overcoat stepped forward to greet her. Corrie froze. She knew this man well; he’d been one of the most vicious guards at Ravensbrück, one who had mocked the women prisoners as they showered. “It came back with a rush,” she wrote, “the huge room with its harsh overhead lights; the pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor; the shame of walking naked past this man.”

And now he was pushing his hand out to shake hers. As she wrote, ‘I, who had spoken so glibly of forgiveness, fumbled in my pocketbook rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course — how could he remember one prisoner among those thousands of women?’

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But I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captors, and my blood seemed to freeze.

“You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk,” he was saying. “I was a guard there... But since that time,” he went on, “I have become a Christian. I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there, but I would like to hear it from your lips as well. Fraulein” — again the hand came out — “will you forgive me?”

And I stood there — I whose sins had again and again to be forgiven — and could not forgive. Betsie had died in that place — could he erase her slow terrible death simply for the asking?

The soldier stood there expectantly, waiting for Corrie to shake his hand. She “wrestled with the most difficult thing I had ever had to do. For I had to do it — I knew that. The message that God forgives has a prior condition: that we forgive those who have injured us.”

Standing there before the former S.S. man, Corrie remembered that forgiveness is an act of the will — not an emotion. “Jesus, help me!” she prayed. “I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling.”

Corrie thrust out her hand.

“And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes.

“I forgive you, brother!” I cried. “With all my heart.”

This is a passage about forgiveness – but it’s equally about love, because they are so close together. As Christ’s friends, we’re called to want to want to love – to stretch out our hands and pray for God do the rest.

Maggie Guite

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God is love: let heav'n adore him

1 God is love: let earth rejoice;
Let creation sing before him,
And exalt him with one voice.
He who laid the earth's foundation,
He who spread the heav'ns above,
He who breathes through all creation,
He is Love, eternal Love.

2 God is love: and he enfoldeth
All the world in one embrace;
With unfailing grasp he holdeth
Every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find that selfsame aching
Deep within the heart of God.

3 God is Love: and though with blindness
Sin afflicts the souls of all,
God's eternal loving-kindness
holds and guides us when we fall.
Sin and death and hell shall never
o'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love, so Love for ever
o'er the universe must reign.

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Tune: Abbot's Leigh by Cyril Taylor (1907-1991)

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In our darkness light has shone

- 1 In our darkness light has shone, Alleluia ,
still today the light shines on, Alleluia ;
Word made flesh in human birth, Alleluia ,
Light and Life of all the earth, Alleluia!

- 2 Christ the Son incarnate see, Alleluia ,
by whom all things came to be, Alleluia ;
through the world his splendours shine, Alleluia ,
full of grace and truth divine, Alleluia!

- 3 All who now in him believe, Alleluia ,
everlasting life receive, Alleluia ;
born of God and in his care, Alleluia ,
we his Name and nature share, Alleluia !

- 4 Christ a child on earth appears, Alleluia ,
crown of all creation's years, Alleluia ;
God's eternal Word has come, Alleluia ,
he shall lead his people home, Alleluia !

Timothy Dudley-Smith (born 1926) from John 1

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Love is his word, love is his way

- 1 Love is his word, love is his way,
feasting with kin, fasting alone,
living and dying, rising again,
love, only love, is his way.
*Richer than gold is the love of my Lord:
better than splendour and wealth.*

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2 Love is his news, love is his name,
we are his own, chosen and called,
family, brethren, cousins and kin.
Love, only love, is his name.

Chorus

3 Love is his name, love is his law.
Hear his command, all who are his:
'Love one another, I have loved you.'
Love, only love, is his law.

Chorus

4 Love is his law, love is his word:
love of the Lord, Father and Word,
love of the Spirit, God ever one,
love, only love, is his word.

Chorus

Luke Connaughton (1917-1979)
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Closing Prayer

God our Father,
whose Son Jesus Christ gives the water of eternal life:
may we thirst for you,
the spring of life and source of goodness,
through him who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. **Amen.**