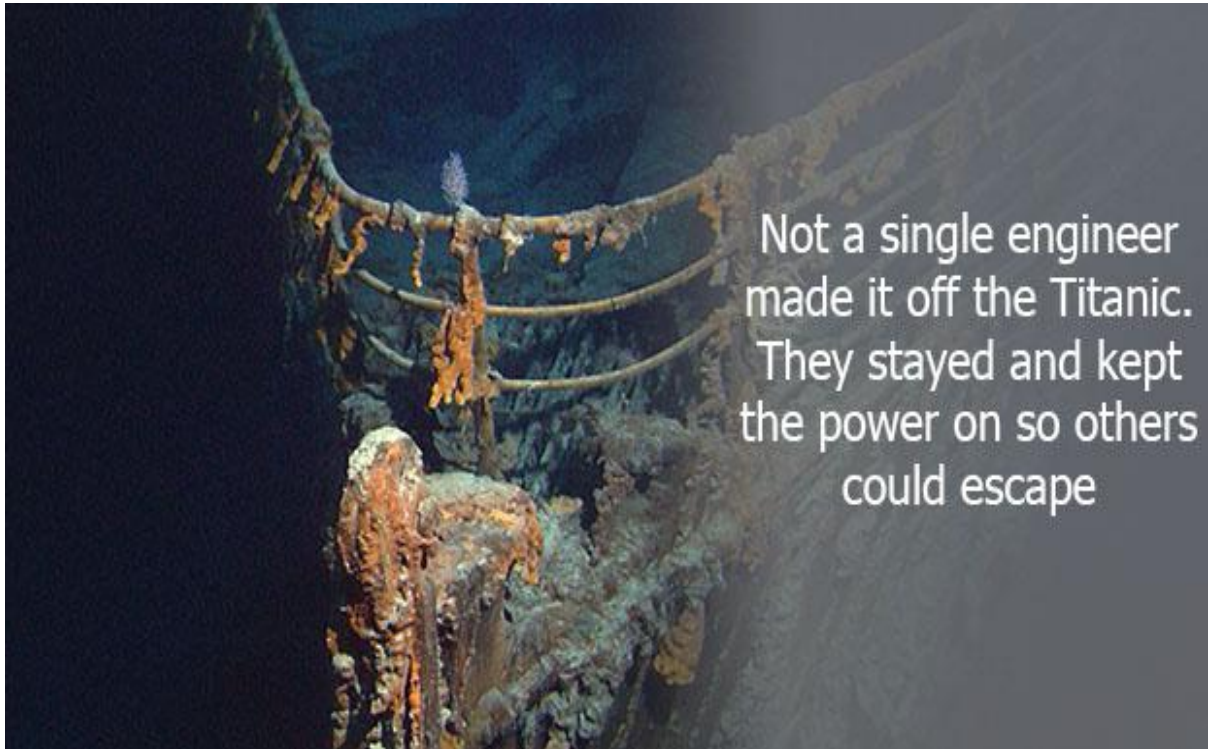


Greater love!



Pentecost 20

Sunday 18 October 2020

**Greater love has no one than this,
that someone lays down his life for his friends.**

John 15:13

In Jesus the Christ present among us we are known,
we are loved because there is a God who never abandons us.
The shaking ground of life lies above a firm rock and our feet always tread the
path of eternal hope.

This is our God, the God of every age and place.

Praise be to God, Creator Sustainer and Redeemer.

Be with us in this time of worship, Holy Spirit. Be with us in all honesty and call
us into a new knowledge of who we are.

***Then be especially near to us in our moment of truth and understanding and
enfold us in your compassion and grace.***

Hymn 182

*Bring many names, beautiful and good,
celebrate in parable and story,
holiness in glory,
living, loving God.
Hail and hosanna!
Bring many names!*

*Great, living God,
never fully known,
joyful darkness far beyond our seeing,
closer yet than breathing,
everlasting home:
Hail and hosanna,
great, living God!*

Prayer of Confession and Assurance

Compassionate and loving God, among us in the Christ our Lord, we know we often defend ourselves by failing to face the truth. We attack others because they remind us of your way and its uncompromising challenge; and then we challenge their credibility so that people's eyes are turned away from us and our failings.

Forgive us and look into our hearts with your penetrating demand for truth and action.

If we spend time arguing about doctrinal niceties, side-stepping the real issues by focussing on trivialities and diverting our energies from the demands of commitment to your kingdom and its realisation:

Forgive us and look into our hearts with your penetrating demand for truth and action.

When we lose our connection with your presence and will, simply confronting others and losing our sense of what is right amongst the plethora of compromises that make life easier for us:

Forgive us and look into our hearts with your penetrating demand for truth and action.

So may we come to you, O God, in humility, genuinely seeking for grace and enabling forgiveness, remembering that Jesus was never deterred by the cunning of those who opposed his ministry and teaching but held firm against those who came in enmity to undermine him and his faithfulness to your purposes. We thank you that you distinguish between those who come in troubled vulnerability and those who are the real enemies of good.

We thank you for life which is full of rich moments and possibilities for kingdom living and creative challenges through the calling of faith and its practice in the Christ among us and in us.

Amen

Hymn 464

*Seek, O seek the Lord,
while he is near;
trust him, speak to him in prayer,
and he will hear.*

*God be with us in our lives,
direct us in our calling;
break the snares the world contrives,
keep us from falling.*

*Seek, O seek the Lord,
while he is near;
trust him, speak to him in prayer,
and he will hear.*

*God, increase in us the life
that Christ by dying gave us:
though we faint in mortal strife
his blood will save us.*

*Seek, O seek the Lord,
while he is near;
trust him, speak to him in prayer,
and he will hear.*

*Strengthen in our hearts
the love we owe to one another;
how can we love God above
and not each other?*

*Seek, O seek the Lord,
while he is near;
trust him, speak to him in prayer,
and he will hear.*

Lectionary May your word live in us, O God
and bear much fruit to your glory

Hebrew Scripture

As we turn to the lectionary readings for today perhaps it is helpful to realise how very human the great ones of faith in the past were as they grappled with the reality of the God whom they were called to serve. I find the cartoonist captures something of this and prepares us for the inter-action between Moses and God.



Exodus 33:12-23

Moses said to the Lord, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.' Now therefore, if I have found favour in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favour in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight, and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

In this is the word of the Lord.

Reflection

The interaction between humanity and God which has its fulfilment in the Christ among us and in us, is, from time immemorial, only expressible in symbolism. For God is the wholly other in our encounters.

I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

But with the coming of Christ there is a new reality for us

**because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power
and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction**

as St. Paul writes to the Thessalonian Christians (1Thessalonians 1:5)

Gospel Matthew 22:15-22

Then the Pharisees went and plotted how to entangle him in his talk. And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true and teach the way of God truthfully, and you do not care about anyone's opinion, for you are not swayed by appearances. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesar's." Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." When they heard it, they marvelled. And they left him and went away.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

We all know the saying 'Religion and politics do not mix' and how it is used by those without a meaningful faith perspective to dismiss the views and opinions of those who practise their faith seriously. Yes, faith can make life decisions more demanding. In the hotbed of Roman occupied Jerusalem, where the Jewish hierarchy was a constant thorn in the Roman management of the city and its people, and also a difficult factor for the various factions in Jewish society, no one was immune from the consequences of 'stirring the pot' as it were and advantage was often sought by 'playing the religion card.' And dare we admit that Jesus was no slouch in this regard as witness his setting various religious opponents against one another to make his points. But his use of such debates was never simply a matter of point scoring; he was always acting with absolute integrity of purpose.

Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the coin for the tax." And they brought him a denarius. And Jesus said to them, "Whose likeness and inscription is this?" They said, "Caesar's."

Then he said to them, "Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

Our decision making is always a test of our integrity. This is the key for the person of faith in a world where compromise and power plays are so often the order of the day and the mark of the astute and the successful.

Hymn 598

*Dear Father, Lord of humankind,
forgive our foolish ways;
re clothe us in our rightful mind:
in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.
In deeper reverence, praise.*

*In simple trust like theirs who heard,
beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord,
let us, like them, without a word
rise up and follow thee,
rise up and follow thee.*

*O sabbath rest by Galilee!
O calm of hills above,
where Jesus knelt to share with thee
the silence of eternity,
interpreted by love,
interpreted by love.*

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
till all our strivings cease,
take from our souls the strain and stress
and let our ordered lives confess
the beauty of thy peace,
the beauty of thy peace.*

Prayers for Ourselves and Others and Lord's Prayer

Save us from hypocrisy and cant, O God, that we may always be known for our integrity and authenticity, the faithful people who really join you in work for the good of all.

And now we would bring others and their situations and concerns before you. Touch our hearts, indeed our innermost being, that we may truly understand their pain and need even as we struggle with the trials of our isolation and separateness at this time.

Give us the courage to listen to the cries of our deeply troubled and suffering world.

Make us open to new ideas from unlikely places and unexpected people.

Heal us when our integrity makes us open to wounds in our efforts to be true to your word, and encourage us when we cannot see the fruits of what we do in your name.

***Breathe into our innermost souls that they may expand with visions of grace.
Flow into our hearts and minds with your living water that we may refresh
the world.***

***Shine your light on others so that we see them with your eyes and
compassion.***

This we pray as your faithful people and in the words of our Lord,

***Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen***

Hymn 563 *Let him to whom we now belong
his sovereign right assert,
and take up every thankful song
and every loving heart.*

*He justly claims us for his own,
who bought us with a price;
as Christians live to Christ alone
to Christ alone we die.*

*We come in deep humility
your easy yoke to prove,
and own it perfect liberty
to serve the Lord we love.*

*Our souls and bodies we resign;
with joy we render thee
our all, no longer ours,
but thine to all eternity.*

Go back to the everyday world and its various challenges trusting nothing but the love of God in the Christ among us and all the resources of faith.

Benediction

And may every blade of grass be gentleness under
your feet,
every ray of sunlight a sign of the love of God and
the night a gift of rest before each new day.

Amen

Reverend Graeme Kerr

