



Pentecost 16

20 September 2020

Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ

Philippians 1:27

In the flow of grace around us, we feel your presence, O Christ.

In the gifts which enhance our lives we find that you are near us even in our isolation from one another.

Lift our spirits now and enhance our sense of fellowship as God's faithful people rising in life between us and around us as we unite in prayer and worship.

Amen

Hymn 231

*At the name of Jesus
every knee shall bow,
every tongue confess him
King of Glory now:
this the Father's pleasure
that we call him Lord,
who from the beginning
was the mighty Word.*

*Humbled for a season
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came,
faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed.*

*In your heart enthrone him,
there let him make new
all that is not holy,
all that is not true.
He is God the saviour,
he is Christ the Lord,
ever to be worshipped,
trusted and adored.*

Confession and Assurance

O God of infinite compassion and grace, we are only too aware of our demand for justice and fair play but often less concerned for the justice owed to others.

We like to see ourselves as guardians of fairness but are quick to claim what we see as our rights when confronted by the needs of others for justice.

Have mercy on us, O God.

Come to us in forgiveness and remind us again of the all-embracing dimensions of your compassion and grace.

When we expect you to be understanding of our often messy lives and their interactions with those around us; when we call upon your generosity of spirit but don't really deserve it and begrudge when it comes to offering the same to others:

Have mercy on us, O God.

Come to us in forgiveness and remind us again of the all-embracing dimensions of your compassion and grace.

When we hardly dare to ask things of you believing that we are not worthy of your attention;

when we fear your judgement of our fragile lives:

Have mercy on us O God.

Come to us in forgiveness and remind us again of the all-embracing dimensions of your compassion and grace.

We thank you, O God, for whom the first are no better than the last that everything about you is wider, higher, deeper and greater than anything we can imagine; for just as we think we have truly grasped your reality and truth your love surprises us. Just as we measure your grace in its compassion in our every situation, it overflows into that which is beyond measure.

We thank you, O God that you free us from the burden of intricate assessment about who deserves your gifts; for you lift us up into the realms of the shining light of resurrection life which through the Christ among us is open to all.

And so we say, thanks be to you, O God.

Amen.

Hear, then, the Gospel for today. **Matthew 20:1-16**

"For the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And going out about the third hour he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.'" So they went. Going out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour, he did the same. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing. And he said to them, 'Why do you stand here idle all day?' They

said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You go into the vineyard too.' And when evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last, up to the first.' And when those hired about the eleventh hour came, each of them received a denarius. Now when those hired first came, they thought they would receive more, but each of them also received a denarius. And on receiving it they grumbled at the master of the house, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius. Take what belongs to you and go. I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?'

So the last will be first, and the first last."

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Hymn 584

*Just as I am, though tossed about
with many a conflict, many a doubt,
fightings and fears, within , without,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am, you will receive,
will welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
because your promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am – your love unknown
has broken every barrier down
now to be yours, and yours alone,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am, of that free love
the breadth, length, height to prove,
here for a season, then above,
O Lamb of God, I come.*

Scripture Exodus 16:2-15

And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, "Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when

we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily." So Moses and Aaron said to all the people of Israel, "At evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your grumbling against the Lord. For what are we, that you grumble against us?" And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him— what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, 'Come near before the Lord, for he has heard your grumbling.' " And as soon as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the people of Israel, they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. And the Lord said to Moses, "I have heard the grumbling of the people of Israel. Say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall be filled with bread. Then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.' "

In the evening quail came up and covered the camp, and in the morning dew lay around the camp. And when the dew had gone up, there was on the face of the wilderness a fine, flake-like thing, fine as frost on the ground. When the people of Israel saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. And Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

In this is the word of the Lord.

O Lord, may your word live in us
and bear much fruit to your glory.

Reflection

As we turn to the Hebrew Scriptures we find ourselves continuing to follow Israel's journey in faith with its God. The long and remarkable journey leaving the primitive judgemental and vindictive gods of those around them and moving on in faith into an unknown future with the God whose nature is Being itself is a journey both of amazing physical dimensions and drama and of spiritual challenge. In this latter regard will be the call to grow in

understanding of the nature of their God. And this will include recognising the need to move further and further away from the simplistic view of the God of their past experiences, the God of judgement and vengeance and transactional interaction to a God of compassion and One beyond human concern for mere fair play as goodness, whether looking in human value terms or the value commitment of the Divine being to his faithful people

**the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled
against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness,
and the people of Israel said to them,
"Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord
in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots
and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out
into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."**

Yes. Faced by the trials and tribulations of nomadic life and its very different challenges they turned to blaming their leaders and their God for such a dramatically different way of life.

We, too are prone to lose faith in new and challenging times, as we are seeing when we have to adapt quite dramatically in the face of a pandemic and its epic proportions and their consequences for living out our lives beyond the parameters that have long been our reality and our accepted expectations. What is God doing to us? The challenge is to grow in our new circumstances. Our way of living has to be different as the Israelites had to adapt in their time. They had to be God's faithful people in terms of a new way of being. And they had to realise and understand God's reality for them in a new way. And so it is for us.

Today's Gospel is a sharp reminder of this. If we simply fall back on older ways of understanding God and older expectations of what God will be for us we are bound to be disappointed like those who thought they should be treated differently to the late comers to the vineyard

**Take what belongs to you and go.
I choose to give to this last worker as I give to you.
Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?
Or do you begrudge my generosity?'
So the last will be first, and the first last."**

But No. The very nature of God transcends humanity's transactional expectations. God in God's Being is far beyond such simplistic relationships which belong to the world of judgement and vindication when God's world, 'Yours is the Kingdom', is one of mercy, compassion and unconditional love.

At the end of the Israelite journey was to be found the One who stands for life in all its fulness, the absolute counter of death and destruction and transactional 'eye for an eye', 'tooth for a tooth' living; the One whose death and resurrection was God's final word and promise to all humankind in Jesus the Christ. This destiny is our destiny and nothing can change this. The promise to Abraham and the patriarchs, Jacob and Joseph and Moses and their successors, is fulfilled in the Christ of our faith and practice unnumbered generations later.

So Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ

Philippians 1:27

Hymn 569

*Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but though art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.*

*Open now the crystal fountain
whence the living waters flow:
let the fiery, cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield,
be thou still my strength and shield.*

*When I tread the verge of Jordan
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.*

Prayers for Ourselves and Others and Lord's Prayer

O God, we are challenged by your word declaring that **"the last will be first, and the first last."** Yes, the very nature of your Being transcends humanity's transactional expectations and is far beyond such simplistic relationships which belong to the world of judgement and vindication when your world is one of mercy, compassion and unconditional love.

You are the One who always gives us far less than we deserve in terms of the

consequences for our failures and mistakes and far more for the little that we offer to the world in contributions of work and efforts for good.

We cannot even imagine how our relationship with you will reward even our most limited faithfulness.

And we are quick to begrudge your generosity when it applies to others.

But for you all creation and its peoples are precious beyond our human valuing.

Teach us how to pray for the realities that are the true expression of Your Kingdom.

Show us the pain in the faces of those who cry out for your mercy and compassion through us.

Bring forth before us those who suffer in silent helplessness and enable us, through our prayers and actions, to be the answer to their needs.

Call us in and through the Christ in us into new relationships of equity and compassion.

We come before you also as those whose lives are fraught with all manner of challenges needing your compassion and grace as we face the harder questions of the life of faith in an often faithless world.

Often we are overcome with our apparent helplessness as we try to understand our part in changing the world into the place of beauty and peace and fulfilment of your purposes which are to be realised in our prayers for your Kingdom to become the final reality.

Hear the prayers of our hearts even when we have no words to express them.

So may the Christ walk with us and the Holy Spirit uplift us.

We pray in the words which Jesus himself first taught his disciples long ago:

***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 609

*May the mind of Christ my Saviour
live in me from day to day,
by his love and power controlling
all I do and say.*

*May the word of God dwell richly
in my heart from hour to hour
so that all may see I triumph
only through his power.*

*May the peace of God my Father
rule my life in everything
that I may be calm to comfort
sick and sorrowing.*

*May the love of Jesus fill me
as the waters fill the sea;
him exalting, self denying,
this is victory.*

*May I run the race before me
strong and brave to face the foe,
looking only unto Jesus
as I onward go.*

Benediction

May Christ's kindness and compassion lead us back into the everyday world,
the hand of God reach out to draw us on into resurrection life
and the Spirit gather around us as we go.

Amen

Reverend Graeme Kerr

A Prayer for the Season of Creation

UCA President Dr Deidre Palmer

Creator God, you move across our world,

bringing light, new life and hope.

We give you thanks for the beauty of your creation,

the intricate and interconnected web of life.

We give you thanks for the sacred earth, the air and water, for the oceans that teem with life, the rain that refreshes and sustains life, the water that we drink that maintains life.

Christ Jesus, you come to bring renewal

and reconciliation to the whole of creation.

We pray for all those places, creatures, and plants, that are suffering, as humans exploit your Earth and its resources.

Forgive us for the destruction we have caused. Guide us into the way of respect and care for the Earth and all living things.

We pray that you will renew our resolve to participate with you

in the healing and renewal of our earth.

May your Holy Spirit strengthen us with courage, to be bearers of your creative and life-giving presence in all the Earth.

Amen.
