



Pentecost 23

8 November 2020

And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." Joshua 24:24

Stay, stay in the sacred space of God, beyond the sanctuary and within it, when life seems filled with hope and when it leaps with joyful rewards.

Stay, stay in the darker times with fragile, flickering candles of hope, when courage wavers and the pathway enters the valleys of life:

For God has always been present, our God is right beside us even now, and our God will guide us into our future.

So let us now worship our God.

Hymn 547

*Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
naught be all else to me, save that thou art;
thou my best thought, by day or by night,
waking or sleeping, thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word;
I ever with thee and thou with me, Lord;
thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.*

*Be thou my armour, my sword for the fight,
be thou my dignity, thou my delight;
be thou my soul's shelter and thou my high tower;
raise thou me heavenward, O Power of my power.*

*Riches I scorn and the world's empty praise,
thou my inheritance, now and always:
thou and thou only the first in my heart,
high King of heaven, my treasure thou art.*

*High King of heaven, after victory won,
may I reach heaven's joys, O bright heaven's sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be my vision, O ruler of all.*

This, Rowan Ebbels' favourite hymn, we sang at the Service on Thursday to celebrate Rowan's life. Covid 19 restrictions meant that, although we were at last able to return to the church building, only 20 people could attend. So I

thought I would share with you in today's On-line service what I had to say on behalf of the St. Andrew's Congregation.

Last Sunday, All Saints Day, we dedicated our worship Service to Rowan to honour his many, many years of service to St. Andrews. But his commitment to his church had extended beyond that to St. Andrews. He had been an important member at Kerrimuir in particular as well. However St Andrews was the place where his membership and leadership had been central. So it is very pleasing that we can be here today to farewell him albeit with the limitations of Covid restrictions making a much smaller attendance than would otherwise have been the case. In the faith community of the Christian church all God's faithful are its saints. But Rowan was, in every sense of that designation, an indisputable saint. One might say of him it was in his DNA. A man of integrity and grace without peer in his personal life, in his career and, indeed, in every aspect of his living. In the days of Presbyterianism which were the hey day of St. Andrews, each year at Assembly in Scots Church Melbourne at the Assembly's Opening Service ,the names of Ministers who had died and also Elders who had been Assembly delegates were read out and then the Assembly Service concluded with the singing of the hymn 'For all the saints'. I now ask June to play through the accompaniment to the hymn "For all the saints" and ask you to read the words of some of the verses which I would offer as tribute to Rowan (Verses 1, 2, 4 ,6) on your behalf today.

Hymn 455 *For all the saints who from their labours rest, who to the world their Lord by faith confessed, Your name, O Jesus, be forever blessed Hallelujah, hallelujah.*

You were their rock, their fortress and their might, you were their captain in the well fought fight, in deepest darkness still their one true light. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

O blest communion, fellowship divine! We feebly struggle, they in glory shine, all yours, all joined in unity divine. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

The golden evening brightens in the west; soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest, the peaceful calm of paradise the blest. Hallelujah, hallelujah.

As he foresaw the end of his life and ministry St. Paul wrote to his young colleague, Timothy

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. 2 Tim. 4:7-8

I cannot think of another more worthy of this accolade than Rowan.

Prayer

Lord, faced with the mystery of death we turn to you. Enable us to face our life ahead with courage and faith and hope; give us the grace and the strength to go on, knowing that the best tribute we can pay to this special loved one is to let his life be a continuing inspiration to us; and, knowing that we are constantly surrounded by the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before this loved one to rest in Your eternity. Comfort and uphold us, until we, too, share with them the light of Your glory and the peace of Your eternal Presence in Jesus Christ our risen Lord.

As death confronts us with its seeming finality, will you confront us with Your eternal promises. Help us to see the end of life within the framework of Your great design for life. Having created humankind in Your own image, You have fashioned us for an eternal purpose, investing us with an infinite value which not even death can reduce. So may we see that You are always working for our good even when we cannot see this. You are our dwelling-place, O God, and underneath us are Your everlasting arms.

We are a people for whom love is that which gives us ultimate meaning and purpose and the strength to go on with life even in the face of those human experiences that most challenge and test us, even in the face of death. God loves and calls on us to love, too. The single creative power of all our experiences is love. The ongoing energy of our existence is love. The perfecting spirit of our being is love. In our beginning and our ending is the greatest reality of all, is love.

Make us now so sure of Your love that we will be able to accept what we today struggle to understand. Help us now to be thinking not only of the darkness of our loss but of the splendour of resurrection life. Give us the grace and the strength to go on with our lives, knowing that the best tribute we can pay to this special loved one of ours is to let his life be a continuing inspiration to us until we, too, are embraced by God's eternity and join with all God's saints there for ever. Amen

Jesus said: Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.

Hebrew Scripture

Today's Lectionary again focusses on the journey of Israel from Egypt through the Sinai and their challenges in faith to heed the call of God to be his people and to leave behind the older understandings of God and to move toward an understanding of God that embraces a new future and a new way of being God's people, a way that will ultimately find fulfilment in the life and teachings of a Rabbi in a time beyond their imagining.

Joshua 24:1-3

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel. And they presented themselves before God. And Joshua said to all the people, "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac'.

Joshua 24:14-25

"Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Then the people answered, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods, for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our fathers up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight and preserved us in all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed. And the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God."

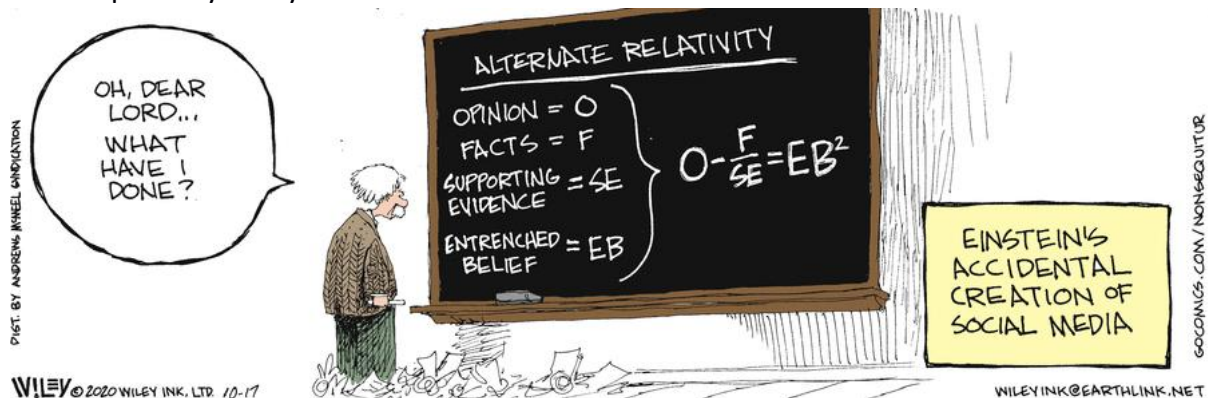
But Joshua said to the people, "You are not able to serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sin. If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm and consume you, after having done you good." And the people said to Joshua, "No, but we will serve the Lord." Then Joshua said to the

people, "You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him." And they said, "We are witnesses." He said, "Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel." And the people said to Joshua, "The Lord our God we will serve, and his voice we will obey." So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and put in place statutes and rules for them at Shechem.

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

Reflection

Non Sequitur by Wiley



I use the cartoon for two reasons. Firstly, as a reminder that the key to Einstein's development of the Theory of Relativity was his ability to move beyond the accepted understanding of the world of Newtonian physics and to find a new understanding of reality which challenged conventional physics. The faith journey of Israel, too, was a leaving behind of old understandings of God and the old way of sacrifice and its quest for atonement towards faith in a non-judgemental God of love and compassion. Ultimately this was to bring faith into the world of a first century Rabbi, Jesus, whose life and teaching found its culmination in rejection and crucifixion and the apparent oblivion of death, only to find ultimate confirmation in the God given affirmation of that life beyond death in resurrection life, and the final justification by God of all humankind through faith in this Christ, the risen Lord. Secondly, the cartoon lampoons humankind's penchant for dogma and entrenched belief when the faith journey of the eons of time is a final quantum leap from the varieties of religious belief as constructed by humankind into the realm of faith alone as the end-point of the quest for God. Life with and in God is realised in the Christ, the risen One: this is kingdom living as today's gospel passage will remind us.

Gospel Matthew 25:1-13

"Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. As the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and slept. But at midnight there was a cry, 'Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him. Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, 'Since there will not be enough for us and for you, go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflection

If you haven't made the right choices in kingdom living and are not ready, then you are left behind. In each moment we do make choices about what we will give pre-eminence in our lives and how we will sustain and grow who we are. The reign of God and kingdom living is not about grabbing bits of it at the last moment when we suddenly see its importance. It is about faithfulness and commitment and living life in which we try to maintain our connections with the life of God. Yet the God who is there at the end of the faith journey is not one of judgement but one of love whose compassion and grace will always over-ride our inadequacies. For this is the God of the ancient promises who called out a people to journey in faith and be the forerunner for humankind's ultimate fulfilment in life in all its fulness as resurrection people through the Christ.

Prayers for Ourselves and Others and Lord' Prayer

Wake us up, O God, when we sleep the sleep of those who take for granted the gift of life and kingdom living. Shake us in our certainties and our blinkered certainties and entrenched beliefs. Confront us with realities which carry us beyond our comfortable places and draw us into the alternative experiences of the suffering world of multiple realities and needs ever crying to be met.

Place in our hands your work and your compassion and love that justice may blossom in all the earth and humankind sing glad songs for the future of your creation. And so we pray in the words of Jesus 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 469

*This is the truth we hold,
source of the joy we share,
hope that can make us bold
trusting the name we bear:
that 'Christ has died and 'Christ is risen,
in Christ shall all be made alive'*

*This is the song of praise
echoing down the years,
true for the present days,
through all our doubts and fears:
that 'Christ has died and 'Christ is risen,
in Christ shall all be made alive'.*

*Christ is the living bread,
Christ is the word to speak,
Christ is the way to tread,
Christ is the goal to seek;
for 'Christ has died and 'Christ is risen,
in Christ shall all be made alive'.*

*One in faith we share,
out in his name we go;
Jesus awaits us there,
longing that all should know
that 'Christ has died and 'Christ is risen,
in Christ shall all be made alive.'*

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

So may 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 the eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you always. Amen

Reverend Graeme Kerr