

St Columba's Church - Virtual Service - 25 October 2020

Welcome

And we come today; we are called to worship the one God and to set aside this time as holy and as precious. Be with us God in our worship. Amen.

Hymn: We sing a love (<https://youtu.be/YABQFILp8FA>)

Prayer (Prayers come from Church of Scotland: Weekly Worship)

Eternal God,
before whom the book of history is laid
and who sees every event,
knows every character,
experiences every moment,
compared to You we are but a dandelion clock blowing in the wind,
or a speck of dust caught in the sunlight;
For we exist only in the moment,
what we call the present – a gift from You: we cannot return to yesterday
and correct our errors,
we cannot venture into tomorrow
and discover what lies ahead,
now is all we have,
we are a limited people, confined, restricted;
And yet, from beyond time and all the stars, You reach out to us in love,
to embrace us, to enfold us,
to make us welcome,
and we rejoice and give You thanks for Your mercy and Your grace.

God of mercy,
whose heart is full of forgiveness,
and who does not deal with us as we deserve:
When we have thought of ourselves more highly than we ought and forgotten to put our
relationship with You first;
Forgive us, we pray.
When we have loved only those who love us
and ignored or turned aside from those who need a smile and a hand of friendship;
Forgive us, we pray.
When we have acted as if all tomorrow was ours yet neglected to do good in the moment
of this day; Forgive us, we pray.
May Christ Jesus,
who healed the sick,
gave sight to the blind,
and loosened the tongues of the dumb, free us from our faults
and all that would hold us back
from being the children

that the eternal and loving God desires;
And hear us now as we pray:
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 debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Bible readings

1 Thessalonians 2: 1-8

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

2 You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results. **2** We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, as you know, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition. **3** For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you. **4** On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts. **5** You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. **6** We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else, even though as apostles of Christ we could have asserted our authority. **7** Instead, we were like young children^[a] among you.

Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, **8** so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

Matthew 22: 34-46

The Greatest Commandment

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. **35** One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: **36** "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

37 Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'^[c] **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'^[d] **40** All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Whose Son Is the Messiah?

41 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42 "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?"

"The son of David," they replied.

43 He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says,

44

"The Lord said to my Lord:

"Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet." [e]

45 If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" 46 No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Hymn: Bind us together (<https://youtu.be/VuhIBLp5aHM>)

Reflection

If you ever want a really good summary of the Old Testament stories of Abraham, Moses, David etc, then look at Acts Chapter 7. A person called Stephen gives such a good summary in one of his speeches. It is, of course, because of that speech that Stephen was then stoned to death. Paul, the person who wrote that letter to the Thessalonians we just heard, Paul was literally holding the jackets of those doing the stoning.

The next chapter of Acts, chapter 8, says that Paul. Paul who would go onto write the famous words of 1 Corinthians 13:

"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and angels,
but do not have love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging symbol....
...And now faith, hope and love abide,
These three and the greatest of these, is love."

In Acts Chapter 8, it tells us that Paul who would go onto write these words, now went wild in arresting these new Christians. Paul would organise it so that people would be dragged out of their houses and into prison, And Paul's reputation for terror spread wide.

But, never underestimate, how Jesus can change lives so much for the better. In your prayers for yourself and others, never underestimate the goodness of God.

It was of course on the road to arrest more people in Damascus That he is blinded. And in this time of blindness, he sees and hears Jesus. "Why are you out to get me?" asks Jesus. And everything for Paul changes.

You see if Jesus is now alive then that changes everything for Paul. And in that moment, Two words: "Christ Crucified" become the most important thing for Paul.

He discovers that Jesus was no longer dead but alive and therefore must be “the son of God” as he claimed. therefore, he must be the Christ. Paul realised that the rules and regulations that he rigorously defended were not central to being put right to God, because God had burst into his life not because of his obedience to the law but despite it.

And as Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan point out, For Paul, Jesus being crucified and then resurrected revealed the character of God more than anything before. And it showed Paul that God was far more powerful than any powers on earth.

And so it seemed obvious now to Paul that people should now to centre their lives on God’s way not the earth’s way. This has been clearly shown to Paul as to be the best, the only way now to live. In Jesus, Paul believed, we had seen "what can be seen of God in human form" And all of this completely changed Paul and his life.

And for about 25 years after this Damascus experience, Traveling by foot and by sea, Paul establishes churches in the big centres, easily reachable by road, and then allows for local converts to take the gospel out to the villages.

Paul was a worker throughout these years. He worked with his hands. Throughout all those years, he earned his keep by working with his hands.

And Paul was brave. He worked hard despite possibly being ill throughout his working life, His life was far from easy. Often he was alone, He knew what it was like to be arrested, Knew what it was like to be beaten up, as he was in Phillipi, which he refers to in this reading. And he knew what it was like to be shipwrecked.

Paul was not perfect, But he did understand that we were made perfect through Jesus. It was Paul who wrote about us being justified, Being put right, being put right with God’s grace alone.

In other words, God totally accepts anyone who comes to Him regardless of their worthiness or unworthiness. No one needs to earn their right to be put right with God. And as we will see in the 12.30pm service, This gives us freedom. Freedom that Jesus says we should use to love our neighbour.

And so how does Paul ask us to live? Well, according to Paul, the more we commit ourselves to believing in Christ Crucified, The more we commit ourselves to living in a way that imitates the God as shown in Jesus, the more we commit to glorifying God in our lives and enjoying him forever, The more we will be transformed.

Today is a good day to be thinking about Paul, Because this Sunday we remember the Reformation. And Paul’s realisation about being justified by faith alone, Was inspiring to the Reformers.

What I want to do now is through sharing a little about Paul and the letter to Thessalonians that was read earlier. Through it We can understand more about the great gifts, Faith, Hope & Love that Paul talks about in those famous words from 1 Corinthians 13.

The Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, Is written with a lot of hope, A lot of joy. It is a letter of encouragement:

"You yourselves know, brothers and sisters, that our coming to you was not in vain, 2but though we had already suffered and been shamefully maltreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition.

3For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, 4but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts.

5As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed;

6nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others,

7though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children.

8So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.'

And it is through being transformed that we receive the three great gifts. And it is the same three gifts that Paul is delighted to see in this new church in Thessalonica. Faith, hope and Love.

Paul sees firstly the Faith shown by this new church, Their faith is active and productive. Paul sees also the Hope shown by these people. They show a spirit that can bear all things, not with resignation, but with a blazing hope. This hope is in the promises of Jesus Christ.

And finally, Paul celebrates that he sees the Thessalonians show Love, They show a love that labours to the point of weariness, It is a love that can only be understood by examining the character of God. They are showing a costly compassion towards others. A costly stand for justice, Without regard to the worthiness or lack of worthiness shown by those they are loving.

In other words, Paul in seeing these three gifts in action, Paul is seeing a people living like Jesus lived. For us, our challenge is to commit to following Jesus. To understand more and more of the character of God seen through Jesus. And through this we will be transformed. And which of us does not want more faith, hope and love in our lives?

And here is the thing, the more faith, hope and love that our lives show, The more evidence we have for others. For that is what happened in Thessalonica. For their faithful

behaviour began a chain reaction: they were an example to the Thessalonians around them, who in turn provided an example for people elsewhere.

On this day of remembering the Reformation, We remember Paul whose words inspired that movement. We remember that all of us can be changed for the better through Jesus. All of us can continue to change the more we understand the Crucified Christ, And this leads to Faith, Hope & Love. Great gifts for us, and great gifts for those around us. Amen.

Hymn: When all is said and done (<https://youtu.be/1IIIIhBMCjU>)

Prayer for Others

Holy God,
who gave Your Law to Moses,
and who personified Your Law of Love
in Jesus your Son,
as Jesus reached out to those on the margins, so now in our prayers we do likewise:
We pray for all who have little love in their lives – those who are lonely and afraid,
those who are addicted and trapped,
those who grieve and mourn,
those whose relationships
have shattered into a thousand shards; God of love,
help us to hold them close.
We pray for those who love the wrong things –
those for whom money or possessions are “god”
and where greed has taken over,
those who love only for gaining the approval of others, flattery, or power, those who can
only love self
and where bitterness or hurt has made them inward-looking;
God of love,
help us to unlock their hearts.
We pray for those who love to such an extent
as to give totally of self –
those who are persecuted for truth
or oppressed because they take a stand for justice, those who face discrimination
because of skin colour, gender sexuality or class, those who strive tirelessly for the Good
News of Jesus often facing hostility or apathy from others;
God of love,
help us to work in solidarity with them.

[A moment of silence to bring personal prayers to God...]

God of Love,
hear our prayers spoken and unspoken, and receive them in Your grace and mercy,
through Jesus, our loving Saviour;

Amen

Hymn: I will sing the wondrous story (<https://youtu.be/mv8wo-t6C1I>)

Blessing

May God's blessing surround you each day,
as you trust Him and walk in His way.

May His presence within
guard and keep you from sin,
go in peace, go in joy, go in love.

Amen