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Service for the 21st Sunday after Trinity, 1st November 2020

A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today.

CALL TO WORSHIP

O God, you have called us to power.

But not a power that shouts; rather, a power that invites –
because this is your power: a power to call all to be with all.

In this power, we find room, we make room, and we are made whole.

HYMN: Jesus, united by your grace

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1. Jesus, united by your grace
and each to each endeared,
with confidence we seek thy face,
and know our prayer is heard.
2. Help us to help each other, Lord,
each others cross to bear,
let all their friendly aid afford
and feel each other's care.
3. Touched by the lodestone of thy love,
let all our hearts agree,
and ever toward each other move,
and ever more toward thee.
4. To thee, inseparably joined,
let all our spirits cleave;
O may we all the loving mind
that was in thee, receive.
5. This is the bond of perfectness,
thy spotless charity;
O let us, still we pray, possess
the mind that was in thee.

Charles Wesley

PRAYERS

Let us pray.

We are gathered here today around the Word and word.

God, your Word lives: it breathes, it encourages, it pleads. It urges us towards love and greater love. As we listen to your Word today, may we hear the words in our hearts that call us towards love of other, self and stranger.

Your Word is an invitation towards an ever greater hospitality; and so, we stand, supported in the living Word that always welcomes.

We know that in coming towards you, you came towards us first.

You called us by name, bringing us deeper into you, into community, into love.

We thank you for the gift of this, and hold our hands humbly, offering you what we have, knowing that you receive what we give – even when it is very little.

God of justice, Justice is your name. We who call ourselves yours have often left justice at the door – preferring words to action. O God, we have done wrong.

May we pick up justice, and hold it in our hands as we turn back to you.

Support us, O God, in our justice, and in our turning towards justice.

We lift up our hands. We lift up our voices. We lift up our hearts. We lift up our lives.

Search us, O God, and bring us deeper into the justice of your life-giving Word.

Call us, O God, into knowing more of life – your Word is life, so may we find life with each other.

We rejoice in your never-failing invitation to celebrate and engage with your welcome.

Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.

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.

SCRIPTURE READING: St Matthew 23: 1-12

23 Then Jesus spoke to the crowds and to his disciples. ² “The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees are the authorized interpreters of Moses’ Law. ³ So you must obey and follow everything they tell you to do; do not, however, imitate their actions, because they don't practise what they preach.

⁴ They tie on to people's backs loads that are heavy and hard to carry, yet they aren't willing even to lift a finger to help them carry those loads. ⁵ They do everything so that people will see them. Look at the straps with scripture verses on them which they wear on their foreheads and arms, and notice how large they are! Notice also how long are the tassels on their cloaks! ⁶ They love the best places at feasts and the reserved seats in the synagogues; ⁷ they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to have people call them ‘Teacher.’

⁸ You must not be called ‘Teacher,’ because you are all equal and have only one Teacher.

⁹ And you must not call anyone here on earth ‘Father’, because you have only the one Father in heaven. ¹⁰ Nor should you be called ‘Leader’, because your one and only leader is the Messiah. ¹¹ The greatest one among you must be your servant. ¹² Whoever makes himself great will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be made great.

Thanks be to God.

ADDRESS: *Mr Geof Owen*

Doing as we say...

Religion has always been connected with words. If you looked at the history of religion throughout the ages and collected all the words associated with them, you would find

volume upon volume of Scriptures of all kinds, explanations of those Scriptures, Prayers, Hymns, Chants, and Mantras. Even religions that are supposedly “wordless,” like the Tao or Zen Buddhism, have their own collections of words. We Christians may be some of the wordiest religious people in the history of the human family! If you gathered together the written deposit of all the preachers and teachers and bishops and popes and moderators throughout the centuries, it would fill a sizable library. And we non-conformists with our official books and declarations are no exception. I think it’s safe to say that where ever you find religion, you’re going to find lots of words.

I think, however, that words are a big part of the image problem with religion in our day and time. I’m afraid that all those religious words come across to many people as so much slick marketing. The words we religious people use make people think that this is just another way of getting money out of them or getting them to do something they really don’t want to do! We Christians say all kinds of things that sound profound and perhaps even beautiful; but, at the end of the day, I think many people see it all as just hollow words. After all is said and done, do all those words really make a difference in the way we live?

When you look at our gospel lesson for today, it’s far too easy to come away from it with the idea that those Jewish Scribes and Pharisees were the ultimate hypocrites. They didn’t even practice what they preached! But to do that would be to miss the fact that one of the most dangerous temptations for all of us is to use religious words to make ourselves think that we have it all done and dusted, when in reality our lives don’t come anywhere near to matching what we say. It’s the temptation of talking the talk without walking the walk.

If you doubt that we still face that temptation today, think about some of the Christian leaders who have been guilty of talking the talk without walking the walk. For some, what difference did all those religious words make when it came to taking money from the millions of pounds good people contributed to the work of God? What difference did the words make when it came to abusing children who were placed in their trust? What difference did the words make when it came to using parishioners to indulge their sexual desires? And, of course, these temptations apply to all of us. It seems that one of the biggest image problems we have is that we say a lot of good things, but we don’t really do any of them.

When you look at all the ways Jesus criticized some of the Jewish leaders of his day, it seems to me that the common thread may be one of ego. In all the ways that he pointed out their hypocrisy, it seems to me that where they went astray was that they used their religion to massage their own egos: to make themselves feel important.

The truth of the matter is that, whether we know it or not, whether we are even aware of it or not, religion has always been incredibly susceptible to being corrupted into just another way for us to feed the unhealthy pride that lurks in the corners of our insecurities. You know, that pride which tempts us to try to make ourselves look more important, or more moral, or simply better than others. It’s the other side of the temptation to brand others as “sinners” so that we can be “righteous.”

But when we indulge that temptation to “exalt ourselves” at the expense of others, we’re really only reinforcing our own insecurities. If my sense of self depends on being better than you, then I always have to find ways of reassuring myself that I am indeed better than you. And I do mean always. And so it becomes a vicious circle - insecurity, pride, ego . It becomes something of an obsession – or perhaps even an addiction.

The solution to that kind of obsessive religious egotism, which shows itself in the unhealthy need to “exalt ourselves” over others, is surprisingly simple. You just let it go. You simply stop feeding those insecurities. And the way to let it go is to embrace the central truth of the strange kingdom Jesus believed in: that God loves and accepts us - all of us.

But like any unhealthy behaviour, if you don’t replace it with something else, it’s incredibly difficult to break the cycle. And so the alternative is that instead of viewing others from our insecurities as the “competition,” we learn to view them from the perspective of compassion. Genuine compassion that cares whether they have everything they need today to be happy and well. Heartfelt compassion that really hopes and prays for them that they may be surrounded by God’s steadfast love that endures forever. When you look at others that way, instead of trying to “exalt yourself” above others, you can care about them enough to serve them.

That’s what true religion has always been about - whatever its name or origin or locale. All the religious words throughout the ages that have ever meant anything boil down to embracing God’s love and sharing it with others. The same thing is true of the strange kingdom Jesus proclaimed: “the greatest among you will be your servant”. It’s right and good that we use words like that to express and experience this profound aspect of human life. But at the end of the day, what it’s all about is doing the profound and beautiful things we say - putting them into action in our lives and in the lives of those around us.

HYMN: Jesus invites his saints

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1. Jesus invites his saints
to meet around his board;
here pardoned rebels sit and hold
communion with their Lord.

2. For food he gives his flesh,
he bids us drink his blood;
amazing favour! matchless grace
of our descending God!

3. This holy bread and wine
maintains our fainting breath,
by union with our living Lord,
and interest in his death.

4. Our heavenly Father calls
Christ and his members one;
we the young children of his love,
and he the first-born Son.

5. We are but several parts
of that same broken bread;
one body has its several limbs,
but Jesus is the head.

6. Let all our powers be joined
his glorious name to raise;
pleasure and love fill every mind
and every voice be praise.

Isaac Watts

HOLY COMMUNION

A prayer of confession, let us pray

Humbly and sorrowfully, we long for Your forgiveness, loving God; for every weakening thought to which our minds have wandered; for every thoughtless word, spoken in the heat of the moment; for every failure of self-control; for all the faults we cannot forget. Help us to know Your forgiveness and acceptance. Help us to let go of the past and to live from now on for all that is good and right. Grant, we beseech You, merciful Lord, to Your faithful people pardon and peace; that we may be cleansed from all our sins and serve You with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

If you have bread and wine or juice to use as Communion elements, please have them ready now.....

Let us celebrate this joyful feast! People will come from east and west, from north and south, and sit at table in the Kingdom of God. Let us hear the gracious words with which our Lord Jesus bids us come to Him, that you may draw near in full assurance of faith. Jesus said "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Anyone who comes to me, I will never turn away."

Let us hear the story of how this sacrament began.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, He sat at supper with His disciples. While they were eating, He took a piece of bread, said a blessing, broke it and gave it to them with the words: "This is my body. It is broken for you. Do this to remember me." Later, He took a cup of wine, saying: "This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood. Drink from it, all of you, to remember me."

So now, following Jesus' example and command, we take this bread and wine, the ordinary things of the world, which Christ will make special; and as He said a prayer before sharing, let us do so too.

Let us pray

Loving God, we give You thanks and praise that You loved the world so much that You gave Your only Son, so that everyone who has faith in Him may not die but have eternal life.

We thank You that you offer not only bread and wine but Your very self, that we may be filled, forgiven, healed and blessed. We join with all Your people in heaven and on earth to sing Your praise. Lord Jesus, present with us now. For all that You have done and all that You have promised, what have we to offer? Our hands are empty, our hearts are sometimes full of wrong things. We are not fit to gather up the crumbs from under your table. But with you is mercy and the power to change us. So, as we do now what You did in an upstairs room, send down Your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and wine; that they may become for us symbols of Your body – healing, forgiving and making us whole, loving and caring in the world until Your kingdom comes.

Amen.

Jesus took bread, broke it and said: "This is my body, it is broken for you; do this to remember me." Eat and remember....

Later, He took the cup of wine and said “This is the new relationship with God, made possible because of my death; take this, all of you.” Drink and remember....

Let us pray

We thank You, Father, that You have fed us in this sacrament, united us with Christ and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, prepared for all people. To You be glory and praise.

Today, we pray for all who feel isolated. In their uniqueness, they may also feel alone.

This is most of us, some of the time, but it is some of us most of the time.

God of encounter, may we all turn with love and interest towards those who have been isolated. God of encounter, hear our prayer.

Amen.

HYMN: Take my life

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

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| 1. Take my life and let it be
consecrated, Lord, to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise. | 4. Take my silver and my gold,
not a mite would I withhold;
take my intellect, and use
every power as thou shalt choose. |
| 2. Take my hands, and let them move
at the impulse of thy love;
take my feet, and let them be
swift and beautiful for thee. | 5. Take my will, and make it thine;
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart, it is thine own;
it shall be thy royal throne. |
| 3. Take my voice, and let me sing
always, only, for my King;
take my lips, and let them be
filled with messages from thee. | 6. Take my love, my Lord, I pour
at thy feet its treasure-store;
take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for thee. |

Frances Ridley Havergal

BLESSING

God of power and light, you have called us into light and friendship.
Send us, now, into more light, with more of the power of friendship.
This love is the love at the heart of all things – that you call us friends.
Empower us in this friendship, this power, this glory.

The Grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us now and evermore. **Amen.**