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Service for the 11th Sunday after Trinity, 23rd August 2020

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

When Jesus asked, Simon Peter answered: “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”. Let us make the same bold answer, and let us come together to worship Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Amen.

HYMN: Fight the good fight

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

1 Fight the good fight with all thy might!
Christ is thy strength, and Christ thy right;
lay hold on life, and it shall be
thy joy and crown eternally.

3 Cast care aside, and on thy Guide;
lean, and his mercy will provide;
lean, and the trusting soul shall prove
Christ is its life, and Christ its love.

2 Run the straight race through God’s good grace,
lift up thine eyes, and seek his face;
life with its way before us lies,
Christ is the path, and Christ the prize.

4 Faint not nor fear, his arm is near,
he changeth not, and thou art dear;
only believe, and thou shalt see
that Christ is all in all to thee.

J S B Monsell (*altd*)

PRAYERS OF ADORATION & CONFESSION

Let us pray.

Lord, do we really believe that we are in the presence of the Son of the Living God? Still our hearts now, so that we may truly appreciate who you are. As we hear these words of power, we bow down before you and praise you.

Lord God, we come before you in humble adoration. How blessed are we that the one who holds the keys to the kingdom of heaven is the one who has the key to our hearts. Thank you, God, for the privilege of being part of the amazing story of faith that sustained our ancestors. Thank you, God, that we know our future is safe with you.

Lord, thank you that you are always ready to forgive us when we trust you enough to confess our sins to you, even when we feel we don’t deserve it.

Be merciful to me, O God.

Forgive me for the times when, just because someone else’s story is different from mine, I don’t always want to believe it. Forgive me for the times I only live my story, not seeing the bigger picture.

Be merciful to me, O God.

Forgive me for the times I see you as less than the Son of God, and my whole life needs your love and understanding.

Be merciful to me, O God. 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 READINGS

Psalm 138 - A Prayer of Thanksgiving

¹I thank you, LORD, with all my heart;
I sing praise to you before the gods.

²I face your holy Temple,
bow down, and praise your name
because of your constant love and faithfulness,
because you have shown that your name and your commands are supreme. ^[b]

³You answered me when I called to you;
with your strength you strengthened me.

⁴All the kings in the world will praise you, LORD,
because they have heard your promises.

⁵They will sing about what you have done
and about your great glory.

⁶Even though you are so high above,
you care for the lowly,
and the proud cannot hide from you.

⁷When I am surrounded by troubles,
you keep me safe.

You oppose my angry enemies
and save me by your power.

⁸You will do everything you have promised;
LORD, your love is eternal.
Complete the work that you have begun.

St Matthew 16: 13-20 - Peter's Declaration about Jesus

¹³ Jesus went to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, where he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

¹⁴ "Some say John the Baptist," they answered. "Others say Elijah, while others say Jeremiah or some other prophet."

¹⁵ "What about you?" he asked them. "Who do you say I am?"

¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

¹⁷ “Good for you, Simon son of John!” answered Jesus. “For this truth did not come to you from any human being, but it was given to you directly by my Father in heaven. ¹⁸ And so I tell you, Peter: you are a rock, and on this rock foundation I will build my church, and not even death will ever be able to overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven; what you prohibit on earth will be prohibited in heaven, and what you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”

²⁰ Then Jesus ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION

In the reading from Matthew 16, Jesus asks “Who do you say that I am?”

For Jews, the newly renamed city of Caesarea Philippi was a headquarters of the foreign rulers and a symbol of oppression. There, in temple and inscription, Caesar is worshipped. Despite this, Jesus asks “Who do you say that I am?” and Peter gets it right. When asked the question, the disciples do not try to fit Jesus into the Caesarea story; they don’t expect him to embark on a campaign to get rid of the hated Romans. Rather, they try to fit him into their own Jewish faith story. Peter makes another leap by saying, “You are the Messiah, Son of God.”

In an Elders’ Meeting here at Broadway, our Minister who was then the Reverend Diana Cullum-Hall asked us to write down how we would describe Jesus. I have worried ever since about my response to the question because it was so different from the other people sitting around the table. There were answers such as The Son of God, a friend, a comforter, a teacher, *etc.* The list was a full one and I sat wishing that I had not written the words ‘challenging, outspoken and passionate’.... my list went on. However, I realised that you can’t answer the question for others, because each of us has to answer it for ourselves. At some point or another, we have all been told who Jesus is. We may have been told by teachers, Ministers, parents, or Sunday school leaders. However, it is not a theology exam; if anything, it is an examination of our own lives.

I don’t think Jesus is asking us to give the answers we’ve heard or read. Maybe that’s why he pushes the disciples to move from what they are hearing around them – John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets – to what they are hearing within themselves. “But who do **you** say that I am?”

It is not an easy question to answer.

Who do we say Jesus is following the death of George Floyd? Who do we say Jesus is as Covid-19 continues to spread throughout the world, as refugees cry out in need, as people in our town are homeless, children are abused and live amidst domestic violence or many work for a wage that cannot support a family?

Who do we say Jesus is when a loved one dies, the doctor gives news we did not want to hear, or our life seems to be falling apart?

Who we say Jesus is has everything to do with who and how **we** are and will be. It is about recognising God's life love and presence in our own lives and the world.

Who Jesus is has changed through my life. He is not the Jesus I knew as a child, nor when I was in my 40s, nor even who is for me today. Hopefully every year he will be slightly different from who he is today as it is not Jesus who changes: it is me that has changed.

Jesus' life and presence among us call into question everything about ourselves and our world. That's why we ought not to answer his question too quickly. It's not a question to be answered as much as it is a question to be lived.

So what might God say in answer to our questions?

Well, I think God might start off by telling us that he didn't make the world in one single creative act, and the world did not come into being perfect and complete. The world is still being created, it is still evolving and it is not yet finished. God is still creating.

And God has also planned the world so that it is governed by regularities. The world is not random. To be a universe at all, it must have a pattern: the sun rose this morning and it will rise again tomorrow morning. But this also means that disasters can occur. For example, think about water. The properties of water mean that it can be both beneficial and harmful. The properties of water do not change under different circumstances: the same water that can cause drowning can irrigate a field, turn a water wheel or baptise a baby.

And what about human beings? We are not robots, we are free and independent children of God designed to be able to respond to him and to each other in love. God cannot give us freedom and then keep taking it back when we hurt ourselves.

I think God is prepared to limit his power over the world, but also give himself totally to the world. We meet a God of love, because real love can't be commanded or forced.

Amen.

HYMN: Father, hear the prayer

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

1 Father, hear the prayer we offer:
not for ease that prayer shall be,
but for strength that we may ever
live our lives courageously.

2 Not for ever in green pastures
do we ask our way to be;
but the steep and rugged pathway
may we tread rejoicingly.

3 Not for ever by still waters
would we idly rest and stay;
but would smite the living fountains
from the rocks along our way.

4 Be our strength in hours of weakness,
in our wanderings be our guide;
through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be thou at our side.

Lowe Maria Willis (and others)

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray.

We trust you, Lord, to answer our prayers. Yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory. Your will be done, O Lord.

We pray for people who struggle for their faith: through self-doubt, through difficult circumstances, through bad things happening, through being led astray, by wanting fame and fortune. We pray for people who feel in the dark, locked in a situation where they can find no answer; that they might come to understand you are the key to everything they need.

We pray for ourselves; when we are in difficult situations, when we try to unlock doors that are not ours to unlock, when we don't focus on the kingdom, when we don't share our story.

Lord, you asked who people thought you were. You got all kinds of answers. Help us to always remember that you are the Son of the living God.

Lord, we pray for our Church fellowship and the Broadway community. We know you will be with us as we begin to open the doors of our Church.

Amen

HYMN: Great is thy faithfulness

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

1 Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;
there is no shadow of turning with thee;
thou changest not, thy compassions, they fail
not;
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

2 Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.
[Refrain]

Refrain:

*Great is thy faithfulness!
Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see:
all I have needed thy hand hath provided,
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!*

3 Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!
[Refrain]

T O Chisholm

BLESSING

Go to serve, go to love. Go to bring healing, go to bring peace.

Go in the strength of the Father. Go in the power of Jesus. Go united by the Spirit.

Go – and know his grace!

Amen.