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Service for the 12th Sunday after Trinity, 30th August 2020

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

CALL TO WORSHIP

God calls us to worship in spirit and in truth,
with both deep sadness and indescribable hope,
as we reflect on all that Jesus went through for us,
and praise God who goes beyond all expectations.

HYMN: Fill thou my life

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

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| 1. Fill thou my life, O Lord my God,
in every part with praise,
that my whole being may proclaim
thy being and thy ways. | 4. Fill every part of me with praise;
let all my being speak
of thee and of thy love, O Lord,
poor though I be and weak. |
| 2. Not for the lip of praise alone
nor ev'n the praising heart
I ask, but for a life made up
of praise in every part: | 5. So shalt thou, gracious Lord, from me
receive the glory due;
and so shall I begin on earth
the song for ever new. |
| 3. praise in the common things of life,
its goings out and in;
praise in each duty and each deed,
however small and mean. | 6. So shall no part of day or night
from sacredness be free;
but all my life, in every step,
be fellowship with thee. |

H Bonar (*altd*)

PRAYERS OF CONFESSION

Let us pray.

Lord, the disciples gathered around you, trying so hard to answer your questions,
and to cope with difficult news.

We come before you now and ask your blessing, as we seek to understand more of your
story – your tough and challenging, but so good story!

Thank you, Lord, that you do not call us to anything without also giving us the resources to
cope. You do not ask us to go anywhere you haven't been.

You call us to take up our cross, and we come to you with fear and trembling, but knowing
that ultimately your way is the best.

Be with us, Lord, and help us to understand.

Lord, we acknowledge before you that often we can be like Peter:
hearing your word but going off on our own track,
not wanting to see your path, especially if it looks rough.

Forgive us, Lord, and set us on your path.

Lord, we acknowledge before you that there are times when we want the world,
but don't give much thought to our soul.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to take up our cross.

Lord, we acknowledge before you that there are times when
we are a stumbling block to others – and to ourselves;
times when we look for complications instead of just following you.

Forgive us, Lord, and help us to follow you.

Lord God, you invite us to come in and share your story.

We stand amazed in your presence, Lord.

We wait on you, lost in wonder that the Son of Man is going to come
in his Father's glory, with his angels.

And you want us, too. We adore you, Lord above all.

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 16: 21-28

From that time Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he had to go to Jerusalem, and there to suffer much from the elders, chief priests, and doctors of the law; to be put to death and to be raised again on the third day. At this Peter took him by the arm and began to rebuke him: 'Heaven forbid!' he said. 'No Lord, this shall never happen to you.' Then Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Away with you, Satan; you are a stumbling-block to me. You think as men think, not as God thinks.' Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine he must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me. Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self. What will a man gain by winning the whole world, at the cost of his true self? Or what can he give that will buy that self back? For the Son of Man is to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and then he will give each man the due reward for what he has done. I tell you this: there are some of those standing here who will not taste death before they have seen the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Thanks be to God.

ADDRESS

An Invitation to Die

It seems that for more than a decade Sam had operated a successful counselling business in a mid-sized industrial city in the southeast. His contracts were with major corporations which had brought growth and progress to the area. The counselling centre offered a variety of services, but most clients wanted help with a drink problem. The centre's contract with each corporation enabled employees to seek help with a guarantee of anonymity. Each employee's problems and progress were treated as completely confidential, and it was well known that client files were for the eyes of the counselling staff only.

One day the executive vice chairman of the largest firm under contract made an appointment to meet with Sam. To Sam's shock and amazement, this executive demanded to see the files for his employees. Sam told him politely but firmly that this was impossible. The files were completely confidential. The vice chairman's face became red, and he spoke loudly and harshly to Sam as he repeatedly insisted that the files about his employees be delivered to him immediately. Sam continued to refuse.

Finally, the vice chairman stood up and moved toward the door. As he touched the doorknob, he turned around, paused, and stared at Sam. "Very well. Since you insist, tomorrow our legal department will contact you to terminate our contract with you immediately. How many of our employees do you suppose have availed themselves of your services? More than a hundred?"

Sam again reminded him that this was confidential information.

"No matter. You won't be seeing them any more, unless you give me their files right now, and I mean right now."

Sam had a vision of his counselling practice collapsing like a building demolished by explosives. He pictured his own personal finances also reduced to rubble. Then he addressed the executive in as measured a voice as he could muster.

"Dick, how many times do I have to tell you? It can't be done. It just can't be done. My centre's work with your employees is completely confidential. Cancel the contract if you must, but you'll never get those files. Never!"

The vice chairman walked back and took his seat again. "Okay," he said, in a subdued voice. "If that's the way it is, then I suppose it's safe to tell you why I came. I have a drink problem, and I need your help."

When he uttered his final refusal of the vice chairman's demand, Sam stepped into a kind of death. It was a death freely chosen, one that followed from all that he was as a professional, a counsellor, a Christian, a human being. When he uttered that final refusal, he gave up his life as he knew it, trusting that somehow God would be there on the other side.

Sam had no idea what the next minutes held for him. In the language of today's Gospel, he simply took up his cross, and by his own choice walked behind Jesus down the road to Calvary. All he could see ahead of him was death.

Sam held out against the vice chairman's insistent demands as a matter of professional and personal integrity. Yet putting it that way makes his decision sound too abstract. He held out, at the cost of his life, because he could not forget the faces of clients who had trusted him and his agency, people in whom he had recognised the face of Christ. He could not fail to do for Jesus what Jesus had done for him. Sam knew the demand Jesus makes of every disciple. There are different ways to phrase it:

- Pick up your cross and follow me.
- Give up your life for my sake.
- Surrender the whole world.

In the end, however, they amount to the same thing. Jesus asks of us no more - and no less - than he himself did for us. And this request shatters the life of every Christian like a rock thrown through glass. Echoing Peter's refusal, we don't want a suffering messiah, one who calls us to no better place than his own, a cross with our name on it.

Yet the message somehow reaches us. We are called upon to die for the right reason. Sometimes - though not always - our chance comes in one unforgettable moment, as it did for Sam that day in his office. The formation of a Christian character over time then shows itself decisively. Jesus offers us a cross with insistence, and we take hold of it, guided more by faith than fear.

In our time, many presentations make Christianity seem something easy, a bargain that nobody can refuse. That God's grace comes to us free and undeserved is a wondrous truth, but too often that truth is perverted. No mention is made that we are offered a cross as well as a resurrection, a death as well as a life. The idea is that if we simply trust Jesus, he will make life easy for us.

The story of Sam illustrates that there can be for us pivotal moments when we must decide whether or not to pick up the cross which is extended to us, whether or not to die so that we - and others - can truly live.

For some of us there are those moments, and for others of us the choice is less dramatic, less identifiable, but no less real. What we face may be more a constant choosing than a one-time decision. And for each of us, certainly, the circumstances are unique. What matters is not how the challenge appears, but the way we respond.

I have recently read the biography of Dorothy Pattison, better known to the people of Walsall as Sister Dora. According to the book, she was a remarkable woman; beautiful, sensitive, with a strong sense of humour. She endured thirty years of claustrophobic family life in Yorkshire, bound by duty and financial constraint to an insane father and a submissive mother.

She joined a pioneer Anglican sisterhood which sent her to nurse (a lifelong ambition previously thwarted by her father) in the heart of the Black Country where epidemic and accident were daily accompaniment to poverty, urban squalor and dangerous working conditions. For fourteen years, until her premature death, she cared for the poor, setting new standards for the nursing profession and bringing about social improvement on a scale of which she could not have dreamed. The daily Telegraph in 1897 said, "What Florence Nightingale did for military hospitals, Dorothy Pattison accomplished in civilian duty".

Sam heard the challenge to take up the cross in the threats of an irate executive. Dorothy Pattison heard it in the poverty stricken working classes of the 19th century. Where do you hear your invitation to pick up your cross? Where is Jesus inviting you to die, that true life may be yours? May each of us be careful to hear and heed that voice!

HYMN: How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

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

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| 1. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear:
it soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear. | 4. Jesus, my Shepherd and my Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring. |
| 2. It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary rest. | 5. Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought. |
| 3. Dear Name! the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding place,
my never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace.: | 6. Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy Name
refresh my soul in death. |

John Newton

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray.

Lord God, you reproached Peter because he had only human concerns;
but Peter just wanted to protect the one he loved.

We pray for people the world over who find themselves in difficult situations.

We pray that they would all have someone to care for them and lift them before you.

Merciful God, hear our prayer.

We pray for all who are persecuted for their faith:

for all who are misunderstood, for asylum seekers who flee real danger in their homeland.

We pray for those who work tirelessly to address wrongs.

Merciful God, hear our prayer.

We pray for people whose lives don't always work out right,
through their fault, or through no fault of their own.

Merciful God, hear our prayer.

We pray for the people in our lives who need your protection, Lord,
that we will always be faithful in prayer for them.

Merciful God, hear our prayer.

Amen.

HYMN: Let all the world

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

*Let all the world in every corner sing
'My God and King'*

The heavens are not too high,
his praise may thither fly;
the earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.

*Let all the world in every corner sing
'My God and King'*

The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out:
but, above all, the heart
must bear the longest part.

*Let all the world in every corner sing
'My God and King'*

George Herbert

BLESSING

Lord God, you knew what was going to happen to you. You didn't flinch, or back away. You calmly told the disciples – and us – what to expect. As we go out now, remind us constantly to look to you in the good and the tough times. Guide us as we go in your name.
Amen.