

Worship Sunday 25th June

Call to Worship:

God cares for us completely and calls for our total commitment. Christ gave his life that we might live and calls us to give our lives to him.

Through Christ we have died to sin; in Christ we are fully alive to God.

Come, let us worship God.

Opening Hymn: All my hope on God is founded.

Prayers:

CALL TO CONFESSION

Confident that we are promised newness of life through repentance and forgiveness, let us turn to God and to one another, confessing our sin.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Hear our cries to you, O Lord: for our lack of compassion toward the poor, have mercy on us; for our failure to end the destruction of air, water, soil, and creatures on Earth, have mercy on us; for our disbelief in your power to make us whole, have mercy on us; for making war, have mercy on us; for mistrusting your Word, have mercy on us; for all that we have done and have not done out of hardened hearts, have mercy on us. Forgive us and renew us.

Guide us into ways that do not deny you but lead to peace. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Do not be afraid. The One who was and is and is to come knows you through and through and has overcome death and sin to forgive you, so that you might be delivered into joy that has no end. Your sins are forgiven. You are alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Sharing the Peace:

Hymn of Preparation for the Word: Holy Spirit, Truth Divine LUYH #864

Scripture:

Psalm 86:1–10, 16–17

Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.

² Preserve my life, for I am devoted to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.

You are my God; ³ be gracious to me, O Lord,
for to you do I cry all day long.

⁴ Gladden the soul of your servant,
for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

⁵ For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving,
abounding in steadfast love to all who call on you.

⁶ Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer;
listen to my cry of supplication.

⁷ In the day of my trouble I call on you,
for you will answer me.

⁸ There is none like you among the gods, O Lord,
nor are there any works like yours.

⁹ All the nations you have made shall come
and bow down before you, O Lord,
and shall glorify your name.

¹⁰ For you are great and do wondrous things;
you alone are God.

¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me;
give your strength to your servant;
save the child of your serving-maid.

¹⁷ Show me a sign of your favour,
so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame,
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

Romans 6:1b–11

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ² By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴ Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷ For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸ But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Sermon:

*Incline your ear, O LORD, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.*

In a world where it doesn't pay to show weakness, where worth is measured by merit and success, we who are people of the Way gather here as we can and a key thing we do is *call out in our need*. We're here to be real; to shine light on our lives and our world, including the hard stuff, to reach out in hope even in the face of what can feel hopeless.

The mess we're in as a world; the powerlessness we can each feel to make things right, in the big picture, but often at times also in the little picture; the fears and anxieties that sit with us, for our own future and even more for the future of the people we love.

Psalm 86 shows the first big step forward – the *fact* of calling out to God. It's the first step towards putting reality – God's reality, not the assumed reality of the world's mainstream narrative – in the centre. Recentring from seeing our story and the story of a human-run world as the be all and end all, and instead seeing the whole lot within the story of God and God's creation.

You could say that a lot of the time we are prisoners of our own stories. That's what is being pointed to when the Bible talks about sin; when our worth and identity is based on what I achieve, what function I serve. And this is writ large as well, as we human beings take charge of the planet, making use of its resources for our own ends and then try to make peace when the drive to acquire and consume leads, of

course, to conflict. Sin is being trapped in the battle to control the world and secure our lives – to save ourselves.

Forgetting that fundamentally life is a gift, we think that our worth is created by our own effort and our identity is tied to what we can make and keep for ourselves. We also think it's up to humanity to sort out all the problems of the human-run world – the conflict and misery of wars, mass migration, increased border security, and the now relentless change in the climate.

All up to human beings to make life and sort life. Hm!

Simply by calling out to God, we are remembering there is another story to tell about life on earth.

Romans 6 talks about dying to sin and dying with Christ; dying with Christ so we're no longer enslaved to sin. Entangled in the world's ways, caught up in the drive to succeed and secure and make our own future, we are *prisoners of our own story*. These are the words of former Anglican Archbishop Rowan Williams speaking to the European Council of Churches Assembly last week in Estonia. To the question "what blessing does the Church of Christ bring?" he says that what it means to be blessed is to *not* be prisoners of our own stories: not anxious about stockpiling resources but acknowledging our dependence on mercy and gift. Hungry not for more security for ourselves, but for a justice that is shared with all.

Who we are and what we are worth – our identity and our value – is not what *we* make it. It is already given to us – a gift of our Creator. And so is everyone else and everything else – all gifts – no exclusions, no child left behind; no creature, no organism, no atom or molecule left behind. Everything exists in relation to God and we need to try to see it that way.

For my favourite philosopher, Benedict de Spinoza, our regular way of looking at reality is by reference to self. We're just one small part of things which means we can't grasp everything at once. So we take it in bits and make sense of it as we our self were at the centre. That's over there and this is here. But reality at its heart is not as I see it with

my own self as the reference point. Reality is only fully understood when it is seen in reference to God.

But whew, how on earth could finite creatures like us manage that?

Well, what's our answer as Christians? Who does the New Testament say was without sin?

To know in every moment that one is God's creation, loved by God, able to call God the closest words of relationship we know – as Jesus called God Abba/Father. To see oneself as immersed in the whole of life, embedded in the web of creation so to speak, that's the Jesus life. At every moment Jesus knew his life was part of God's story and therefore he could live, and die, giving as God gives – no limits.

We will always struggle to be part of this, to live this Christ-shaped life, but the thing about church is that over the centuries and continuing now it returns – its people return – to the God story. We keep telling it. We keep reminding one another of the Jesus way, something expressed in action in the meal we will share next Sunday. We are assured of his presence with us in this community of friends called the church when we share the ultimate symbol of the self-giving life – the bread and wine of communion. This is the story that puts the lie to the world's story of aggression and consumption. This is the story that we place ourselves in as followers of the Way, meaning that, even if just in little ways, we live by God's standards of equal justice and mutual commitment, as people of welcome and gratitude.

Remember: we are part of God's story, not just our own story, and definitely not just the fearful, conflict-ridden world's story.

To die with Christ is to let our stories be displaced so the story of life as God's gift can take centre stage. As Rowan Williams says,

“to make room here and now for the Kingdom of renouncing sufficiency and complacency, by keeping alive the passionate hunger for the neighbour's life – including the non-human neighbour's life; by the simplicity and single-heartedness of a desire for a reconciled world, by willingness to forgive; and by not being surprised if all this brings struggle, suffering and opposition.”

The message in today's reading from Matthew's gospel shows how crucial this struggle is, and it effectively sums up much of what I've been saying. With Eugene Peterson's help, and some adaptations, some verses from Matthew 10:

²⁶⁻²⁷ "Don't be intimidated. Eventually everything is going to be out in the open, and everyone will know how things really are. So don't hesitate to go public now and light up the way I teach.

²⁸ "Don't be bluffed into silence by the threats of bullies. There's nothing they can do to your soul, your core being. Save your fear for God, who holds your entire life—body and soul—in his hands.

²⁹⁻³¹ "What's the price of a sparrow? Some loose change, if that. And God cares what happens to it even more than you do. God pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! So don't be intimidated by all this bully talk.

³²⁻³³ "Stand up for me against world opinion and I'll stand up for you before my Father in heaven. If you turn tail and run, do you think I'll cover for you?

³⁴ "Don't think I've come to make life cozy. I've come to cut through the cozy arrangements of the world's ways – where everyone has a fixed place in the status quo - and free you for God.

³⁸⁻³⁹ "If you don't go all the way with me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to me, you'll find both yourself and me.

Hymn of Reflection: Christ Be Our Light:

Prayers of Intercession:

God calls us to offer up the world's concerns in petition for others. Let us therefore pray for the church, the world, and those in need, saying,

Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

Blessed are you, sovereign God: you do not abandon what you have created but continue to make your grace known among us. We

thank you for those you have chosen to speak your reconciling word in this age, and we pray for the faith to receive it.

Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

Blessed are you, caring God: you hear the cries of the poor, you see the tears in the eyes of all who mourn, you know the pain of those in anguish, and you come to the side of the lonely. Call your church to compassion and service.

Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

Blessed are you, God of peace: you call us to make warfare cease and to place our trust in the One who bears us up. Give comfort and courage to all refugees, especially in Ukraine, and those fleeing Africa for Europe. Raise up peacemakers among all peoples and confound those who place their fortunes in weapons.

Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

Blessed are you, God of justice: you desire that all be one. Erase prejudice and class divisions, bring strength to those who are persecuted, and heal those who believe that destruction is the path of righteousness.

Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

Blessed One, turn us to your ways. Make us bold. Increase our passion for what is good. Inspire us with the witness of those who have gone before us, whose faith shines through the ages.

Hear us, O God; your mercy is great.

Into your hands we place the welfare of all for whom we pray. We trust in your mercy; through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Offering:

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING/DEDICATION

Holy God, who gives life, nourishment, and strength to all creation, we thank you: for the community of faith you have built, for your servants who have held fast to you through centuries, for the teachings and the witness of our ancestors, for the gospel's welcome to all in need, for the healing that comes from your

watchfulness. Bless these gifts that all may be nurtured in truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Closing Hymn: His Eye Is on the Sparrow LUYH #441

Benediction:

CHARGE

As you leave this place, leave fear behind, leave with a glad heart, leave with conviction that all people you meet in the coming days are beloved of God as you are, also. Rejoice and give thanks.

BLESSING

Now may the Lord bless you, guide you, hold you, guard you, and make you bold to live a life of trust and deep joy. Go in peace.

Liturgy – Andrew Howley

Sermon – Robyn McPhail