



Personal service for 13th September 2020

This Sunday is recognised by Churches Together in England as Education Sunday.

Call to Worship: Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. *Psalm 103v1*

Hymn Praise to the Lord, the Almighty the King of Creation (16 H&P, 88 StF, 564 MP)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Let us pray to God, knowing even though we are apart, God hears us all.

Praise to the Lord, O let all that is in me adore him!
Lord, we come before you with a mix of emotions in this time of change.

But we recognise that you are eternal, you know all times and all places and we can rely on you.

You are an ever-present constant in our lives and your boundless love and unlimited power comfort and amaze us in equal measure.

As we spend time with you, help us hear your word afresh and show us how to apply it to our lives today.

We know we need your help because we often go wrong.

Forgive us Lord for the times when we don't praise you, as we should.

Forgive us Lord when we are not open to learning more about you, those around us and ourselves.

Forgive us Lord when we are not ready to teach others about you and your saving grace.
God who is faithful and just assures us of forgiveness and peace.
Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Readings

In last week's Old Testament reading God instructed the Israelites how to mark the first Passover. They then escaped slavery in Egypt, but the Egyptians realised they had lost all their slaves and so chased after them and today's familiar reading tells of God's power and commitment to the Israelites as the Egyptians were getting closer.

Exodus 14:19-31

Our Gospel reading also follows on from last week, when Jesus was teaching the disciples how to react to another person sinning against them. This prompts today's question from Peter about forgiveness, which Jesus answers with a parable.

Matthew 18:21-35

Hymn Help, us, O Lord, to learn (474 H&P, 501 StF)
or Speak, O Lord, as we come to You (1350MP, 161 StF)

Can you remember as a child trying to count as high as you could go and as you got older you learnt bigger

and bigger numbers and couldn't continue counting because you either ran out of time, or got fed up. Then you learnt about infinity (In science infinity it is the symbol that looks like an 8 on it's side ∞) the biggest number you can ever imagine. I can't remember whether it was at A level or degree level that I learnt you can add 1 to infinity. It's obvious isn't it, the biggest number you can have and you can still add 1 more. Other words that relate to infinity are eternal and endless, now we are getting into the language of God, God is eternal; his reign is endless, his love is never-ending, and his power is unrestricted. (You might like to read the hymn There's a wideness in God's mercy 230 H&P, 416StF, 683MP which offers more descriptions) However big we think God is, however long we have known God, we can still add to our knowledge of to him, still learn something new about him, about his love for us and about how he wants us to live.

Most of us will know the reading from Exodus well. God protected and saved the Israelites escaping from the Egyptian army parting the Red Sea so that they could walk on dry land. I don't know about you but I would have been terrified, an army behind trying to attack, a cloud, that moved from showing them the way to moving behind to protect. A wall of water either side as the people walked through on dry ground, I think I would have needed a hand to hold, I'm sure many of them were afraid. Once the people got through and saw that they were safe on the others

side they feared God and believed in him and Moses. I think the fear of God was different to my imagined fear of water crashing down on me. They had seen God's awesome power right in front of them, they now trusted him and had more respect for God which showed itself in worship. If you follow on reading you will see that they praised God. They learnt something new about God that day; God would protect them and lead them. It was a moment of massive change for them, even if they didn't know it at that point, going from captivity into freedom. They would continue to learn about the nature of God, about their own human nature of insecurity and disobedience.

One of the questions for us today is what are we learning? Life may have changed massively since Moses's day but in another way it hasn't changed at all. We are still God people trying to following him, but often failing. Most of us have spent nearly 6 months away from church; some churches are starting to tentatively reopen. At the moment we are sort of stood on the other side of our Red Sea, for us that is the first wave (and hopefully last wave) of Covid 19, just as the Israelites were at the end of our reading. We are, just as they were, about to step out into the unknown.

What have we learnt that will take us through the next few months, what do we need to continue to learn about God, about ourselves and each other. I don't know about you, but I've learnt that however much a struggle the last 6 months has been, God is still with

us. I also want to learn how to be more inclusive, how do we as a church community welcome those who haven't been to worship before, when our church capacity is lower? How do we stay more connected with those who at the moment and in the future can't get to physically meet their church community? Maybe you might want to spend a few minutes thinking about what you have learnt over the last few months, or what you want to try and learn in the near future.

Our Gospel reading is also familiar to many of us. Jesus is in the process of teaching his disciples about how they should act within the church and how they should conduct personal relationships in the Kingdom of God. Peter asks about how much he should forgive, and it's worth bearing in mind he is asking about a church member, brother or sister, someone who shares his faith in Jesus. Seven times seven is the response, another way of saying forever, there should be no limit to your forgiveness. Forgiveness is a lifestyle not a number. Then Jesus goes on to tell the parable to explain that we have been forgiven a lot by God, and so we should also forgive the little that our brothers and sisters do to us.

For the first Christians this was a massive change to what they had known, just like the Israelites at the edge of the Red Sea, the Christians were stepping out into a new world, a new Kingdom that was lead by Jesus. We too as we have said are just starting out again. I know we have made mistakes in the past as

churches and we are probably going to make mistakes as we set out on this new journey. I think we need to have a culture of forgiveness within our church communities as we move forward.

But it's not really forgiveness that I want to commend to you this week, although it is always good to remember that we need to forgive one another. I want us to look at Jesus's teaching. Through all of this chapter Jesus is teaching, he teaches by answering questions, by giving examples from everyday life and by using parables. Throughout the gospels Jesus uses different ways of teaching for different situations and different people. He expands his plain words of how much to forgive with a parable.

We are not just learners, we are all also teachers, even if you don't think of yourself as one. The second question for us today is are we teaching? Are we giving out the knowledge we have. Now I know most of you will be sat at home in a couple or on your own reading this, some of us won't be going back to church for a while, some may always be reading a Sunday service at home from now on. You may not think you have much to teach, but your knowledge about how you have worshipped God at home, how you continue to do that, your patience, your prayer life, the more time you have to read scripture and absorb it, or a thousand other things, might be just what someone else needs to hear and to learn. Maybe we need to spend time working out how we

can connect people together so that teaching can take place. Not the teaching that happens in the pulpit week by week, but the small bits of teaching we all do when we talk to someone side by side on life's journey, in whatever context that takes place.

Education is not just about learning and taking in knowledge, it's about teaching and sharing that knowledge with others. I hope we can all continue to do both of these, with God's guidance as we move forward in faith together.

Prayers of Intercession

Today we pray for all those involved with education, teacher, students and national leaders.

Let us pray:

Lord, in this time of change we pray for all those leaders around the world who make national and international decisions about education. We pray that they may see the value of each person's differences and make a fairer world for those who struggle to access education.

Lord, we pray for all teachers in our school, colleges and universities. As the new year starts be with them as they manage their own and student worries. During this year may they open the world of learning up in new and exciting ways, so that all pupils will be able to find a place to grow, belong and feel valued and the staff will feel fulfilled in their role as educators.

Lord, we pray for all students of whatever age, that the places they study in may be welcoming and inclusive. We pray that the young will have their minds opened to possibilities and will be guided in this difficult world full of choices.

Lord, we pray that the church may be a community where all are welcome. Welcome to pray, to worship, to explore to learn and to teach. May we provide comfort to the lonely, hope for the broken and rest to the weary.

Lord we ask these and all our prayers in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Hymn Give me the faith with can remove (767H&P, 661StF, 168MP)

Blessing

May God bless you in your learning

May God bless you and others in your teaching.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.