

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 6 After Easter A
17th May 2020

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.

Opening Prayer

Lord, we believe in you: increase our faith.
We trust in you: strengthen our trust.
We love you: let us love you more and more.
We are sorry for our sins: deepen our repentance.
We worship you as our first beginning.
We long for you as our last end.
We praise you as our constant helper,
and call on you as our loving protector. **Amen.**

Hymn StF 568 Alleluia! Sing to Jesus (Hyfrydol)

Alleluia! Sing to Jesus,
his the sceptre, his the throne.
Alleluia! His the triumph,
his the victory alone.
Hark! The songs of peaceful Zion
thunder like a mighty flood;
Jesus, out of every nation,
has redeemed us by his blood.

Alleluia! Not as orphans
are we left in sorrow now.
Alleluia! He is near us,
faith believes, nor questions how.
Though the cloud from sight received him
when the forty days were o'er,
shall our hearts forget his promise,
'I am with you evermore'?

Alleluia! Bread of angels,
thou on earth our food, our stay.
Alleluia! Here the sinful
flee to thee from day to day.
Intercessor, friend of sinners,
earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
where the songs of all the sinless
sweep across the crystal sea.

Alleluia! King eternal,
thee the Lord of lords we own.
Alleluia! Born of Mary,
earth thy footstool, heaven thy throne.
Thou within the veil hast entered,
robed in flesh, our great High Priest;
thou on earth both priest and victim
in the eucharistic feast.

Prayer of Praise

O Lord, enable us to greet the coming day in peace.
Help us in all things to rely upon your holy will.
Throughout the day reveal your will to us.

Bless our dealings with all who surround us.
Teach us to treat all that comes to us
throughout the day with peace of soul
and with firm conviction that your purpose
is at work in all things.

Guide our thoughts and feelings,
our words and actions.
In unforeseen events,
let us not lose sight of your presence.

Teach us to act firmly and wisely,
without embittering and embarrassing others.

Give us strength to bear whatever stress
the coming day may bring.
Direct our wills,
teach us to pray,
and let your Holy Spirit pray in us.

Metropolitan Philaret of Moscow (1782-1867)

Reading John 14:15-21

"If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever-- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

Address

From the very first people realised that John's gospel was unlike the others, Matthew, Mark, and Luke – the so-called synoptic gospels because they have the same "viewpoint". While the synoptic gospels were interested in telling the story of Jesus, what he did, what he taught, and how things happened, John was more interested in telling us who Jesus was. He gave us seven signs – events that give us a clue about who Jesus was – and several "I am" sayings, which we been looking at over the last couple of weeks.

So it isn't at all surprising that John, unlike Luke, doesn't tell us about what happened when the Holy Spirit came, but is more interested in telling us what the Holy Spirit is and does in this passage. He tells us that the Holy Spirit is Paraclete – a Greek word that conveys a lot of different meanings. So in our translations we find it described as advocate, councillor, comforter and so on. Paraclete is a word that is associated with legal proceedings and describes an individual who stands alongside the accused in a court case. Legal cases in the Roman world were settled in ways which are unfamiliar to us. There was no consideration of precedent – previous cases and how they had been decided - and there was little use of the cross examination of witnesses. Instead the lawyer for the prosecution and the lawyer for the defence would both make lengthy, highly rhetorical speeches to try and persuade the jury of ten men (and the legal system was entirely male dominated – sorry ladies) to decide the case for or against the accused. The speeches could be exceedingly long – the Roman lawyer and writer Pliny the Younger was proud of one case that he had prosecuted when the speech he made took seven hours to deliver!

The public were entitled to attend to listen to the speeches and could interrupt them by cheering and booing. Friends and family of the accused or the defendant often paid people to attend the cases to cheer the speeches which were in their favour and jeer the speeches that were against them. So it became an accepted practice for someone who was unfamiliar with the law to have a Paraclete – someone who would stand beside them and would offer them advice as a counsellor, or speak up when the process of law was being flouted as an advocate, would give them moral encouragement if it looked as if things were going badly for them – a comforter. So when John uses the word Paraclete it would have all those meanings wrapped up in it.

The Paraclete was important when a case was tried before the Emperor – who had the right to intervene in cases if he didn't think that justice was being done. The Emperor's judgement was final, but the Paraclete would often act as an intercessor with the Emperor to ask for mercy and justice. That was especially important if the person involved in the case was very vulnerable – poor, or a widow or an orphan. Jesus tells the disciples in this passage that he is not going to leave them as orphans. These words from Jesus come at the Last Supper. Jesus has just told them that he is going to the Father and will be leaving them. Thomas and Philip have expressed surprise that Jesus is leaving and bewilderment at what is happening. But Jesus is telling them that the Holy Spirit – the spirit of truth, essential in a legal case, will be with them as a Paraclete. He will do all the things that Paraclete would do to support them, even against the rowdy crowd who had been paid to shout abuse and to accuse them publicly. The crowd will simply not recognise that the Paraclete is with them, but the disciples will.

Now when Jesus tells them that the Paraclete will be with them, he says that he will give them **another** counsellor (or advocate or comforter – depending on the translation). Now the word “another” is specific in Greek. In English if we say to someone “would you like another drink”? it could be taken to mean do you want the same type of drink again or do you want a different drink? To avoid the confusion we generally say, “would you like another cup of tea?” and be specific about it, but it wouldn't be unusual if someone said “I'd like a drink of water instead” as an answer. In Greek if you wanted something which was “another of the same” you would use the word allos, if you wanted “something different” would say heteros. The word that is used here is allos – another counsellor like the one that you already have - in Jesus. We might recall the words of the Prophet Isaiah when talking about Immanuel – God with us – which was interpreted by the Early Church as heaping up praises of Jesus - as the Mighty Counsellor, Redeemer, and Prince of Peace. Jesus has been their Paraclete whilst he is with them, what he is now offering them is that his spirit will remain with them to carry on the work that he has started in bringing in the kingdom but which has not yet concluded.

Instead that work is to be carried on by Jesus' followers who will receive the Holy Spirit as a Paraclete provided that the followers "commit to following Jesus' words "if you love me, you will obey what I command". What Jesus says here is in English translated very much as a command – you **will** obey – but in Greek the very opposite of what was meant the case of "another" happens here. The word in Greek carries a wider range of meaning than the English. It can be taken as Jesus saying that he is confident that his followers love him and because they love him, they will certainly obey his commandments. Because they are seen to obey his commandments then it will follow that all people will know they love Jesus. And that love shown in action will, through the activity of the Holy Spirit – the Paraclete – mean that God will love them as Jesus loved them. Like the Emperor in a Roman court case the Holy Spirit will intercede with God who will show mercy to us. From the earliest times Christians have displayed that love in keeping the commandments of Jesus. "See how these Christians love one another" was the popular saying recorded by the Early Church Father, Tertullian.

Christians continued to show that love for one another even the face of adversity. For from the first, Christians found themselves not only under the judgement of God, but also under the judgement of the people and their rulers. The Emperor Claudius banned the Christians and Jews from Rome because of their infighting about Christ which disturb the public peace. They were treated as scapegoats by Nero to cover up his own failings; they were persecuted by the Emperor Domitian who was paranoid that the meeting of Christians was highly political and aimed at his overthrow. Throughout the first two centuries of Christianity there were repeated persecutions because the Romans were suspicious of this new religion. Yet when the Roman state could no longer look after the welfare of its people under the pressure of barbarian invasion it did a deal with the Christian Church. In return for recognition as the religion of the Empire, the Church extended its well-established welfare system to all Roman peoples.

Still throughout history Christians have stood accused in the courts of popular opinion and felt the power of the Holy Spirit supporting them as Paraclete. That's not to say that there haven't been episodes when Christians have failed to live up to the commandments of Christ – there had been enough of those as well. But as Christians in times of trouble we are called to show our commitment to the commandments of Christ by what we do. We do have trouble at present – so it is interesting to see how much the media have been surprised by the acts of kindness and self-giving that have been shown in the present difficulties. Not all of that will be based on specific Christian faith, but a lot of it is.

So we have a bit of a challenge at this difficult time – to show the love of Christ and to live in the power of the Holy Spirit. The judgements of our own time are not like

the physical persecutions of Roman times. Instead the accusations thrown against Christians and other religions are that we are a source of conflict rather than reconciliation or that faith is an emotional prop which is quite unnecessary in a world of rationality and science. There is still a need for Christians to defend our faith against such accusations, and when we do to it is comforting to think that we have a Paraclete alongside to aid us in what we say. Much more powerful is the demonstration of what we do in love. We approach Pentecost through the time of Ascension, and both remind us that although Christ is not with us physically, his spirit is still here to assist us to do his will.

Hymn StF 242 A new commandment (Sing Twice)

A new commandment I give unto you;
that you love one another as I have loved you,
By this shall all men know that you are my disciples,
if you have love one for another.
By this shall all men know that you are My disciples,
If you have love one for another,
By this shall all men know that you are My disciples,
If you have love one for another

Prayer of Response

O God of peace,
unite the hearts of all people
that we may live with one another
in gentleness and humility, in peace and unity.

O God of patience,
give us patience in times of trouble,
and courage to endure to the end.

O Spirit of prayer,
awaken our hearts
that we may lift up holy hands to God
and cry to him in all our distress.

Be our defence in time of need,
our help in trouble,
our consolation when all things seem to be against us.

Come, eternal light, salvation and comfort;
be our light in darkness,
our salvation in life,

our comfort in death,
and lead us in the narrow way to everlasting life,
that we may praise you for ever,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Bernard Albrecht (d. 1636)

Prayers of Intercession

The Spirit of truth, given to us, enables us to discern the living, risen Christ.

As we gather in the company of the living God, let us pray.

Lord of life, we pray that the Church
may be alive with your risen life,
refreshed and revived by the breath of your Spirit,
purified and refined like gold and silver,
so that we truly offer the possibility
of saving love to the searching world.

Silence

You are the one true God:
and we worship you.

Lord of life, we pray that in all meetings and conferences
where important decisions are taken,
hearts may be turned to honour what is just and true,
compassionate and constructive.

We pray that in all areas
where there is corruption, deceit or distrust,
consciences may be sensitised afresh
to know what is right and strive towards it.

Silence

You are the one true God:
and we worship you.

Lord of life, we pray for the streets
and places of work we represent.
May they be places where the truth of your being

is proclaimed daily by the way we live
and handle the everyday situations, through your leading.
May our words and actions speak of your faithful love,
your graciousness and your purity.

Silence

You are the one true God:
and we worship you.

Lord of life,
we pray for all who feel out of their depth,
all who are drowning in their pain, sorrow or guilt.
Set them free, O God, and save them,
support them to a place of safety
and fix their feet on the solid rock of your love.

Silence

You are the one true God:
and we worship you.

Lord of life, we pray for those who have died
and now see you as you really are.
We ask for mercy and forgiveness,
and commend them to your keeping for ever.

Silence

You are the one true God:
and we worship you.

Lord of life, your love for us is so great and our love for you so small.
Thank you for accepting what we are able to offer;
and ignite us to a blaze of love.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ, who taught us when we pray to say.....

Lord's Prayer

Hymn StF 372 Come down, O Love divine (Down Ampney)

Come down, O Love divine,
seek out this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn
till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light
shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, my path illumining.

Let holy charity
mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become my inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart,
which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong
with which the soul will long
shall far surpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace
till we become the place
wherein which the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

Blessing

God the Father, bless us;
Jesus Christ, take care of us;
Holy Spirit, enlighten us all the days of our lives.
o Lord, be our defender and keeper,
both now and for ever, through all ages.

Amen.

Aedlwald, Saxon Bishop, 9th Cent.

