



CENTRING WORDS

The Spirit of truth dwells among us.
Open your hearts, your hands, your eyes,
and bask in this awareness....

Now take a deep breath....in and out...
In the Lord, we live and breathe and have our being.
Rest in this presence.

CALL TO WORSHIP

God of love,
as Jesus reminded his disciples
that love is always the answer,
love us,
receive our imperfect response
and our lack of love,
receive us as we are
and help us to worship you in truth and in hope and in love.

SONG: 'Into the Deep' by Roxanne McLeod © 2019

From different streams of life, we come
Drawn to the Source of living hope
Ready to trust in the depths of God's love
Abandoning fear
God's calling us near

Chorus:

*And so we will go into the deep
Where we will find our place with those who believe
The shallows behind together we'll be
Immersed in God's grace, carried by love
Into the deep*

We will find peace in the mystery of faith
Living our lives in joyful praise
Ready to dive in the depths of God's grace
Surrendering all
We follow God's call

(Chorus)

Here in the deep we are never alone
As we declare one faith, one hope
Learning from those who have gone here before
Welcomed to be
In God's family

(Chorus)

And so we will go into the deep
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Immersed in God's grace

Carried by love
Into the deep

ALL-AGE PRAYER

God, we love you,
we love each other,
and we love what you have created:
our planet, the people who look after us,
our families and friends;
all the things and people
that show love for us.

Love is the way that we know you;
we know you as the Creator,
as the Son, as the Spirit,
we know that you are always with us,
always in our lives, taking care of us,
loving us.

Your message is love,
your commandments are love, so, we live our lives,
happy that you have promised to be here forever,
because of your love for us. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Sometimes God, your ways are a mystery to us.
When we cry out in desperation,
we don't really expect you to hear our prayers.
When we suffer for doing the right thing,
it just seems to be the way things are.
When we deny or doubt your presence, you forgive us.
God make your presence known to us,
and receive our prayers and praise, our wonder and awe.
Receive our confession

- that we long to feel your presence with us.
Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

The Spirit of truth abides with you and will be with you.
Because the Lord lives, you also will live.
Love God and receive God's abiding love.

INTRODUCTION TO THE WORD

Listen for the presence of God in the word.
Listen for the presence of the Holy in your lives.
Worship a God who makes known a love for all of humanity.
See a God who sends help and hope.
Open yourselves to the Spirit of truth.

SCRIPTURE READING: John 14:15-21 (NRSV)

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

SERMON by Rev. Dr Peter Walker

The philosopher Aristotle taught that we are all essentially political animals,
By which he meant that human beings were created to live in groups and in communities - to live in a 'polis'.
For instance, Aristotle even went so far as to teach that an immoral person is a person without friends.
Only friends make us a moral being because they tell us the truth about ourselves - truth that those who are not as close as friends are never likely to tell us.
Only friends know how to break that truth, in the right way.
Pity the person who is without friends, said Aristotle, someone without people to say what they need to be told.
Though you probably hold greater sympathy for the person who is without friends, you can pick up the logic of Aristotle's argument.

Aristotle's view clashes head-on with today's prevailing view of a human being.

Most people today prefer to think that we are essentially self-made.

Dependent on no one.

And if we cannot stand alone, if we do depend on others,

Then there's something wrong with us.

The ability to stand alone is the sign of a successful modern life.

The legacy of this move to individualism is all around us.

Think of all those communities that should be working, and yet are failing: families, neighbourhoods, clubs, churches, nations.

The list could go on.

This is the sad harvest of the view that the individual human

being stands supreme,
not the community.

~ ~ ~

Chapter 15 of John's Gospel shows us that the Christian view of our humanity stands in stark contrast to the contemporary western concept of the person, and is actually much closer to Aristotle!

We believe that God has created us, and Christ has commanded us, to lean on one another when we need help; and that God has created us, and Christ has commanded us, to give help to others when they need someone to lean on.

Three times in this passage our Gospel links obedience with love:

- If you love me, you will keep my commandments (15)
- They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me (21)
- Whoever does not love me, does not keep my words (24)

And we also know that which Jesus described as the greatest of all commandments:

Love God, and love your neighbour as yourself.

The sign of our faith in Christ, and our obedience to him, is not a matter of belief, but a matter of *love*.

The basic unit of life is not the individual.

The basic unit of life is an individual who loves others.

And, we might add, who is willing to be loved by others.

The basic unit of life is a loving community...

loving family, loving friends, loving church.

I suspect that this time of isolation has reminded most of us, if not all,

That true life is found in our connectedness, not our individualism.

And that our deepest joy is found in giving ourselves to others,

Not giving and holding all things to ourselves.

I hope that is something we can hold onto when this pandemic is over.

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People are often heard to say that they want to be free;  
They long for freedom.

I say it. Maybe you do as well.

Yet it is one of the ironies of life that,  
if freedom to us means freedom from dependence on others,  
if we try to free ourselves of dependencies and attachments -  
to be the modern ideal of humanity - the self-made person -  
we will end, not with freedom, but enslavement.

I know people, and I don't doubt you know some too,  
whose lives and well-being have been destroyed because  
they have loved only themselves.

However, I cannot think of anybody I know  
who has had their life or well-being destroyed  
because she or he was lovingly obedient to Christ's call to  
love one another.

It is costly - and it should be costly.

But that love is life's true freedom, and true meaning.

Our humanity is given its truth within community.

## RESPONSE TO THE WORD

We will love as the Lord loves us.

We will testify to the presence of God, through the Spirit, and  
friend and advocate

We will stand with one another in times of suffering.

We will open our hearts in praise and thanksgiving.

We are not rejected or alone,  
for we are loved.

SONG: 'Your Labor is Not In Vain' by the Porters Gate Project

Your labor is not in vain

Though the ground underneath you is cursed and stained

Your planting and reaping are never the same

Your labor is not in vain

Your labor is not unknown

Though the rocks they cry out and the sea it may groan

The place of your toil may not seem like a home

But Your labor is not unknown

I am with you, I am with you

I am with you, I am with you

For I have called you, called you by name

Your labor is not in vain

The vineyards you plant will bear fruit

The fields will sing out and rejoice with the truth

For all that is old will at last be made new

The vineyards you plant will bear fruit

I am with you, I am with you

I am with you, I am with you

For I have called you, called you by name

Your labor is not in vain

The houses you labored to build

Will finally with laughter and joy be filled



The serpent that hurts and destroys will be killed  
And all that is broken be healed  
I am with you, I am with you  
I am with you, I am with you  
For I have called you, called you by name  
Your labor is not in vain  
I am with you, oh I am with you  
Oh I am with you, oh I am with you  
For I have called you, called you by name  
Your labor is not in vain

### AN AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

I remember hearing a story about a young priest, confessing to his mentor that he struggled to say some of the words of the creeds because he either didn't believe them or didn't understand them. To which his mentor answered, "I don't say the words of creed for myself, I say them for those who cannot yet say them and believe them."

There are churches who would say the creed every Sunday as a matter of tradition.

I think I am a bit like the young priest, struggling to ask individuals to say words they are not sure they believe. But what if we affirmed our faith not so much for ourselves but for the person who needs to hear the words spoken for them?

Creeds were shaped in the politics of the early church, they invite people to opt in rather than opt out of believing.

Perhaps today, you will respond with the words "Yes, that's what we believe!" simple because you really believe it. Or perhaps you will say the response for the love of someone who is struggling to believe.

Or perhaps you will just listen and let the faith of your  
community who loves you more than words can say,  
wash over you....

God knows our names and calls us round heaven's table  
Do you believe this?

***Yes, that's what we believe!***

Jesus knows our hiding place and waits for us to come  
out

Do you believe this?

***Yes, that's what we believe!***

The Spirit challenges us to change and move towards  
living in justice

Do you believe this?

***Yes, that's what we believe!***

God enjoys eating with us and changes things that way  
Do you believe this?

***Yes, that's what we believe!***

Jesus loves company, especially ours

Do you believe this?

***Yes, that's what we believe!***

The Spirit give us endless second chances with grace  
Do you believe this?

***Yes, that's what we believe!***

God has a favourite word and the word is love

Do you believe this?  
**Yes, that's what we believe!**

Jesus is waiting, and is waiting, and will continue to wait  
until we are ready  
Do you believe this?  
**Yes, that's what we believe!**

The Spirit laughs at our foolishness and loves us all the  
more  
Do you believe this?  
**Yes, that's what we believe!**

#### OFFERING OUR GIFTS

God of love, you are present in all things.  
Be present to a hurting world in our gifts we offer today.

#### BLESSING

Go in the name of God,  
the one who created us for community.  
Go in the name of Christ,  
the one who abides in love and abides in you.  
Go in the name of the Spirit of truth,  
the one who advocates for you and guides you.  
Amen.

