

ST ANDREWS GLENBROOK UNITING CHURCH

13th Sunday in Pentecost - the Growing Time



30 August 2020 - Worship-at-home

CENTERING WORDS

Let love guide your path, for love is the holiest path of all.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy God, we come this day,
this sacred moment
aware that your holiness is always around us.
Surround us with your wondrous love,
that we might be wise enough
to understand your call
and be brave enough to follow your path. Amen

SONG: Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

Oh soul are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior
And life more abundant and free

Through death into life everlasting
He passed and we follow Him there
O'er us sin no more hath dominion
For more than conquerors we are

Oh, turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

His word shall not fail you, He promised
Believe Him and all will be well
Then go to a world that is dying
His perfect salvation to tell
Oh, turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
Oh, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

PRAYER OF ADORATION AND CONFESSION

God, you are solid and sure and reliable,
while at the same time being creative,
adaptable and free.
We change too,
but not always in a good way.
We catch sight
of something new and life-changing
in the teaching of Jesus
and we vow to be different,
to follow him for ever.
Then the kaleidoscope turns,
and a new picture emerges:
one that involves cost,
and letting go,
one where people do not come flocking to hear what we have to say,
but are hostile,
or, worse still, indifferent;
a future that holds the real possibility of dying,
and we are not ready for that.

Gentle God,
help us to take things a bit more slowly;
to get our balance and find a way of following
that is sustainable for us and honouring to you.
May we neither shame ourselves by dwelling
on all the mistakes we have made in the past,
nor frighten ourselves by looking too far into the future.
Help us rather to take one day at a time,
to keep going by putting one foot in front of the other,
lifting our eyes now and then
and surprising ourselves
to see just how far we have come.
And if the way for a while is easy,
let us enjoy it;
and if suffering comes, give us strength to bear it.
And in both remind us that you have been there before,
and have promised to stay with us to the end,
which may, if the impossible promises of our faith
turn out to be true, not be the end at all,
but a glorious new beginning.

Keep us faithful,
keep us hopeful;
above all, O God,
keep us going.
In Jesus' name. Amen.

GROWING FAITH TOGETHER: "Decisions"

How do you make decisions?

If you're a scientist you look for facts.

Let's play a game.

I've got a picture of something in my mind,
and you need to decide what you think it is;

It's got two legs.

It flies.

*It has feathers and some of them are red.
and I've seen it in my garden.*

What do you think it is?

See answer on bottom of last page.

Did you get it correct ? Or did you think of
something else?

How did you make your decision ?

Let's try another one

What is this?

It's a lot older than your grannie.

You could hold it in your hand.

It's smooth.

It's hard.

You could find it on a beach or at the bottom of a river.

What do you think it is?

See answer on bottom of last page.

Sometimes we can put together lots of facts and this helps us to make a decision.

But sometimes decisions aren't just about facts

Like what's your favourite ice-cream?

Did you try every flavour of ice-cream first and then decide ?

Or did someone tell you that it tasted really good?

How do you decide how to behave each day?

You do things that you know are helpful?

You do things you like doing?

You do things people have told you to do?

You do what your friends are doing?

You do what you want to do?



You do things that you've done before and really enjoy?

Everybody has to make decisions every day, children and adults.
Can you think of some decisions you've made this week?

Some decision are small, like - *what will I eat for breakfast?*
Other decision are big like - changing school, trying something new, even
deciding to trust someone can feel like a big decision.

In the Bible Jesus was always asking people questions to help them decide for
them selves who he is?

Can you think of any of them?

Maybe...

Who is your neighbour?

Why are you frightened?

Who do you think I am?

In today's Gospel story, Jesus is asking the disciples to make decisions.
He tells them that they must decide for themselves if they want to follow him, and
he said that following him would be very difficult and dangerous,
they would need to let go of a lot, and there would be suffering, loss, even death.

We do not want to have to suffer—why would we?

We do not want to die before our time—and neither did Jesus.

Still Jesus said:

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves,
and take up their cross and follow me"

This feels to me like an impossible decisions.
But Faith sometimes means letting yourself feel afraid
and following anyway.

ALL-AGE PRAYER

Loving God,
you made us and you know us outside and in.
Some of us like to look tough
and hide our soft centre.
Some of us look fragile on the outside but have a core of steel within.
We believe that you want us to be whole,
so help us to accept all the different qualities that make us uniquely the people we
are.
May we use our strength to support other people and not to trip them up.
May we risk sometimes showing our softness
so that we feel with others in their pain
and share with them in their joy.

Solid as a rock, or mushy as marshmallow;
hard as a diamond, light as a feather
or frothy as a milkshake,
help us to become our best selves for you. Amen.

BIBLE READINGS:

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Matthew 16:21-28

From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and undergo great suffering at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This must never happen to you." But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?"

"For the Son of Man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay everyone for what has been done. Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom."

SERMON by Rev. Geoff Stevenson: *Chairperson-Mission Strategist for Parramatta-Nepean Presbytery*

'A Narrow Way into Life – Through Crosses and Denial'

COVID-19 is dragging on. The pandemic is here for the long haul and I, like so many, am tired, weary, confused and sometimes lost in the chaos and challenge of these times. All around, there is news of new outbreaks and the virus keeps on

keeping on. Whilst we have been relatively spared compared to many other nations, the toll is still too high and the crisis across our elderly is traumatic and awful. Within this chaos I have heard news of young people taking their lives – the stresses and constrictions of COVID-19, along with pressure of HSC and other exams is taking a deep toll. Many are struggling with mental health issues and in too many homes, there is escalating violence.

I feel utterly helpless before this pandemic to do anything except try and minimise risk to other people. Limiting public exposure, wearing masks and strongly encouraging our congregations to take the most responsible and difficult paths of very limited or no gatherings, are some of the small responses I can make. I think about many communities across the nation and world, especially those that are poorer and with limited resources and limited access to good healthcare. I am sometimes overwhelmed by the injustice of our world where the rich have better options and chances of coming through this.

Then I open the Bible and hear a story that seems to ram the point home. Jesus speaks, not of peace and comfort, as I would like. He doesn't promise me a way into ease and security or even consolation. He speaks of suffering! When confronted by Peter, challenged about their obviously conflicting understandings of 'Jesus as Messiah,' Jesus turns on him, putting Peter in his place. He tells the gob-smacked disciples that he is off to Jerusalem to die at the hands of the powers of religion and the world.

The people expected a Messiah who would take up the kingship and rule from Jerusalem. He would liberate them and set them free from Roman rule. He would be a political and religious successor to the great King David. The ordinary people would now have life and peace! No, he speaks instead of suffering, pain and death. He then rubs salt into the wounds suggesting that if anyone wants to be his disciple, they must do the same – deny themselves and take up their cross! He goes on: *'Whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?'*

I'm not sure I want to lose my life – not yet. The thought of following some of the heroes of faith that I love to read about – Martin Luther King jr, Bonhoeffer, Romero – doesn't appeal right now. I also wonder about denial and what denial as a way of life, really means?

As I sit here writing, the words of the Moving Pictures song come to mind:

What about me? It isn't fair/I've had enough, now I want my share

Can't you see, I want to live/But you just take more than you give

Isn't that how we often feel in this time, when government closes everything down or churches and other groups are recommended to not gather, when masks and distancing and limiting outings and... deprive us of our lives, our freedom, our joy, our rights, or whatever we feel deprived of. Then Jesus seems to say that's okay – suffering is a path that should be embraced as he did. For what?

Isn't it the truth that we avoid suffering and struggle for all we're worth? Don't I work hard to not be uncomfortable, insecure, afraid or suffering. I hate sitting in a

place where my mind is overwhelmed and fear asserts its ugly face in everything and there feels like threat coming from all directions. I hesitate to enter into the deep pain of others because I know it will rub off and I will feel it with them. I would sometimes rather run in the opposite direction as fast as I can, to escape, avoid and abandon hopelessness, fear, death and pain.

The truth is that I can't! These things are all around and the faster I run, the closer they seem to be. Suffering follows everywhere because it is impossible to watch the news without being challenged by fear, grief, pain and struggle – broadcasters seem to thrive on it. It is impossible to live life and not encounter that which is difficult, painful and tragic. It is also impossible to live a life of unencumbered bliss and contentment where nothing challenges our status quo of ease and comfort.

The other word that sends shivers down so many people's spines is change. We seem to be caught in the slipstream of change and its cold grip feels threatening. Change is uncomfortable, unsettling – especially when everything seems to be forced into change! Much of what is, seems preferable to change, fear, pain, struggle and death. This does not seem to be the path of Good News that I want from Jesus. It doesn't feel like life in abundance and yet I can't avoid change, suffering or struggle.

I come back to the sense of 'what about me' and wonder if that isn't always my/our problem – that so much comes down to 'me'. Too much response in COVID-19 world is about personal/individual rights rather than the well-being of everyone. Too many respond out of self-centredness and live out of fear and personal need. I find myself caught between my own feelings and desire for security or safety or comfort and the pain of the world around me. I want someone, something to fix it all and make it all okay. God, what are you doing?? Why doesn't God 'fix' everything and make life okay for the world??!

In response, Jesus tells me to deny self, to let go of my ego and step out of the cycles of denial, violence, acquisition and my attempts to control life and everything around me. What might it mean to 'let go' and live another way. What if faith really does mean living into a mystery that is beyond materialism and competition, beyond 'me'? I can't help thinking about Jesus and his resolute manner, his absolute passion, confidence and hope. I think also of those I named before, such as Martin Luther King jr. His last speech, the night before he was killed is remarkable and filled with a vision, a hope and a belief that is mesmerising, inspiring and something that touches the depth of my soul. Letting myself go into this mystery of love that invites me to love God and neighbour as myself, to engage with others in the painful moments, living through them rather than playing with avoidance and distraction.

What will be the cross I bear? I actually refrain from wearing a cross because it is so confronting and challenging – an instrument of torture and pain. I am challenged to take it up, not wear it as an ornament. I am offered a path into the narrow way that will take me through the valley of death's shadow and from there I will find a strange way into life???! Instead of avoiding everything that will

transform me and bring change, the uncomfortable, challenging and confronting words and experiences of life, to enter into them and into the darkness of the world, trusting God goes before me, before us and shines light that is healing and renewing. Will you come on this strange journey of crosses and denial into life?

SONG: The Summons

Will you come and follow me
If I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
And never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
Will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown
In you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind
If I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
And never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
Should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
In you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see
If I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
And never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean,
And do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean
In you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide
If I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
And never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
To reshape the world around,
Through my sight and touch and sound
In you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true
When you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
And never be the same.
In your company I'll go

Where your love and footsteps show.
 Thus I'll move and live and grow
 In you and you in me.

PRAYERS FOR OTHERS AND OURSELVES

Living God,
 we view you, as Christians,
 through the lens of Jesus of Nazareth,
 a man who experienced more and achieved more in his tragically short lifetime
 than most of us will if we live to be a hundred.
 If it is true that you were present in him
 in a uniquely powerful way;
 his thinking completely in tune with yours;
 his life imbued with your spirit,
 then we can look at him and see you
 in a new and different way:
 not separate from human brokenness and suffering,
 but one with us in our loss and grieving,
 as well as in our wonderment and joy.

We pray today for any today who are going through the long, slow journey of loss,
 and grief, and recovery, and that means all of us in one way or another.
 The announcement of bad news:

"I must go to Jerusalem and suffer... and die..."

We pray for those who have received recently
 the kind of news that all of us dread:
 news of serious illness,
 or redundancy,
 or the loss of a loved one.
 Be with them on the road they must travel from here on in.
 And for those who have to break bad news to others:
 may they receive the care and support that they need.

There is the immediate, instinctive denial:

"Never, Lord!... This must not happen to you!"

Sometimes, O God, it is just too much to bear.
 We pray for those whose loss is on a scale that no-one should have to face,
 or whose back has finally broken under one last, tiny straw.
 May there be ears to listen, arms to hold,
 hearts to understand until they are ready
 to face their truth and take the first small step forward,
 even if that leads to...
 ...the anger, the looking for someone to blame:
 "Get behind me, Satan!"

Forgive us if we have lashed out in anger
 at someone who did nothing to deserve it
 because they were voicing our own secret thoughts
 or just because they were close by.

Grant us compassion, and broad shoulders,
if someone needs to vent their rage on us.

There is the bargaining, the doing of deals,
the desperate searching for hope:

“If you are willing to lose your life, you will find it”.

May we move quickly from false, futile deals with the universe,
to this real, honest deal with you.

Help us to let go of whatever it is we need to let go of....

Help us, as quickly as we can, as slowly as we need, to reach acceptance,
of a new and different future:

“The Son of Man will come in his glory...and you will see him”.

God, grant hope to all who are in despair,
or someone to hold a candle of hope on their behalf
until its light reaches through to warm and encourage them.

God, who knows from the inside what it is to be human,
with all the joy and sorrow that entails,
bless us and all for whom our prayers are offered.

Amen.

SENDING WORDS

Continue your walk with Jesus
as you leave our time together.
Whatever the burdens are that you carry, know that Jesus shares your load.
May God's love,
Jesus' compassion,
and the Spirit's guidance
be with you
as you go about your daily living.
Amen

SONG: ‘The Grace’ by Malcolm Gordon.
Jesus, may your grace be upon us
Father, may your love be within and before
Spirit, may you gather and hold us forever more
forever more
Amen, Amen, Amen
Amen, Amen, Amen

ANSWERS:
CRIMSON ROSELLA
PEBBLE

- The Abingdon Worship Annual 2020 . Abingdon Press.
- Spill The Beans
- <https://malcolmgordon.bandcamp.com/track/the-grace>
- The Summons - Wild Goose Resource Group by Hope Publishing Company