

Welcome to worship!

After Lister's comments last week, I note that summer has now decided that it's autumn already and were back to wearing macs and cagouls.

Today, the gospel reading is more about the relationship between Jesus and God the Father – to a certain extent picking up the themes of Trinity 3 weeks ago. I have taken my lead from a commentary by Tom Wright and have used the occasional quote. It has certainly made me think again about the way Jesus' ministry developed.

A call to worship

Come on, shrug off that burden,
pull up a chair, sinner,
and join Jesus,
let him take your burdens:
let him lighten your load.

Amen

We praise our God by singing:

**Hymn STF 86 Praise the Lord!
You heavens, adore him**

<https://youtu.be/ix8Q0QwWUxA>

Praise the Lord! You heavens, adore him;
praise him, angels in the height;
sun and moon, rejoice before him;
praise him, all you stars and light.
Praise the Lord, for he has spoken;
worlds his mighty voice obeyed;
laws that never shall be broken
for their guidance he has made.

Praise the Lord, for he is glorious!
Never shall his promise fail;
God has made his saints victorious;
sin and death shall not prevail.
Praise the God of our salvation;
hosts on high, his power proclaim;
heaven and earth, and all creation,
laud and magnify his name!

*Foundling Hospital Hymns c.1796 from
Psalm 148*

Prayers of adoration confession

There is a response: to "Lord, hear us"
your response is: **Lord, graciously hear us.**

Lord, you are an awesome and mighty God,
yet you want a relationship with us mere humans.

When we look at your creation –
the fields, streams, rivers, hills and mountains.

We can but stand in awe and wonder.
You are truly worthy of our praise.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us.

You are all powerful and ever present.
You are always there, ever ready;
we are but dots on the horizon of the
timeline of this world.
But you care for each one of us.
And that is so amazing.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us.

You are all good, all loving, ever merciful,
showering us with your blessings,
reaching out in our need,
we are not worthy, but you continue in
your wisdom,
to care for and watch over us.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us.

We praise you for your Son, our Saviour
Jesus Christ,
that you allowed him to come to earth and
to die for us –
To release us from the bondage of sin.
and we thank you that you send to your
Holy Spirit.
To guard and to guide us.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us.

Lord, forgive us that we have not
worshipped you.

As often, or as fully as we should,
that we have not praised you with heart
and soul and mind.

That we have glimpsed so little of your
greatness.

Forgive us for failing to appreciate your
mercy,
for forgetting your countless blessings,
and for losing our sense of awe and
wonder before you.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us.

Open our eyes afresh to your splendour,
our hearts to your love, our minds to your
purpose,

and our spirits to your presence.

And so, assured of your forgiveness and
your renewing power,

help us to praise you not just in words.

But in lives offered to you in glad and
joyful service.

We ask this all in the name of our Lord
Jesus Christ.

Amen

**I thought, today, we might use the
Modern form of the Lord's Prayer;**

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your Name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins

As we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

And deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory
are yours,

Now and for ever. **Amen.**

Readings:

**Romans 7:15-25a New Living
Translation (NLT)**

¹⁵ I don't really understand myself, for I
want to do what is right, but I don't do it.
Instead, I do what I hate. ¹⁶ But if I know
that what I am doing is wrong, this shows
that I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ So I

am not the one doing wrong; it is sin
living in me that does it.

¹⁸ And I know that nothing good lives in
me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to
do what is right, but I can't. ¹⁹ I want to
do what is good, but I don't. I don't want
to do what is wrong, but I do it
anyway. ²⁰ But if I do what I don't want to
do, I am not really the one doing wrong; it
is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ I have discovered this principle of life—
that when I want to do what is right, I
inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love
God's law with all my heart. ²³ But there is
another power within me that is at war
with my mind. This power makes me a
slave to the sin that is still within
me. ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am!
Who will free me from this life that is
dominated by sin and death? ²⁵ Thank
God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our
Lord.

The Gospel according to Matthew

11:16-19, 25-30

New Living Translation (NLT)

¹⁶ "To what can I compare this
generation? It is like children playing a
game in the public square. They complain
to their friends,

¹⁷ 'We played wedding songs,

and you didn't dance,

so we played funeral songs,

and you didn't mourn.'

¹⁸ For John didn't spend his time eating
and drinking, and you say, 'He's
possessed by a demon.' ¹⁹ The Son of
Man, on the other hand, feasts and drinks,
and you say, 'He's a glutton and a
drunkard, and a friend of tax collectors
and other sinners!' But wisdom is shown
to be right by its results."

²⁵ At that time Jesus prayed this
prayer: "O Father, Lord of heaven and
earth, thank you for hiding these things
from those who think themselves wise and
clever, and for revealing them to the
childlike. ²⁶ Yes, Father, it pleased you to
do it this way!

²⁷ "My Father has entrusted everything to
me. No one truly knows the Son except
the Father, and no one truly knows the

Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

²⁸ Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

Our next hymn aligns with the last 3 verses of the gospel reading:

Hymn STF 248 I heard the voice of Jesus say

<https://youtu.be/B1tY900Dx0Q>

1 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Come unto me and rest;
lay down, O weary one, lay down
your head upon my breast.'
I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad,
I found in him a resting-place,
and he has made me glad.

2 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'Behold, I freely give
the living water; thirsty one,
stoop down and drink and live.'
I came to Jesus, and I drank
of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived,
and now I live in him.

3 I heard the voice of Jesus say:
'I am this dark world's Light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise,
and all your day be bright.'
I looked to Jesus, and I found
in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk,
till travelling days are done.

Horatius N. Bonar (1808-1889)

Reflection

You have no doubt heard this before, often when somebody takes a quote of a few words out of context, but it also applies to words and even, lectionary readings from the Bible. In the lectionary

this is the middle reading of 3 weeks where last week Paul's words from Romans 6 was selected and next week his words from Romans 8. To my way of thinking, you need to look at the words of chapter 8 to make better sense of what Paul is explaining. Paul's comments do not mean when you become a Christian you die to sin and because you are forgiven, you can then continue sinning continually even though you know it's wrong. It is the Holy Spirit that gives you the strength to follow the right path and leave behind your old ways. Your love of being in Christ will encourage you to do what is right. But I think Paul is trying to acknowledge is that we are all human and fall short of the ideal but that does not mean that we can't aim for the ideal.

Today however, I would like to focus on the gospel reading. Earlier on in Chapter 11, Jesus is asked by John's disciples whether he is the One who is to come or are they to keep looking? Despite Jesus' answer, the question still seems to be hanging in the air. It may be worth noting that the verses in the middle of this reading which are left out show Jesus castigating the towns of Galilee, where he had spent much of his time up to now, for not repenting their ways and recognising who he was despite the many miracles and signs that he had given. He is still fighting the Jewish image of the Messiah warrior king coming to rescue the Israelites from their subjugation to the occupying power. Jesus was offering a last chance to embrace a different kingdom vision. The people didn't appear to want it and were ready to use any excuses to avoid the issue, hence their cries of glutton and drunkard.

In talking about a funeral that he had attended, Tom Wright talked about a tribute given by son who told many stories which only a son could know and only a son could tell. He suggests that, at this time, Jesus came to a greater recognition of his knowledge of the father never being understood by humans. Jesus is left

announcing God's kingdom and God's powerful love in healing, forgiving and bringing of new life and obviously realising that other people he met including religious leaders, his own followers and ordinary people, didn't have the same awareness of his father that he did.

Jesus talks of wisdom. In those times, it was felt that lifetime study of the Torah, piety and the study of the law trying to work out its finer points would ultimately lead to wisdom and knowing God. For the average Jew, that would be so far beyond their reach as would becoming a brain surgeon or test pilot today. Jesus removes this thinking with one stroke by declaring that you just need to be like a small child to learn to know your parents as any child would, learning about the ins and outs and the wonders of what such a relationship means. Jesus saw that the wise and learned seemed to be getting nowhere whereas the poor, the sinners and the tax collectors – the ordinary folk – were discovering more of God simply by following him. Jesus, in essence, becomes a window to the living God - the doorway we knock at. He had the gift of drawing the curtain back and unveiling the truth about God. The word for unveil here is apocalypse, which still today speaks of something dramatic, sudden and earthshattering.

There is a confirmation for Jesus in all of this, that the path he had chosen (which was given to him by his father), was one of gentleness and warmth, care and compassion. Whilst it may seem a little daunting that God can only be accessed through his son, Jesus gave us the most welcoming and encouraging invitation ever offered. Come to me and I will give you rest. Whereas the Pharisees spoke of the yoke of the Torah – the heavy burden of Jewish law – Jesus offered a different yoke and because it came from his mercy and love it was/is easy to bear.

When we are weighed down by burdens, whether they be moral, physical,

emotional, financial or whatever, Jesus offers us himself. He won't stand over us like a policeman or rage with anger. The welcome he offers for all who rely on his mercy is the welcome God offers through him. As Tom Wright says "this is the invitation which pulls back the curtain and lets us see who 'the father' really is – and encourages us to come into his loving, welcoming presence." Amen.

Our prayers for others

There is the well-known response: to "Lord in your mercy" it is **Hear our prayer.**

Sovereign God,
We bring before you our troubled world –
A world of so much hatred, suspicion, greed and envy,
So much poverty, exploitation, violence and suffering,
Wherever war and strife prevails and we pray for peace.
We think of those many areas still recovering from natural disasters,
Often years after they happen
And we pray that you will renew their lives to the full.
Yet it is a world you love so much
That you became a part of it through your Son.
Offering your love to bring it healing.
You call us to share in mending broken lives, help us to respond.

Lord in your mercy.

Hear our prayer.

Loving God,
You have called us to be a living community,
People bound together in the body of Christ.
A family united in love.
We bring to you our families and friends.
And especially all those who are sick or suffering, both near and far
We especially think of.....
(name those you think of in the silence)
Help us to keep you at the centre of our lives.
And focus on what really matters.

Lord in your mercy.
Hear our prayer.

Almighty God,
Bring friendship to the lonely, reconciliation
to the estranged,
Harmony to the divided, and comfort to the
bereaved.
In our homes and our families, our schools
and our places of work,
Our country and our world.
May your love be shared among us, creating
faith and bringing hope and healing.

Lord in your mercy.
Hear our prayer.

Living God,
Teach us to be still in your presence, to
listen to your voice,
Seek your will, and to respond to your
guidance.
Deepen our relationship with you through
Christ,
So that we may know your presence with us
all fully each day,
And share your life more abundantly each
moment.
You reach out with unfailing love, help us to
respond in faith.

Lord in your mercy,
Hear our prayer

We ask these and all our prayers in the
name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen

Our final hymn is
Hymn STF 345 And can it be
<https://youtu.be/sQeIGbKqiw8>

And can it be that I should gain
an interest in the Saviour's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above --
so free, so infinite his grace --
emptied himself of all but love,
and bled for Adam's helpless race.
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;
for, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray --
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
my chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living Head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my
own.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing

May our bounteous God's
goodness enrich us,
His love inspire us,
His spirit guide us,
His power protect us,
His mercy receive us,
now and always
Amen.

John Bailey for 5th 0July 2020