

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:
Telephone Service for Sunday 29 August 2021 – Trinity 13

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett and can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley churches for the 13th Sunday after Trinity.

We come from scattered lives to meet with God.
Let us recognize God's presence with us.

Silence is kept.

As God's people we have come:

Let us worship God together.

Psalm 15: 1 - 4

Lord, who may dwell in your tabernacle? Who may rest upon your holy hill? Whoever leads an uncorrupt life and does the thing that is right; who speaks the truth from the heart and bears no deceit on the tongue; who does no evil to a friend and pours no scorn on a neighbour.

Hymn: Ye holy angels bright

1 Ye holy angels bright,
who wait at God's right hand,
or through the realms of light
fly at your Lord's command,
assist our song,
for else the theme
too high doth seem
for mortal tongue.

3 Ye saints, who toil below,
adore your heavenly King,
and onward as ye go
some joyful anthem sing;
take what he gives
and praise him still,
through good and ill
who ever lives.

2 Ye blessed souls at rest,
who ran this earthly race,
and now from sin released,
behold the Saviour's face,
his praises sound,
as in his sight
with sweet delight
ye do abound.

4 My soul, bear thou thy part,
triumph in God above,
and with a well-tuned heart
sing thou the songs of love;
let all thy days
till life shall end,
whate'er he send,
be filled with praise.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691), John Hampden Gurney (1802-1862), Richard Robert Chope (1830-1928) (Public Domain) CCLI Licence 2370586

Invitation to Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ says, 'A new commandment I give you, that you love one another as I have loved you.'
Let us confess to almighty God our failure to accept God's love and to share it with others.

Prayers of Penitence

Lord Jesus, you came to reconcile us to one another and to the Father:
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you heal the wounds of sin and division:
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you intercede for us with your Father:
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Absolution

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God, you search us and know us: may we rely on you in strength and rest in you in weakness, now and in all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

First Reading

Deuteronomy 4: 1,2, 6 – 9

So now, Israel, give heed to the statutes and ordinances that I am teaching you to observe, so that you may live to enter and occupy the land that the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the LORD your God with which I am charging you. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!"

For what other great nation has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is whenever we call to him?

And what other great nation has statutes and ordinances as just as this entire law that I am setting before you today?

But take care and watch yourselves closely, so as neither to forget the things that your eyes have seen nor to let them slip from your mind all the days of your life; make them known to your children and your children's children—

Gospel Reading

Mark 7: 1 – 8, 14, 15, 21 – 23

Now when the Pharisees and some of the scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered around him, they noticed that some of his disciples were eating with defiled hands, that is, without washing them. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they thoroughly wash their hands, thus observing the tradition of the elders; and they do not eat anything from the market unless they wash it; and there are also many other traditions that they observe, the washing of cups, pots, and bronze kettles.) So the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" He said to them, "Isaiah prophesied rightly about you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.' You abandon the commandment of God and hold to human tradition."

Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen to me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

Reflection

My reflections on the readings for today have gone in three different, but linked, directions. The first is about the Pharisees: they make an appearance throughout the gospel narratives and are present in today's reading. What should we do with them? It can be tempting to turn them into the baddies – those awful Pharisees – always getting it wrong! I suggest we may miss the point if we think of them only as an historical group of people from way back then. It is possible instead, every time they come up in a gospel event, to see them acting as helpful reminders to us to question our own motivations. In today's gospel passage for example, the Pharisees are the ones pointing the finger at the disciples and Jesus criticises them and calls them hypocrites. What they seem to be doing here is focussing too much on small, external matters, rather than on the bigger picture of what comes from inside people that can really hurt and damage the self and others. We could therefore take this opportunity, not to point the finger back at the Pharisees, but to reflect on our own approaches to life. Are there times when we have found ourselves focussing on the small details and missing the major point? When might we have tried to regulate and judge other people's behaviour in some minor matters and at the same time have blind spots about our

own motivations and desires? This isn't so much about beating ourselves up, but about helping us become more aware and living with fewer blind spots.

My second focus for reflection is about the Jewish law, or Torah (the law found within the first five books of the Bible). Both Jesus and the Pharisees were deeply committed and interested in how to live in ways that please God and in what ways the Jewish law enabled that. They clashed because they had different understandings and approaches. For early Christians, Jesus is understood to be the fulfilment of the law. Talk about obeying laws can suggest a joyless burden of following rules. But in our Old Testament passage set for today from Deuteronomy, we are given a glimpse of the joy and pride that the Jewish people felt in relation to their God and to the gift that God had given them that was the Torah, or the law. For what shines through this passage is the awareness of being a chosen people, that God is not far off but will draw near when they call and that those looking in from the outside will see a distinctive relationship between God and people. They will see a people living in wise and discerning ways because of the godly instructions given them. There is no sense here that obeying the law is a deadening burden, or even a means of gaining God's good favour – they already have that! This is about living the law as a loving, joyful response to God's loving goodness towards them.

I find the following illustration about the purpose of the law really helpful. Imagine our local beaches in wartime. At the beginning of the war there was a serious threat of invasion from across the Channel and the south coast was an obvious place where the enemy might land. These beaches had to be fenced off with barbed wire – they were so dangerous to the local population because landmines had been buried all over them in case of invasion. When the threat was over, imagine the bomb disposal experts and the hours of careful work they did, inching forward painstakingly, to make a safe way through. There would be stakes and ropes either side of the track made, showing where it was safe to walk. Everyone who walked that way would know that by keeping within the marked out route they would be safe from harm, but if they stepped off the track, something could literally blow up in their face. So we can think of the Torah, the law, being given as a safe way through life – its aim is to keep safe those who walk within it and prevent harm and serious hurt.

The third part of my reflection is on the heart. It is our gospel reading today which reminds us that so many of those things which can hurt us and others come from within. Jesus speaks of these things coming from the heart. This may seem surprising because the heart can also be understood as the place of prayer and encounter with God. The heart is both, for in the Hebrew understanding, the heart is the place of decision and desire. I wonder if any of you experienced the sense of being overwhelmed as a child with a desire to do something, no matter what mum says. I can remember feeling impelled to jump off a flight of steps onto the pavement – I so wanted to do it – my mum got cross and said no, you'll hurt yourself, but I couldn't help myself – I was overwhelmed by the desire to jump. And yes, I fell and got hurt! And as an adult, I am aware that for example, envy or jealousy can get hold so strongly that words are spoken, perhaps 'jokingly' but nevertheless with the intention of hurting the other person. There are many words, as well as actions, which I wish I had never said or done. I wish I could wipe out the hurt caused.

Our gospel reading is a reminder that being human is complex – we are capable of such courage and bravery and generosity – but we can also be driven by heartless desires within that can cause havoc in relationships and communities and across the world. I don't think we can stop the desires, and pretending they are not there is no solution – they can grow in strength if suppressed. But we can choose what we do with them – which ones will we turn and face and say, 'I could do that, but I am choosing not to, for that way lies hurt and damage and potential destruction.' Which ones will we run with? – which ones will we seek to develop and nurture because they will help us to grow into the likeness of Christ? Amen.

Hymn: When I needed a neighbour

1 When I needed a neighbour,
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
Were you there?

2 I was hungry and thirsty,
Were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
Were you there?

3 I was cold, I was naked,
Were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
Were you there?

4 When I needed a shelter
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
Were you there?

5 When I needed a healer,
Were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there?
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
Were you there?

6 Wherever you travel,
I'll be there, I'll be there.
Wherever you travel, I'll be there.
And the creed and the colour
And the name won't matter,
I'll be there.

Richard Baxter (1615-1691), John Hampden Gurney (1802-1862), Richard Robert Chope (1830-1928) CCLI Licence 2370586

Prayers

We pray for God to fill us with God's Spirit.
Lord, come to bless us.
Fill us with your Spirit.

Generous God, we thank you for the power of
your Holy Spirit. May we be strengthened to
serve you.
Lord, come to bless us.
Fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the wisdom of your Holy Spirit.
Make us wise to understand your will.
Lord, come to bless us.
Fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the healing of your Holy Spirit.
Bring reconciliation and wholeness where there is
division, sickness and sorrow.
Lord, come to bless us.
Fill us with your Spirit.

We thank you for the breath of your Holy Spirit,
given by the risen Lord. Keep the whole Church,
living and departed, in the joy of eternal life.
Lord, come to bless us.
**Fill us with your Spirit and send us out in the
power of your Spirit to live and work to your
praise and glory. Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray
**Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name;
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,**

**And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory
For ever and ever. Amen**

The Blessing

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and peace in believing, through the power of the Holy Spirit; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

Anthem: Lord for thy tender mercy's sake

Lord, for thy tender mercy's sake, lay not our sins to our charge,
but forgive that is past, and give us grace to amend our sinful lives.
To decline from sin and incline to virtue,
that we may walk in a perfect heart before thee, now and evermore.
Amen. *Lidley's Prayers, 1566 CCLI Licence 2370586*