



Pentecost 15

13 September 2020

The gods whom earth holds sacred are all worthless and cursed are all who make them their delight; those who run after them find trouble without end.... Thou, Lord, my allotted portion, thou my cup, thou dost enlarge my boundaries: the lines fall for me in pleasant places; indeed I am well content with my inheritance.

Psalm 16: 3 – 6

God's call comes clearly to us;

***we will listen and bring you our praise in this time of worship today.***

God, ever leading us on to new visions of your engaging grace for each other and for the world in which we live;

***we will listen and bring you our praise in this time of worship today.***

God whose support and challenge is always before us;

***we will listen and bring you our praise in this time of worship today.***

God who gathers his faithful people to meet every challenge;

***give us the courage to go back to the everyday world walking in the way of Jesus the Christ together.***

Hymn 533

***I come with joy to meet my Lord,  
forgiven, loved, and free,  
in awe and wonder to recall  
his life laid down for me.***

***And thus with joy we meet our Lord,  
his presence, always near,  
is in such friendship better known:  
we see, and praise him here.***

***Together met, together bound,  
we'll go our different ways  
and as his people in the world,  
we'll live and speak his praise.***

Invocation

Loving God, you sustain us when our world crumbles and life's assumed certainties are taken away.

***Enable us to search out the unseen glory and strength that will keep us secure in these hard times.***

Especially when we feel like giving up because the way ahead seems without real hope, you, O God, remain "the rock" that Christ has promised against

which “the gates of hell will not prevail”

**The gods whom earth holds sacred are all worthless , and cursed are all who make them their delight; those who run after them find trouble without end.... Thou, Lord, my allotted portion, thou my cup, thou dost enlarge my boundaries: the lines fall for me in pleasant places, indeed I am well content with my inheritance.**

Psalm 16: 3 – 6

### **Confession**

O God, your love for us in Jesus is beyond mere human comprehension and we easily find ourselves denying our worthiness for your forgiveness and compassion and grace. It is often easier for us to condemn others for their frailties than face the reality of our own. In such acts of denial we separate ourselves from the compassion and grace that is ours in the Christ who would stand with us in our own reality and humanity:

***enter every part of our lives and show us the wonder of your compassion and grace.***

God is always more compassionate than we will ever be. Christ looks upon us with patience, even when we do not deserve that and in him we find gifts of new life which surprise us.

### **Assurance**

**Yes. Thou, Lord, my allotted portion, thou my cup, thou dost enlarge my boundaries: the lines fall for me in pleasant places, indeed I am well content with my inheritance**

***and we will take hold of the just and loving possibilities to which you invite us.***

***We thank you for being a God who brings us in newness to the gift of each day and who calls us on in grace through Christ himself.***

***Amen***

### **Reflection**

As we turn to the Hebrew Scriptures we find ourselves looking again at Israel's journey in faith with its God. Theirs is to be a long and remarkable journey leaving the primitive judgemental and vindictive gods of those around them and moving on in faith into an unknown future with the God whose nature is Being itself. At the end of this journey will be found the One who stands for life in all its fulness, the absolute counter of death and destruction in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. And so the great story of the escape from Egyptian slavery is not about the punishment of the slave masters but about the new life that is to be the culmination of Israel's amazing journey into an unexpected new existence as they continue towards the fulfilment of the

ancient promise to Abraham and the patriarchs, Jacob and Joseph and Moses and their successors, finally to the Christ of our faith and practice unnumbered generations later. This epic saga encompasses myriad stories, but none greater than this of its early history.

#### **Hebrew Scripture Exodus 14:19-31**

**Then the angel of God who was going before the host of Israel moved and went behind them, and the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them, coming between the host of Egypt and the host of Israel. And there was the cloud and the darkness. And it lit up the night without one coming near the other all night. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And in the morning watch the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and threw the Egyptian forces into a panic, clogging their chariot wheels so that they drove heavily. And the Egyptians said, "Let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians."**

**Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea, that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen." So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to its normal course when the morning appeared. And as the Egyptians fled into it, the Lord threw the Egyptians into the midst of the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the horsemen; of all the host of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea, not one of them remained. But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.**

**Thus the Lord saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the Lord used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in his servant Moses.**

**In this is the word of the Lord.**

**Hymn 391**

*Come, God's people, sing for joy,  
shout your songs of gladness,  
for the hope of Easter day  
overcomes our sadness.  
Come with all God's people here  
who with true affection  
join again to celebrate  
Jesus' resurrection.*

*Years before, as Moses led  
Israel's sons and daughters  
from their bonds to exodus  
through the Red Sea waters:  
so the living Lord of life  
speaks through our baptism  
of the new life which we share  
with him who is risen.*

*That first Easter he arose,  
his disciples greeting;  
Christians now in every place  
still their Lord are meeting.  
Christ, who died for all the world,  
in his death brings healing  
and his rising from the grave  
is God's power revealing.*

**Epistle Romans 14:7-12**

**For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.**

**Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgement seat of God; for it is written,**

**"As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God.**



## Reflection

We human beings are very quick to judge others and to set hurdles for them to successfully complete before they qualify for acceptance. And we are very quick to decide what are the minimum requirements for acceptance in the eyes of God. From time immemorial human beings have seen God as fundamentally judgemental. Yet the whole history of the faith journey is the story of humankind's discovery of the compassionate nature of God, the God who removed the threat of judgement and condemnation through the sacrificial life of Jesus and the reversal of vindictiveness and punishment as the path to eternal life. The entry into eternal life as God intends, as "the preferences are reset" through Jesus' resurrection as the Christ is now guaranteed in keeping with the compassion of the God of love and mercy. So we have the gospel of unlimited forgiveness which reverses forever humankind's perverse attempt to crush ultimate goodness through Jesus' crucifixion. Today's Gospel is a powerful and indisputable affirmation of this in Jesus' response to Peter's question and the subsequent teaching parable.

## Gospel Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven.

"Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt.

**But when that same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, 'Pay what you owe.' So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?' And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers, until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."**

**This is the gospel of the Lord**

***Praise be to you Lord Jesus Christ.***

### **Concluding Reflection**

The ongoing human misunderstanding of God throughout history is wiped out in the Christ of God. Jesus' life, death and resurrection have reset God's reality forever. Thanks be to God!

### **Hymn 158**

**God has spoken by his prophets,  
spoken his unchanging word,  
each, from age to age proclaiming  
God, the one, the righteous Lord.  
In the world's despair and turmoil  
one firm anchor holds us fast:  
God is king, his throne eternal,  
God the first and God the last.**

**God has spoken by Christ Jesus,  
Christ, the everlasting Son,  
brightness of the Father's glory,  
with the Father ever one;  
spoken by the word incarnate,  
God from God, ere time began,  
Light from Light, to earth descending,  
God revealed as Son of Man.**

**God is speaking by his Spirit,  
speaking to our hearts again,  
in the age-long word expounding  
God's own message, now as then,  
through the rise and fall of nations  
one sure faith yet standing fast;  
God still speaks, his word unchanging,  
God the first, and God the last.**

### **Prayers for Ourselves and Others and Lord's Prayer**

O God, as we remember your gracious heart, filled with loving patience and compassion and as we look back on the human journeys of old, we bring before you now all those who have been wounded in their faith struggles and by unjust judgements on them, especially those in the name of misplaced faith and belief, people whose lives have been separated from you because such as us did not witness to a loving and compassionate God.

And where we must own in our time and in our fellows such suffering and alienation from your truth, be with them now, O God.

***Come to them in healing, Lord Jesus the Christ.***

***Walk close beside them, O Holy Spirit.***

***Embrace their living now with your truth,***

***Loving, Compassionate God.***

Be with all those who suffer, waiting for justice and compassion, especially where wealth and prosperity and all manner of advantage are the root cause of their suffering and disadvantage; especially where we must face the fact that countries where the Christian faith prevails are often such places. We pray that, in humble gratitude for all the advantage that we enjoy because we live in such places, our hearts will be moved by the pain and need of others. We pray that we will become living witnesses to your goodness and committed in and through our faith to share and seek equity in the offering to all the gifts and benefits of your creation and, as co-stewards of the created order, respect and honour it as we honour your name.

***Remind us of our true calling, Jesus the Christ among us.***

***Walk close beside us, O Holy Spirit.***

***Embrace the whole of creation now with your truth,***

***Loving, Compassionate God. Fill us with the hope for the future that you alone can give in the promise of resurrection life.***

And so we pray in the words that Jesus taught us



*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*

**Hymn 648**

*Help us accept each other  
as Christ accepted us;  
teach us as sister, brother,  
each person to embrace.  
Be present, Lord, among us  
and bring us to believe  
we are **ourselves** accepted  
and meant to love and live.  
  
Let your acceptance change us,  
so that we may be moved  
in living situations  
to do the truth in love;  
to practise your acceptance  
until we know by heart  
the table of forgiveness                      (seventy times seven)  
and laughter's healing art.*

**Benediction**

May the loving Christ speak through us,  
the creative God expand our boundaries  
and the Holy Spirit write the gospel in our hearts every day.  
**Amen**

**Reverend Graeme Kerr**