



Easter 6

17 May 2020

Hear the Gospel:

Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

John 14:19-21

Deep within the universe lies a divine mystery – wider than all worldly wisdom, deeper than the most profound contemplation. Higher in aspiration than windswept clouds and loving beyond measure. Yes; there lies the grandeur of God, the costly life of Christ and the fiery passion of the Spirit.

We will open ourselves to the earthly glimpses of the holiness of God and, as the people of faith in a world of little faith, we will seek to live our lives embraced by this holiness.

O God who is never fully known, yet closer even than the very breath of life within us, come now into our lives with your eternal truth through the power and inspiration of your Holy Spirit. Amen

Hymn 646

*God is our song, and every singer blest
who, praising him finds energy and rest.
All who praise God with unaffected joy
give back to us the wisdom we destroy.*

*This is the song no conflict ever drowns
who praises God all human wrath disowns.
Love knows what rich complexities of sound
God builds upon a simple, common ground.*

*God is our silence when no songs are sung,
when ecstasy or sorrow stills the tongue.
Glorious the faith which silently obeys
until we find again the voice of praise.*

Confession

When we try to imagine your face, O God we wonder anxiously whether you are frowning at us in judgement or turning away from us in anger.

Forgive us for our inadequacies of faith; look at us in love and compassion as was the promise of Jesus to the first disciples.

Too readily we show a harsh face to those outside the community of faith.

We must confess that your church is not always true to the example which Christ offered to us. We presume to represent the way of Jesus but fail to live and act with forgiveness and compassion.

Forgive us for our inadequacies of faith; look at us in love and compassion as was the promise of Jesus to the first disciples.

In all our humanness, as we travel on our stumbling journeys, often far removed from the great hope to which we are called:

Forgive us for our inadequacies of faith; look at us in love and compassion as was the promise of Jesus to the first disciples.

Assurance

So now we look into the loving face of the Christ and see the wonder of a God of compassion and grace.

Now we do not fear to stand in honest humanness for now we know we are forgiven.

Thanks be to God!

Hymn 143

*Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
in light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
almighty, victorious, your great name we praise.*

*Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
nor wanting, nor wasting, but ruling in might;
your justice like mountains high soaring above,
your clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.*

*You give life to all, Lord, to both great and small,
in all life now living, the true life of all;
we blossom and flourish as leaves on a tree
then wither: but ever unchanged you will be.*

*Great Father of glory, pure Father of light,
your angels adore you, all veiling their sight;
of all your rich graces this grace, Lord, impart –
take the veil from our faces, the veil from our heart.*

*All praise we would render: reveal to our sight
what hides you is only the splendour of light;
and so let your glory, Almighty, impart,
through Christ in the story, your Christ to the heart.*

Acts 17:22-31

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: "Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

" 'In him we live and move and have our being';
as even some of your own poets have said,
'For we are indeed his offspring.'"

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a

day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

John 14:15-21

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

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

Reflection

I recall a cartoon I once came across which has a permanent place in my consciousness as a questioning faith person. It involved the depiction of the interior of a monastic chapel where two monks were at prayer. They were devoutly on their knees. But one monk was clearly making an aside to the other. And below the cartoon were the words "Er, actually I'm a lapsed atheist, you know! " Well, Paul was one who had turned from the fanaticism of anti-Christian persecutor and opponent to one seeking to acknowledge and understand God in a completely different way. Yet he recognised in the idolatry of the Athenians a questing for God that went to the heart of the human search for God. Paul addressed the Athenians with real respect as people who, like himself, were deeply religious. Yes, their commitment was to "an unknown god" but that was to be respected as the starting-point for the religious exploration into which he was calling them as, together with them, he wanted to discover God's truth for all humankind; the truth that it is in God that "we live and move and have our being" even as some of your own poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring". And so let us recognise that God is always one we search for, not one we capture in the images and idols of our human imaginings and reasoning. For God is deeper and larger and more real than any of the images we turn to and carry within our living. God is beyond our particular faith and unfaith. God is beyond **and** within our humanity. For God meets us in Christ as, in love and action, in him we know him and his ultimate truth for us and for all creation. Yes,

*reveal to our sight what hides you is only the splendour of light
and so let your glory, Almighty, impart,
through Christ in the story, your Christ to the heart.*

Prayers for ourselves and others

Great God, show us your face in friend and in stranger. Engage your Spirit in all our living in ways which give to us a new understanding of your will for us and all creation as we find blessings unimagined from the earth around us and from the loving commitment to shared life with all humankind. And now, as our lives are raised up to the mountaintops of your love and compassion through the inspiration of your Spirit in us, we pray for ourselves and others.

Speak through us into the challenging life of the world and our experience of it so that all people may look in wonder at new possibilities for the realisation of life and its renewal

and healing.

Take our care for others beyond the borders of race and clan, faith and unfaith, privilege and class. So may we become those who gather all people into the shared embrace of your loving arms.

Rework in us a vision of true community where the strong care for the weak and all are valued and loved as those who are precious in your sight.

Help us in the struggle to cherish all of creation, O God of all. May our love for each other and for the very earth itself be a sign of the fullness of your coming reign of eternal grace.

Hymn 641

*'This is my will, my one command,
that love should dwell among you all.
This is my will, that you should love
as I have shown that I love you.*

*No greater love can be than this:
to choose to die to save one's friends.
You are my friends if you obey
what I command that you should do.*

*You chose not me, but I chose you,
that you should go and bear much fruit
I chose you out that you in me
should bear much fruit that will abide.*

*All that you ask my Father dear
for my name's sake you shall receive.
This is my will, my one command,
that love should dwell in each, in all'.*

Let us look around us for the grandeur of God in places and ways beyond our limited imagining; may we embrace all that we see as we go out into God's world.

And may the love of Christ encircle the earth,
the unlimited Being that is named by us as God call forth new life
and the mystery of the Holy Spirit warm and enliven our hearts now and always.

Amen

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