



*"Whoever receives you receives me,
and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.*

Matthew 10:40

In every moment there lies a possibility – an option to add to, or take from, life, a choice to diminish or enhance each person in our chance meetings. People of God, the future is ours – in sharing or denying, in bringing grief or celebration. This is eternal life; for it begins now as we walk in the way of Christ.

May God help us to be the ones who bring to each day a ray of hope, for all whose lives touch ours.

God in Jesus Christ offer to us the growing and changing which comes from true encounter with you in every act of worship.

Come, loving Jesus, in the power of your Spirit.

For the strength to endure the hard places of life:

Come, loving Jesus, in the power of your Spirit.

For the courage to face the unknown future:

Come, loving Jesus, in the power of your Spirit.

For the deepening of faith within our faith community, even in its time of isolation:

Come, loving Jesus, in the power of your Spirit.

Hymn 109

What God ordains is always good:

his will is just and holy.

As he directs my life for me

I follow meek and lowly.

My God indeed

in every need

knows well how he will shield me;

to him, then, I will yield me.

What God ordains is always good:

he is my friend and father;

he will not let me come to harm

though many storms may gather

Now I may know

both joy and woe;

some day I shall see clearly

that he has loved me dearly.

What God ordains is always good:

this truth remains unshaken.

Though sorrow, need, or death be mine,

I shall not be forsaken.

I fear no harm.

For with his arm

he shall embrace and shield me;

so to my God I yield me.

Confession

You accept and bless us, O God and so we come humbly and contrite before you. You see all people as those who are deserving of love and acceptance; but we are not always so faithful. It is all too easy for us to view others within the boundaries of our own experience and within the limits of the culture in which we grow and move. Loving those who are strangers and aliens is a challenge we would rather ignore.

But your pattern of selflessness and unqualified acceptance and love is the yardstick to which we are called in Jesus the Christ who calls us. Inspire in us a greater love for others, we pray.

When we are so focussed on our own efforts in life that we fail to see the struggles and challenges of people near to us, or far away; when we blame those who have less options than ourselves and look at them without compassion:

Inspire in us a greater love for others, we pray.

Christ loves friend and stranger; Christ loves us: so may we receive this compassion in faith and confidence.

Thanks be to God!

Hymn 613

*Lord of all hopefulness, Lord of all joy,
whose trust, ever childlike, no cares could destroy,
be there at our waking and give us we pray,
your bliss in our hearts, Lord, at the break of the day.*

*Lord of all eagerness, Lord of all faith,
whose strong hands were skilled at the plane and the lathe,
be there at our labours and give us, we pray,
your strength in our hearts, Lord, at the noon of the day.*

*Lord of all kindness, Lord of all grace,
your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace,
be there at our homing and give us, we pray,
your love in our hearts, Lord, at the eve of the day.*

*Lord of all gentleness, Lord of all calm,
voice is contentment, whose presence is balm,
be there at our sleeping and give us, we pray,
your peace in our hearts, Lord, at the end of the day.*

Scripture Genesis 22:1-14

After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you."

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." So they went both of them together.

When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I. He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place, "The Lord will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Romans 6:12-23

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Reflection

These two passages of Scripture are quite challenging for us set as they are in a very different world to ours and using images and metaphors which do not readily enable us to connect with the message they would seek to convey. Indeed the aborted sacrifice of Isaac is quite abhorrent for us and presents an image of God far removed from any that we would want to identify with. Yet it does highlight God's ultimate and enduring faithfulness and Abraham's absolute trust in God (and probably also reflects a time in Hebrew history when human sacrifice was recognised as totally against the will of God and not to be practised by his faithful people.) The story is also, surely, a forwarding looking understanding of the sacrificial death of Jesus and his status as the lamb of God that is the final sacrificial offering for God's people, changing forever the relationship between humanity and God from that of fearful subservience to the freedom of unfettered life embraced within the love of God forever. Paul was to express this in terms of the end of the enslavement of humanity to anything that limits the experiencing of life in the fulness of all its possibilities: what he refers to as " **the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord**". Resurrection life! Yes life with an exclamation mark.

As Christians we are called to live this reality in such a way that it becomes the norm for all humanity, not just us. It is all too easy to confine our generosity to those we easily identify with in life and to consider others as less than the children of God. And, therefore, less than deserving the fulness of life that is what being human is all about. At a time when we are confronted once again with the challenge of racism along with a multitude of forms of prejudice and rejection it is timely to have to re-examine the universality of the call to fellowship in faithfulness. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me." This is the gospel. Thanks be to God!

Hymn 164

*The great love of God
is revealed in the Son,
who came to this earth
to redeem everyone.*

*That love, like a stream
flowing clear to the sea,
makes clean every heart
that from sin would be free.*

*It binds the whole world,
every barrier it breaks,
the hills it lays low,
and the mountains it shakes.*

*It's yours, it is ours,
O how lavishly giv'n!
the pearl of great price,
and the treasure of heav'n.*

Prayers for Ourselves and Others

O God, we can never repay you for all you give to us, but we pray that our offering of ourselves in faithfulness will fulfill the call of Christ to the sharing of love and compassion in a world where justice is scarce and fragmentation of life and fear of each other so often prevails. Images of disease and suffering dominate our living, with bombs and threats of terrorism often rendering us incapable of genuine care and empathy for others. Yet we dare to pray that our faithfulness may still be the vehicle for the beginning of the transforming of all that so often destroys and alienates.

O God, hear our prayers. So often we cannot think what to do to bring about change in the face of global forces which stand in the way of our hopes for a better world for all.

Yes, our hearts are often hard and cold when we think of those who struggle or live in pain and rejection. The cup of water which we carry seems to make so little difference.

Give to us your perspective of a future which will, one day, be subject to your final reign of compassion and love. Teach us faithfulness and the building up of our lives even in the smallest moments of joy.

When we look upon the Cross of our Lord and receive his life in the Eucharist help us know that all things are possible through your power released in and through us.

As we leave this time of worship may we go as those who have the sacred task and calling of representing the risen Lord in our relationships with friend and stranger.

***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 forever.

Amen

May our hands hold the cup of love and our hearts be full of the compassion of Christ the Lord. May we always be the people to whom God has given countless gifts to share

Amen

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