Order of Service

Trinity 8: July 25th 2021

# Welcome

It’s a delight and privilege for me to welcome you to this online service this morning, wherever you happen to be. I’m Canon Terry Joyce and I’ve been an Assistant Priest in this Rural East York benefice. I’m here today because it is my last Sunday before I retire; and I’ll be offering the homily during the service. But first, let me offer one of my favourite bidding prayers, from the Iona Community worship resources.

Gather us in,

The lost and the lonely,

The broken and breaking,

The tired and aching

Who long for the nourishment found at your feast.

Gather us in,

The done and the doubting,

The wishing and wondering,

The puzzled and pondering

Who long for the company found at your feast.

Gather us in,

The proud and pretentious,

The sure and superior,

The never inferior

Who long for the levelling found at your feast.

Gather us in,

The bright and the bustling,

The stirrers, the shakers,

The kind laughter makers

Who long for the deeper joys found at your feast.

Gather us in,

From corner or limelight,

From mansion or campsite,

From fears and obsession,

From tears and depression,

From untold excesses,

From treasured successes,

To meet, to eat,

to be given a seat,

Be joined to the vine,

Be offered new wine,

Become like the least,

Be found at the feast.

# Prayers

*Just as I am, without one plea*

*but that thy blood was shed for me,*

*and that thou bidst me come to thee,*

*O Lamb of God, I come.*

Jesus invites us to the feast: for nourishment, fellowship, justice and joy.

Without judgement, favoritism, or hesitation, he invites us all.

In this time offered to God,

as we give thanks for all the blessings we receive,

as we pray for ourselves, for one another, and for the world,

as we seek to walk further together on the path of peace and love,

let us confront our own fears, faults and weaknesses,

assured that God sees all, knows all, and forgives all.

*Just as I am, though tossed about*

*with many a conflict, many a doubt,*

*fighting and fears within, without,*

*O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind;*

*sight, riches, healing of the mind,*

*yea, all I need, in thee to find,*

*O Lamb of God, I come.*

Jesus invites us to the feast, to accept his forgiveness, healing and wholeness.

As he takes our burdens from us, all our worries and our shame,

may we open our lives to the Holy Spirit,

that as the Spirit moves and breathes in us,

together we may rejoice in the freedom of this new life.

*Just as I am, thou wilt receive,*

*wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve:*

*because thy promise I believe,*

*O Lamb of God, I come.*

*Just as I am, thy love unknown*

*has broken every barrier down,*

*now, to be thine, yea, thine alone,*

*O Lamb of God, I come.*

Jesus invites us to the feast of the heavenly kingdom.

We join our worship with all the saints, in earth and heaven,

in one unending song of praise.

*Just as I am, of that free love*

*the breadth, length, depth and height to prove,*

*here for a season, then above;*

*O Lamb of God, I come.*

# Reading

## Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

# Gospel

## John 6:1-21

 After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, also called the Sea of Tiberias. A large crowd kept following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing for the sick. Jesus went up the mountain and sat down there with his disciples. Now the Passover, the festival of the Jews, was near.

When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming towards him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Six months’ wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’

One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’

Now there was a great deal of grass in the place; so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets. When the people saw the sign that he had done, they began to say, ‘This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world.’

 When Jesus realized that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, got into a boat, and started across the lake to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The lake became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the lake and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But he said to them, ‘It is I; do not be afraid.’ Then they wanted to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the land towards which they were going.

# Homily

The feeding of the five thousand is not a bad theme for my last sermon before retirement. It seems to have a message of encouragement as well as some challenge for us.

This is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels, so it must convey some importance. This is a multiply miracle which throws up some interesting questions – I’ve got four!

First, this miracle came when the Apostles were shattered. They had been out to the various communities following Jesus’ instructions, healing and teaching and they were thrilled with the results and were debriefing with Jesus, but they were spent. Jesus had attempted to extract them to a deserted place so that they could rest and recover. But that didn’t work: the crowds found them and invaded the quiet. So it seemed strange that the task of feeding the crowd was thrown upon them at this point.

Second, why did Jesus ask the Apostles to do something that it was manifestly clear they couldn’t do, having done some marvellous things in the villages and also being shattered?

Third, if Jesus could do whatever he did with those five loaves and two fish, whatever it was, so that the crumbs filled twelve baskets, why did he need to have the apostles go about working out what they could muster together from a young child’s picnic box?. Surely, he could have called up to heaven and had some of that manna stuff dropped down. There was a precedent!

Fourth, why did Jesus ask the disciples to feed the crowd, when an easier alternative plan was even mentioned and could have been chosen i.e. going into the surrounding country and villages and buying something for themselves to eat?

So what do we make of all that? Three things I want to emphasise.

First, God wanted to stretch their faith. It had already happened in the sending out to bless and heal people. But he wasn’t done with them: there was further to go. And knowing that they could not feed five thousand on their own was the next step of development.

The last thing he needed was for them to get carried away by their success. Catch ‘em before they got too confident. Likewise, God wants our faith to grow and in order for that to happen, he often puts us in situations where there is no way we could ever possibly do what he’s asked on our own.

This is a vulnerable time for the church – for the diocese as for the wider church, as we navigate finance issues and work out how to be church for the next generation. But God’s got a plan!

Second, there’s a wonderful contrast here between small and big – between insignificant and plenty – five loaves and two fish or an instant catering service with loads of left-overs.

Hudson Taylor, a great Christian writer said, "Unless there is an element of risk in our exploits for God, there is no need for faith." If we could do it all by ourselves, what need would we have for God?

The purpose of the miracle was to glorify Jesus and to build faith – not just among the Apostles, but also among the crowd, by putting God at the centre of it all. As a church, we exist to serve Jesus Christ and to give God glory.

But there’s something else here. The apostles’ contribution was at best meagre, even embarrassing – only five loaves and two fish. But it was little crumbs that made the difference. Jesus took what the disciples gave him and he multiplied it.

There was no chastising – could do better – try harder. No, he took the goods, looked up to heaven and blessed and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people – actions that are replicated in Holy Communion which we share.

Third, Jesus asked them to do the work! Up until this time – Jesus had been doing all the work. But now He tells His disciples: *You* do it – *you* give them something to eat.

Jesus doesn’t just bless the good and hearty, but he also blesses the weak and pathetic – and everyone was blessed.

How do our weak and pathetic fragments make a difference? When they are offered in humility. Jesus wanted his disciples to be his partners in ministry. That’s his wish for us too.

This is a miracle about the little we can offer to God and what he can do with it. We are called to offer ourselves to God through prayer and worship, no matter how pathetic and weak we may feel, God can and will use us. “You provide the bread. Let God take care of the miracle.”

Don’t worry about how little you have to give. Whatever it is, God will bless it and spread it to the glory of God’s kingdom. Don’t even worry about the future – hard as it is. Just provide the bread. Let God take care of the miracle.

The last 22 years of my ministry has been largely focussed on people development through training. I like to keep track of some of the people I helped and advised, not for my benefit, but because I like to be surprised by what God has done with people. If I’d have said “You might be the Archbishop of Canterbury’s chaplain, or the Bishop of Horsham, or three of you will be archdeacons”, we’d have all laughed and laughed. (Not a boast, but a little bit of pride at being involved). If God had told me who I was advising and helping and their potential, I think I’d have run a mile.

But it doesn’t work like that does it? God feeds us what we need when we need it, not before. He wants us as part of the team – keep God at the centre. You are God’s church and he has plans for you.

In all this, I’ve been taken by some words from 2 Corinthians 3: “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

It’s what is written in people’s hearts that matter. These things will be carried with them, it is these things that make the difference and enable us to both live Christ’s story as well as tell it.

For me, this links in with the well-loved song ‘Here I am Lord’, also known as ‘I the Lord of sea and sky’, which includes the phrase “I will hold your people in my heart”.

Debbie and I will certainly be carrying you in our hearts as we move away. We’ve been so encouraged by the deep commitment of so many to the work and ministry of the church in these four villages. There is a real and impressive sense of outreach, service and concern for our communities. Having got through the lockdown challenges which have left us all feeling vulnerable and insecure, it’s perhaps harder to recognise what has been achieved in the benefice. But in thanking you for the love you have expressed to us over these (nearly) ten years, we want to applaud you for your ardent desire to shine as lights to the glory of God. Together you tell a wonderful story of devotion and love and this will be written and held deeply in our hearts. Thank you!

# Affirmation of faith

Together, we declare the faith of the church.

We believe in God the Father,

from whom every family

in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,

who lives in our hearts through faith,

and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,

who strengthens us

with power from on high.

We believe in one God;

Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

# Hymn

From heaven you came helpless babe,

entered our world, your glory veiled.

Not to be served but to serve

and give your life that we might live.

*This is our God, the servant king.*

*He calls us now to follow him,*

*to bring our lives as a daily offering*

*of worship to the servant king.*

There in the garden of tears

my heavy load he chose to bear.

His heart with sorrow was torn,

“Yet not my will, but yours,” he said.

Come see his hands and his feet:

the scars that speak of sacrifice.

Hands that flung stars into space

to cruel nails surrendered.

So let us learn how to serve,

and in our lives enthrone him;

each other’s needs to prefer,

for it is Christ we’re serving.

# Intercessions

Restore again our fortunes, O Lord,

as the river beds of the desert.

Those who sow in tears shall reap with songs of joy.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed,

will come back with shouts of joy, bearing their sheaves with them.

Let us pray.

In the midst of our trouble, in the midst of our joy,

we call upon the Lord, and the Lord will hear us.

Lord, we thank you for the witness and ministry which your servants Terry and Debbie have shared in this benefice. As they now leave us and start a new chapter in their lives, we pray that they may be richly blessed.

We pray for all who confess your name and work for your kingdom of righteousness and truth; for all who seek to bring peace and healing to the marginalised, the oppressed, and those in any kind of need. May they be guided by the light of your love.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for our country and for those who have been entrusted with the responsibility of leadership. May they always turn their face from lies, corruption, cowardice and greed, and pursue paths of honesty and fairness. May they show compassion, wisdom and fortitude. Lord, we pray that this land may be a place where the stranger is welcomed, the vulnerable are sheltered, and those who stumble are lifted up.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for all those whose lives are directly affected by climate change: for the communities in Germany, Belgium and across Europe where floods have brought death and destruction; for the hundreds of thousands evacuated following the flooding in the Henan province in China; for those affected by the wildfires raging in the United States, Siberia and Spain.

Lord, deliver us, we pray, from those systems we have made that trap us into wasteful living. We may feel helpless and see no way forward, but you are able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine.

Lord, hear our prayer.

We pray for all who suffer in body, mind or spirit. Especially we pray for those who continue to suffer in the pandemic, those who are sick, anxious, under additional stress or whose financial situation is precarious. Even as we try to return to some normality, we know that the path ahead remains uncertain. We pray for your healing and guidance.

Lord, hear our prayer.

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,

as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

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.

Lead us not into temptation

but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power,

and the glory are yours

now and for ever.

Amen.

# Song

You shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace,

and the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you,

there’ll be shouts of joy and the trees of the field shall clap their hands,

and you’ll go out with joy.

# Blessing

As we come to the end of our time of worship, I would like to say a few words of thanks to The Revd Canon Terry and Debbie Joyce, on behalf of our benefice of churches, and all those who have benefited from their ministry amongst us.

Terry has been a wonderful colleague these past years, a wise presence and critical friend. He has been unstinting in his support, and, despite having a full time role within the wider diocese, has exercised a wonderful ministry in these parishes that was appreciated by all of us.

Debbie has been a joy to have around, doing particularly good work in helping to plan and organise social events in Stockton on the Forest. Your love and kindness will be greatly missed, Debbie.

We shall miss you both hugely.

Terry and Debbie, as you move into retirement, and soon leave this area, please know that you go with our grateful thanks and our blessing.

And so we ask for God's blessing on us all.

May God go before you, to lead you and guide you.

May God be behind you, to support and uphold you.

May God be beside you, as your friend and protector.

May God be within you, to lift you and transform you.

And may the blessing of God Almighty,

Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer,

be with you, and those whom you love,

now and always. Amen.