

Sunday 14th June
Trinity 1

Welcome

Parts of this week's service have been filmed in Holy Trinity Stockton on the Forest. We are now in Ordinary Time (even as we live through extraordinary times!), and this is also known 'Feria' (strangely opposite to its original meaning as 'festival', but one might think of it as a 'feral' time, wild untamed. The liturgical colour is green, and we might hope that it is a 'green and growing' time, both spiritually and in nature.

Prayer

As we gather together in God, let us pray:

O Lord, open our lips;

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Blessèd are you, Lord our God, redeemer and king of all;
to you be glory and praise for ever!

From the waters of chaos you drew forth the world,
and in your great love, fashioned us in your image.

May we, the first-fruits of your new creation,
rejoice in this new day you have made;

may Christ your light ever dawn in our hearts

as we offer you our sacrifice of thanks and praise,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit:

Blessèd be God for ever!

All my hope on God is founded

¹ All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.

Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.

God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

² Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tow'r and temple, fall to dust.

But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my towe'r.

³ God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light and life attend him,
beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

⁴ Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

Exodus 9.2-8a

The Israelites had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.'

So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. The people all answered as one: 'Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.'

Matthew 9.35-10.8

Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into his harvest.'

Then Jesus summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every sickness. These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, also known as Peter, and his brother Andrew; James son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-collector; James son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed him.

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. As you go, proclaim the good news, "The kingdom of heaven has come near." Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. You received without payment; give without payment.'

Reflection

'In his book *The Widening Circle*, Graham Tomlin suggests that 'Priest' is much more than a term to describe certain Christian ministers [or an ancient people, as in our Exodus reading] - it is a vital category for understanding God's way of blessing his world. Jesus Christ is the only and true 'High Priest'. Yet this ministry is enacted through others. Exploring how this priesthood of Christ has an impact on everyday life, we discover the human race is chosen to play a priestly role between God and Creation. The Church is then called out to be a kingdom of priests, enabling humanity to fulfil its divine calling. And, finally, the minister himself or herself is called to enable the rest of the Church to play its distinct part. In each case, the part is the means by which the whole becomes all that it is intended to be, in an ever widening circle of divine blessing.'

In our passage from the book of Exodus, we read of God speaking to his chosen people, the Israelites, and, despite their constant erring and straying, he sets them aside, he 'ordains' them as a 'priestly kingdom' – creating a people who are to worship and serve God, but who also are to represent him to the world. Not special for the sake of being special, but as a people who will **be a blessing** to the world.

Jesus, in our passage from Matthew's gospel, sends out his disciples to let people know, to proclaim, that 'the kingdom of heaven has come near', and to heal, raise, and restore the people whom they meet – to bless them, in other words, and **be a blessing to them**. One of the striking things about the ministry of Jesus, and his teaching and formational role as a rabbi, is that this is always outward facing. This is not a cult he is creating, introspective and paranoid, but a people who will worship and serve God, but who will also represent him, re-present him, to the world, and be a blessing to it – to everyone.

It is notable that Jesus does not take a group of successful, well trained, well educated people to do this, but a group who have erred and strayed (like the proverbial lost sheep). Just look at the makeup of the twelve who are named: the "first" apostle Peter will deny the Lord three times and the last apostle Judas will betray him to death, while two apostles in between held opposite positions on the Roman occupation (tax collector Matthew worked for them, while Simon the Cananaean or "zealot" worked against them).

The passage begins with Jesus proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing, and the passage ends where it begins, but this time with this assorted rabble of apostles now entrusted with Jesus' work of proclamation and healing. As Jesus blessed the world, so did they.

This 'priestly ministry' that is entrusted to all baptised people is not one that is perfected in theory before it is put into practice. It is not rehearsed in private before it is taken out publicly. God is discovered in the doing, and we are those who are called and sent out to be a blessing to the world. The church is, in its inheritance, an outward facing community, gathered and then sent to be a blessing. It does not gather (when it can do so) simply to feel 'blessed', but so it can go and make a material difference in the world. It is said that the two most important parts of the liturgy is the bit before the priest walks in, and the moment when we are all sent out – not "Go, the service has ended", but "Go, your service is just beginning".

Sometimes, just sometimes, may I dare say, the church building can prove a poor place to encounter God. But visit the sick, sit with the dying, feed the hungry as though they are your sister or brother, or work to bring healing and reconciliation where there is hurt or conflict, and remind people that God is so very near – and there you will encounter the living God, whilst living out your call in being a blessing to others.

Perhaps you might reflect a while: How might you be a blessing to friends, family and neighbours in the coming week, making a material difference in the lives of others? Who is being a blessing to you in this current situation? And where is God for you in all this?

Intercessions

"Give ear to my words O Lord consider my lamentations
hearken to the voice of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I make my prayer"

Psalm 5

We lift your world to you and ask for your blessings, especially in these troubled times. There is much anger and frustration worldwide about inequality, injustice, poverty and discrimination. We pray for people in positions of power, that they may be guided by your Holy Spirit to make decisions that favour all, to heal deep seated wounds.

Let us as Christ's disciples be prepared to step out, open our mouths and let you, Lord, give us the words to say.

We give thanks for the ways in which your church, here and around the world, has continued to find new ways of reaching out in worship during these times of social isolation. We give thanks for the increased awakening of spirituality within people who have reached out to the online services and prayer sessions. Services initially aimed at local communities being accessed by others far away. May your Kingdom be extended by this new confidence to "taste and see" .

Let us as Christ's disciples be prepared to step out, open our mouths and let you, Lord, give us the words to say.

We cannot fail to be thankful for the increased love and concern for each other shown within our communities during these times. Reaching out to the people on the margins of society, the lonely, the sick, the vulnerable is a central part of Jesus's commission to us, working for the good and safety of all. We lift these people to you today.

Let us as Christ's disciples be prepared to step out, open our mouths and let you, Lord, give us the words to say.

Jesus went out to look for people. He taught in the communities where they gather. Without any discrimination, he healed, consoled, relieved pain and showed compassion.

He commissioned his disciples to do likewise. This is our mission.

God of Mercy and compassion, in your Son Jesus Christ you have revealed yourself as a God of people. Turn our empty hearts to you. Give us eyes to see the depths of our poverty and our inability to build a better world with our own resources. Come and build it with us through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect

God of truth,
help us to keep your law of love
and to walk in ways of wisdom,
that we may find true life
in Jesus Christ your Son. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Benediction

May the everlasting God shield you,
east and west and wherever you go.
And the blessing of God be upon you.
The blessing of the God of life.
The blessing of Christ be upon you,
the blessing of the Christ of love.
The blessing of the Spirit be upon you,
the blessing of the Spirit of grace.
The blessing of the Trinity be upon you,
now and for evermore. Amen.

Will you come and follow me

Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown? Will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around,
through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In Your company I'll go where Your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.