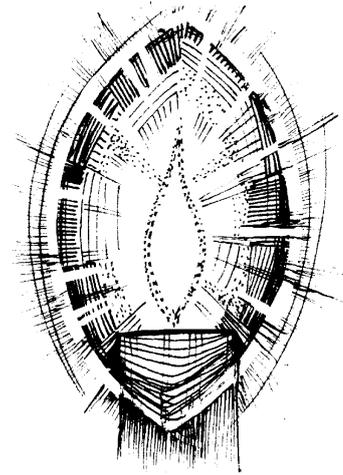


Worship @ Home

Sunday 22nd March 2020

Revd Val Reid

Christchurch Hitchin and Pirton



Call to worship

The Lord is our shepherd

We shall not want.

He makes us lie down in green pastures.

He leads us beside still waters.

Come, let us worship the Lord, the holy God,

And let our souls be restored.

Prayer

I invite you to sit in silence for two minutes.

Don't worry about setting a timer – each minute is about six deep breaths.

Get comfortable.

Put your feet on the floor, and feel the solid ground beneath you.

Sit upright, and feel your spine holding you together.

Look around at the space you are inhabiting this morning.

This probably isn't where you usually worship!

But God is surely here.

Breathe in – and feel yourself filled with the love of God.

Breathe out – and feel yourself letting go of the things that weigh you down.

Breathe in...

Breathe out...

Silence...

God is love.

God is present.

You are held in God's grace.

Now and always.

Amen.

Today's reading: John 9: 1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, 'Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?' Some were saying, 'It is he.' Others were saying, 'No, but it is someone like him.' He kept saying, 'I am the man.' But they kept asking him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash." Then I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?' And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, 'What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age; ask him.'

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, 'Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?' Then they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began

has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.’ They answered him, ‘You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?’ And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, ‘Do you believe in the Son of Man?’ He answered, ‘And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.’ He said, ‘Lord, I believe.’ And he worshipped him. Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.’ Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, ‘Surely we are not blind, are we?’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, “We see”, your sin remains.

Reflection

To be honest, the first thing I thought as I sat down to write this reflection yesterday morning was:

Saliva?

Mud?

Touching a man’s eyes?

What was Jesus thinking?

What happened to social distancing??

And then the more I re-read this familiar story, the more I recognised things that seem to resonate with this extraordinary week.

There is the mindset of the disciples – *Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*

That seems to be a thing, this week.

Looking for someone to blame for this pandemic.

Whose fault is it?

The Chinese?

The people who like to go skiing in Northern Italy?

The people who won’t stick to self-isolation?

The government for being so slow, so behind the curve?

God?

On Thursday my son, a history teacher and an atheist, called to check I was OK.

Well, he said, floods – fires – locusts – plague.

Your God is having a field day!

There is the mindset of the Pharisees.

People so wedded to the rules about Sabbath that they can’t accept this miracle.

They can't celebrate with the man who was healed, because it was done in the wrong way.
On the wrong day.
Perhaps we all understand something of this way of thinking.
Rules protect us.
Rules keep us safe.
If we stick to the rules, everything will be OK.
But of course, what we have found in the last few weeks, is that this only goes so far.
We have had to discern which rules to keep, and which rules to break.
We have had to reinvent rules for a completely new world order.
And to do that we have had to decide what matters.
What really matters?

Then there is the mindset of the man's parents.

We don't know.

Ask him.

He is of age.

Not our responsibility.

Today is Mothering Sunday.

Always a difficult day.

A day to celebrate caring, loving relationships.

But also a day to acknowledge that these can go horribly wrong.

Not everyone can look at their mother and be grateful.

Not everyone knows what it is to have experienced good parenting.

I guess none of us can look back at our own mothering skills and think we got it perfectly right.

And for some of us this will be a day of heart-breaking memories.

I imagine that, as we move through the weeks and months ahead with children home from school for an unbelievably long time, we will learn some new stuff about intergenerational responsibility.

And then there is the mindset of the man born blind.

One thing I do know.

Though I was blind, now I see.

The desire to blame, the obsession with rules, avoiding responsibility – none of this matters to him.

He has had an encounter with Jesus.

His world has been turned upside down.

Everything he took for granted has been changed utterly.

He sees with new eyes. Literally.

I think this has happened to us in the last week.
Suddenly, all the things we took for granted have been turned upside down.
Who are the most important people in our society this weekend?
Not the footballers who earn an average of £45,000 a week.
There's no premier league.
Not the pop stars who live in multi-million-pound mansions.
Glastonbury has been cancelled.
Not the hedge fund managers.
They haven't been able to prevent the global economic recession.

The most important people in our society now are nurses, care workers, teachers, delivery drivers.
Who would have thought it?
This feels really gospel.
The first shall be last, and the last first.

Jesus said:
*I came into this world for judgement,
so that those who do not see may see,
and those who do see may become blind.*

I think we all need to allow our eyes to be opened.
Of course this global pandemic is a terrible thing.
But though God did not cause this, God is not absent.
And God is inviting us to open our eyes.
Out of terrible things, new learning and new life might flow.

What might we learn about ourselves?
What might we learn about our global connectedness?
What might we learn about what makes for good community?
What might we learn about the things that really matter?

Amen

A hymn

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

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Prayers for ourselves and others

Close your eyes.

Make yourself comfortable.

Breathe in – and feel yourself filled with the love of God.

Breathe out – and feel yourself letting go of the things that weigh you down.

As you breathe in and out, notice how you are feeling.

Are you relaxed?

Are you tense?

Where in your body do you feel stress?

Are you feeling it now?

Consciously notice where you are hurting.

When we pray, we are reminding ourselves that there is nowhere we can go where God is not.

God's grace surrounds us.

God's love upholds us.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley

I fear no evil

For you are with me.

I invite you to begin with yourself.
Be conscious that you are held in God's love.
Now.
And always.
Place your hand over your heart.
Say to yourself:

May you be safe.
May you have ease of being.
May you live with kindness.
May you know God's love.

Now think of someone you love.
Someone you care deeply about.
Be conscious that they are held in God's love.
Now.
And always.
Place your hand over your heart.

Say to that person:
May you be safe.
May you have ease of being.
May you live with kindness.
May you know God's love.

Now think of someone that you don't know.
But whose story has caught your attention this week.
Perhaps an exhausted NHS worker.
A teacher.
A government minister having to make difficult decisions.
Someone stuck far from home where flights are cancelled.
Someone living in a refugee camp, with no access to health care.
Be conscious that they too are held in God's love.

Now.
And always.
Place your hand over your heart.
Say to that person:

May you be safe.
May you have ease of being.
May you live with kindness.
May you know God's love.

I invite you now to say the Lord's prayer out loud.

Use whichever version you are familiar with.

Use whichever language feels like your mother tongue.

Although we are apart, we join together in praying the prayer that Jesus gave us.

Our Father...

Blessing

The love of the Father enfold us.

The wisdom of the Son enlighten us.

The fire of the Spirit enflame us.

And the blessing of God, the three-in-one

Be upon us and abide with us

Now and for ever.

Amen.