

Christchurch Service
9th August 2020

- ✚ Welcome
- ✚ Opening Prayers
- ✚ Hymn – StF 516 ‘What shall I do my God to love?’
- ✚ Bible Reading – Psalm 85
- ✚ Reflection
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- ✚ Prayers
- ✚ Blessing
- ✚ Song – SoF 2306 ‘Go Peaceful’

Welcome

Opening Prayers

Loving Lord Jesus,

It is good to come to You in prayer.
You don’t mind where we are, because You welcome us
Into Your presence anytime, anyplace.
Your love is always seeking us, reaching out to us
And offering Yourself to us.
All we need to do is turn to You and You are there
And for that we offer You our praise and our worship.

Yet, Lord. How often do we turn our back on You
And go our own way, because that seems more exciting
Or easier, or because we haven’t listened to Your guidance.
That has led us down paths we wished we hadn’t gone
And so hurt others hurt ourselves and Hurt You
Because of what we have done and said, or not done and not said.
Jesus, we are truly sorry.
Please forgive us and make today a new day, a new start
As we try to follow You more closely.

Jesus, Your forgiveness is assured and we thank You
That Your love is so complete
That You will always welcome us back into Your arms.
Thank You for giving us not just Yourself
But also each other.
Thank You that Your salvation is near for all
Who put their trust in You
That Your peace is promised to Your faithful servants
And that Your glory will dwell in our land
That will one day reap it’s harvest.

So bless us all, Lord Jesus.
Fill us anew with Your Holy Spirit
And energise us for the days ahead
As we walk in Your way
Along the paths You have laid out for us.
Amen.

Hymn – StF 516 ‘What shall I do my God to love’

What shall I do my God to love,
My Saviour, and the world's, to praise?
Whose tenderest compassions move
To me and all the fallen race,
Whose mercy is divinely free
For all the fallen race, and me!

I long to know, and to make known,
The heights and depths of love divine,
The kindness thou to me hast shown,
Whose every sin was counted thine:
My God for me resigned his breath;
He died to save my soul from death.

How shall I thank thee for the grace
On me and all the world bestowed?
O that my every breath were praise!
O that my heart were filled with God!
My heart would then with love o'erflow,
And all my life thy glory show.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Reflection

A couple of weeks ago, I decided that having lived in Hertfordshire for over 30 years, it was high time I went to visit St Albans Cathedral. So, on a hot, sunny day I packed up a picnic and set the SatNav to a local car park. However, I had to divert from the chosen route due to work going on right in the centre of the city. Serena SatNav calmly tried to get me to turn around, but I followed signs to a different car park and ended up eating my lunch in a park, sitting on a bench beside a stream where various dogs were having a wonderful time splashing about and keeping cool. A quick walk up the hill after lunch meant I soon reached the Cathedral grounds and entered into the cool of the sanctuary. Few people were around and I spent a calming and reflective hour in this awesome house of prayer.

Once I was back outside in the grounds I decided to stop and do what so many of us do today – check my phone. There I picked up a message that a lady I will always be grateful I got to meet had died very suddenly in South Africa of Covid-19. Thokozani

Powsa was one of those forces of nature who became the Director of a small charity called Phakamisa that is close to my family's hearts. Phakamisa means 'to uplift' in Zulu and is an outreach of Pinetown Methodist Church in Kwazulu Natal, inland from Durban. The charity exists to serve and uplift impoverished communities through the provision of educational training, resourcing and support. They do this through educational programmes providing pre-school education to the poorest of communities – at times literally entering a village and setting a school up under the biggest tree! They also support carers caring for orphaned and vulnerable children (mostly the Gogos – grandmothers) to be as well equipped in their caring role as possible, knowing that this is the best way to benefit the children.

Phakamisa was initially set up by a dear family friend, Glenda Howieson, whom my parents met when they lived and worked in Pinetown for a couple years in the late 1990s. When Glenda felt it was time to hand over the reins, she felt it important that the new Director be a fluent Zulu speaker (most of the people they reach out to are Zulus) as well as being a committed Christian. Experience and expertise would be an added bonus – and as Zulu, a qualified social worker, an experienced manager within the charitable sector and a deeply-faithful Christian lady Thokozani ticked every box... and more! I was blessed to meet her on a couple of occasions when she visited the UK wing of the charity, which my parents were active in helping set up, and for that I will always be grateful.

But why have I told you this story and how does that fit with the Psalm that Heather read? Well, when I was looking at the Lectionary readings for today, I was drawn very much to this psalm and verses 10 and 11 in particular:

“Love and faithfulness meet together;
Righteousness and peace kiss each other.
Faithfulness springs forth from the earth,
And righteousness looks down from heaven.”

There seems to be some agreement amongst scholars that this psalm was written following the return from exile in Babylon. The first 4 verses speak of restoration, but the psalmist then goes on to question why everything is now not lovely and wonderful, why life is still hard and why God still seems distant and angry? However, as is the case in so many psalms, the focus turns to trust and hope– trust in the promises God has made and hope in a future where salvation is the reward for those who remain God's faithful servants. Trust and hope in a God who meets faithfulness with love and who kisses righteousness with peace.

Whilst sitting in the quiet of St Albans Cathedral I could sense that this was a place where love had been, and still was being, poured out on the thousands and thousands of faithful pilgrims who have stopped to pray, worship and meet with God. I left there feeling energised and grateful that I had been given the time to sit in God's presence and simply be. Which is perhaps what I needed to prepare me for the news of Thokozani's sudden and very sad passing?

And which also helps me turn to the message of verse 11. For righteousness to look down from heaven, faithfulness needs to spring forth from the earth. Last week Tom explored how we need to act with courage, with power and with love to enable others to come to know Jesus for themselves. And, here we are reminded again that we are

called to be active in our faith, springing forth rather than passively waiting and achieving nothing. Then, God can reach down and shine his righteousness upon us. Yes, my time of simply being whilst sitting in the Cathedral was hugely important and beneficial, but I have reflected afterwards how being reminded of the work and witness not just of Thokozani, but of all people who work to uplift other, to offer 'phakamisa' to those who are troubled, vulnerable, disenfranchised and persecuted is what we are all called to do. And, then, when the time is right God will restore us fully to all that is good and true. He will help us bring in the harvest of our labours because our steps have been made along the path of righteousness that God has already laid out for us.

It is not an easy path and the challenges can be hard, they can hurt, they can be dangerous and they can be cut short unexpectedly. I have no idea why Thokozani, like so many millions of others, was taken by this pandemic we are facing. I have no idea what God's plan is with this pandemic – although I trust in His goodness and love for all his people. But I do know that He has invited us to join Him in the work that needs to be done to bring about the full restoration of his Kingdom here on earth and I also know that, as Paul wrote in his letter to the Romans (Chapter 5:1-2) "...since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Christ Jesus, through whom we have access by faith into this grace in which we now stand".

We may not be called to lead a charity, minister in the inner-city, be an ordained priest or a lobby as a political activist (although I am grateful to those who are and who faithfully answer that call). But, we can all reach out to our own communities and uplift those in need. We can let our faithfulness spring forth in action and word, and we can rest in the righteousness of our God that kisses peace and brings love and faithfulness together. Because, even when we cannot see the way forward and when the future seems bleak, we worship a God who is faithful and true and who offers us the salvation that can only be found through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. So let us seek to show 'phakamisa' to everyone we can, and lift up to God our work and our lives so His Kingdom will come on earth as in heaven. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer.

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.

Song – WT 143 ‘Here is love vast as the ocean’

Here is love vast as the ocean,
Loving kindness as the flood,
When the Prince of life, our ransom
Shed for us his precious blood.
Who his love will not remember?
Who can cease to sing his praise?
He can never be forgotten
Throughout heaven’s eternal days.

On the mount of crucifixion
Fountains opened deep and wide;
Through the floodgates of God’s mercy
Flowed a vast and gracious tide.
Grace and love, like mighty rivers,
Poured incessant from above,
And heaven’s peace and perfect justice
Kissed a guilty world in love.

William Rees (1802-1883)

Prayers

Blessing

This is from a card picked up on my visit to St Albans Cathedral where they are recognising a Year of Pilgrimage.

Loving God,
Draw us on the journey
To the places of holiness,
The places of peace,
The places of fellowship,
The places of encounter,
The places of beauty,
The places where faith has been lived,
Your love made known,
Your hope held out
In the past,
For the present,
Into your future.
Amen.

Song – SoF 5 No 2306 ‘Go Peaceful’

Go peaceful in gentleness
Through the violence of these days.
Give freely, show tenderness
In all your ways.

Through darkness, in troubled times
Let holiness be your aim.
Seek wisdom, live faithfulness,
Burn light of flame.

God speed you, God lead you
And keep you wrapped around His heart.
May you be known by love.

Be righteous, speak truthfully
In a world of greed and lies.
Show kindness, see everyone
Through heaven's eyes.

God hold you, enfold you
And keep you wrapped around His heart.
May you be known by love.
May you be known by love.

Paul Field.