

Worship @ Home

Sunday 6th September 2020

Worship Leaders:

Revd Val Reid and Louise Selby

Reader: David Box

Music: Steve and Caroline Cook

Technician: John Hamblin



Call to worship

Together we come to worship,
individuals gathered as one
in the name of the Lord.
Amen.

Welcome

This is the first Sunday of the church year.

This afternoon a few of us we will be gathering together to worship at Christchurch.

This morning we are gathering together online to worship in our homes.

Together we come to worship

Individuals gathered as one

In the name of the Lord.

None of us know what the following weeks will hold.

We don't know how worship will look or feel or sound.

We know it will be different from how it used to be.

It may well not fulfil our hopes or our expectations.

We may not all hope alike.

How do we live in community with people who think and feel and hope and expect very differently from us?

How do we manage the inevitable conflict?

This morning, Matthew has some words of wisdom for us.

Today would normally be Promotion Sunday, as we celebrate the work of our Junior Church, and send our young people up into new groups.

But this year is nothing like normal!

So today is Transformation Sunday.

In our prayers, which will be led by Louise, we'll be thinking about how we are all being transformed into something new – even if we don't yet know quite what that might be!

Opening hymn – StF 161

Speak, O Lord, as we come to You
To receive the food of your holy word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes, for Your glory.

Teach us Lord full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility.
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.

Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see,
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail;
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time,
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises;
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, 'til your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

Keith Getty and Stuart Townend

Let us pray...

Holy God,
we sometimes tremble as we think of who we are and who you are.
Bring us now, in this moment, to know you.
See us as we are, and see our yearning to be more like you.
May we lay aside anything that hinders our journey with you,
and with our friends and neighbours.

Think of the tiny space you occupy right now – the floor you are standing on, the chair you are sitting on, or the cushion you are kneeling on.

Think of that space in the context of the community you are with right now...

Think of the vastness of earth, of space, of the universe, and beyond...

Now think again of where you are right now,
and let yourself just be in that space with God.

Silence...

In the higgledy-piggledy ways of life, Lord,
with challenges and changes pulling us this way and that,
we sometimes find it hard, in the heat of the moment,
to know what is right and what is wrong.
Forgive us for our failings and wrongdoings.
Forgive our insensitivities to the ways of others.
Forgive anything that cuts us off from each other, or from you.

God of the vastness of all that is, of all peoples and communities,
here we are, part of this place;
gathering to worship and adore you, marvelling at your love and care, and your persistence with us.
Thank you that you know us, You understand us, You have forgiven us.
We are your people,
Now and always. Amen.

Matthew 18: 15-20

'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

Reflection

Conflict?

What conflict!

We don't have conflicts in the church.

Of course we don't.

We're Christians.

We love one another.

Don't we?

Matthew's advice for resolving conflict in the church seems straightforward.

Go and have a word in private with the sinner.

And if they won't co-operate, take a couple of heavies along with you...

But if you read carefully, this is not unproblematic.

It's written from the perspective of the person who thinks they are in the right.

In the translation we heard this morning, Matthew has Jesus say: 'if another member of the church sins against you'.

Many of the earliest manuscripts don't have those two little words 'against you.'

Some just say, 'if another member of the church sins.'

So who gets to define sin?

I think we need to approach this advice with a little healthy scepticism.

But I do think we ought to approach it.

Because one thing that Matthew does make clear is that we shouldn't sweep conflict under the carpet.

At least in Matthew chapter 18 we are asked to have the courage to name the problem.

To get in touch with our own hurt, or our own discomfort.

To go and have a conversation directly with the other person.

Not to go and moan to our friends.

Or complain to the minister.

But even that simple step is not straightforward.

A few years ago I was sent on a course by the Methodist Church called 'Growing through Conflict'.

First we were asked to complete a questionnaire called the Kraybill Conflict Style Inventory.

You can find it online if you want to have a go.

What it does, is to help you to analyse your own instinctive way of dealing with conflict.

It identifies five different approaches.

Some of us are **directing** – we will sort this out my way.
Just so everyone's clear what's going to happen.
We all know where we are.
After all, I'm the one in charge.

Some of us are **harmonising** – we'll do this your way.
I don't want to sour the atmosphere.
I want us to get on.
I want you to like me.
Don't worry – it's fine.
I don't mind. Really.

Some of us are **avoiding**.
Conflict – what conflict?
These trivial things don't really matter.
Did you see that wonderful David Attenborough programme last Sunday?

Some of us are **compromising**.
Well – if you do this, then I'd be willing to do that.
We'll each get a bit of what we want.
That's only fair, isn't it?

We'll come to the fifth approach later.

You'll see that some of these approaches prioritise getting to a solution.
And some prioritise the relationship.

Kraybill also asks us to think about what we do when we're calm.
And what we do in the heat of an argument.
Because they may not be the same!

You'll see already that it's complicated.
Is it that one of these approaches is better than another?
Is it holier, or more Christian, to avoid conflict?
Or to assume that you are always right?

Can we help ourselves?
What is it about our DNA, our early family experiences, our life stories, that has made us the people we are?

And of course, as we look around the world today, how we approach conflict is a significant issue.
Is Donald Trump directive or harmonising?
What about Boris Johnson?
Vladimir Putin?
Jacinda Ardern?

Is there such a thing as a national conflict resolution style on the Kraybill Conflict Inventory?

Let's look back at today's lectionary passage from Matthew's gospel.
What might we learn from what he has to say?

Chapter 18 of Matthew's gospel is the fourth of his major discourses.

From the end of chapter 13 Jesus has been gathering and instructing his new community. Chapter 18 is about how the Christian community organises its life together. Matthew has brought together many of the sayings of Jesus, and addressed them to the church community he is writing for. A community that is in deep conflict with their Jewish heritage.

These sayings are about not putting stumbling blocks in the way of little ones – those new to the faith. They are about going to great trouble to rescue the lost. They are about forgiving people who have done you wrong. Not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Does that mean we should all be avoiders? Or harmonisers? That doesn't seem to be what Matthew is saying. Surely there are some tensions even within this chapter.

What is important for Matthew is that you can't be a Christian on your own. Committing yourself to Christ is committing yourself to the communal life of faith. Our translation of verse 15 says 'if another member of the church sins...'. The Greek is Adelphos. It means 'brother'. To avoid sexist language the NRSV talks about a member of the church. But that disguises the language which Matthew is deliberately using. Brother. It's like a family. You don't choose your family. They are what you are given. Within families feelings can be pretty intense. Conflict can be deeply hurtful. And of course the patterns for dealing with conflict we have, are often the ones we have learned from within our own family. That doesn't always make for healthy relationships.

So what is the way forward?

Matthew suggests that *if the offender refuses to listen ... let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector*. Over the years this has been taken to be a prescription for excommunication. Cast them out. Get rid of them. And the history of the church is full of schisms. People being thrown out. Or people leaving in a huff.

But Matthew's use of words is rather interesting. When we read the stories we have inherited about the life and ministry of Jesus, Gentiles and tax collectors feature quite significantly. Not as people that Jesus avoids. Or excludes. But as people Jesus wants to spend time with. People he wants to get into conversation with. People he wants to go and have tea with.

It is a gentile woman who challenges Jesus' own inherited human prejudices about outsiders, as we heard in our reading three weeks ago.

It is a tax collector who offers Jesus hospitality, and who – when Jesus terrifyingly and unexpectedly accepts – is willing to change his way of life as a result.

Perhaps when disputes arise in the church – or in our family, or in the workplace, or in the world – we should treat the other person as Jesus treated gentiles and tax collectors.

We should spend time with them.

We should listen to their story.

Because there is always another story.

How we see it is not the way someone else sees it.

They have their own truth, their own experience, their own journey.

Let me listen to where you are coming from, and why this is important to you.

And will you listen to my story too?

This is the fifth Kraybill Conflict style.

Co-operating.

Being willing to welcome difference, to invite other views, to hear all the possible perspectives.

To reflect together on where we have come from, and what we might do next.

To recognise, like Matthew, that we are a family.

We can't do this on our own.

We can't resolve conflict by insisting on our own way, or by walking away from the problem.

Criticising and labelling and excluding the people we don't agree with – that won't bring us closer to the kingdom.

But making space to listen – to pay attention – to understand....

That seems to be the Jesus model.

So as we move forward out of lockdown, and try to find a common way forward into a new normal, let's treat each other like gentiles and tax collectors.

Like brothers and sisters.

Let's listen.

Amen.

Hymn STF 615

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
Without the need to manage and to own;
A haven free from posing and pretending,
Where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
Give me your love wherever we may go.
As God loves us, so let us love each other;
With no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
That strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
That helps us face the risk of truly living,
And makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are
weakness;

Give me your love in spite of all you know.
As God loves us, so let us love each other;
With no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Let love be real, with no manipulation,
No secret wish to harness or control;
Let us accept each other's incompleteness,
And share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and
disappointments
Give me your trust when all my failings show.
As God loves us, so let us love each other;
With no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

Michael Forster

Prayers for ourselves and others led by Louise: "Promotion Sunday"

This morning in Family Church we have been thinking about different kinds of dispute and conflict and focusing on how to cope with feelings of anger and frustration. We used pillows to play some games and think about different feelings. We even had pillow fights! We focused on God's safe space being like a pillow, helping us to feel safe and secure, to rest and to cushion the blows of life for others. You are invited to use a pillow or cushion for our prayers today.

Today would normally be Promotion Sunday - when we celebrate our Junior Church, from aged 0 - 18, and pray for them as another year of learning and growing in faith begins. We normally bless those who are moving to new groups and pray for all the leaders.

The term "promotion" never sits comfortably with me in this context. Moving to an older group is, to me, more a case of transformation than promotion - for all ages are equally important and valued by God. The worship and learning of our youngest baby is equally as important to God as that of our oldest teens. This seems more appropriate than ever now, as we find ourselves in the midst of a pandemic and Junior Church has changed entirely, and will continue to do so as we are constantly transitioning.

So today, our prayers will focus on transformation. There is a response:
When I say "Bless them", please respond "**As they travel in life with you**".

Let's pray.

First of all, we consider our youngest, who normally attend creche. You might like to hold your pillow as if you are holding a baby. The sense of wonder in this age group is so precious to you, God. Thank you for the determination in these little ones to learn and experience the world.

Bless them **as they travel in life with you**

Next we turn to our early years children, aged 3 - 5. You might like to mould your pillow into different shapes as we pray. Lord, this age group is where so many foundations are laid. Thank you for the malleability of these children, for their eagerness to learn and play, for the rapid learning and changing they do at this age, and for the privilege to be part of laying those foundations for life.

Bless them **as they travel in life with you**

Now we will consider our primary aged children, age 6 - 11. You might like to throw your pillow around. The energy and zest for life as children travel through primary years is a gift from you, Lord. Building on foundations, these children are exploring so many ideas and feelings - thank you for the different characters you have created and are shaping within our family of primary aged children.

Bless them **as they travel in life with you**

Moving on to consider our teens, I invite you to sit on your pillow. So much of the teen years is about establishing identity, working out our place in life, questioning ideas, values and beliefs. Thank you that you offer us a secure identity and place in which to do this - and that you are helping our youth work that out for themselves.

Bless them **as they travel in life with you**

Turning to pray for all the leaders, I invite you to hold your pillow in your hands, away from your body. So valued and important are these willing people who invest time, energy and love into our young. So challenging have the last 6 months been with change thrown at us in abundance. So uncertain is the future for us all - but we know that you hold us securely in your hands.

Bless them **as they travel in life with you**

Amen

Lord's prayer

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 in heaven...

Blessing

Into a world of confusion and doubt.

Into a world of conflict and disagreement,

Into a world of love and harmony,

Into a world of hope and possibility,

We travel with you.

We travel with you.

Amen.

Music: As the deer pants for the water

Opening prayers are from ROOTS for Churches 6.9.20

CCL 7011