

Sunday 1 October 2023

Morning Worship

The Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

Led by Michaela McNeill, ALM

<https://zoom.us/j/82311473640>

LORDSBRIDGE TEAM
OF CHURCHES



Greeting

May the light and peace of Jesus Christ our Lord be with us.

The Lord bless us.

Hymn – Be Thou My Vision

- 1 Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.
- 2 Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee Lord;
be thou my great Father, and I thy true son;
be thou in me dwelling, and I with thee one.
- 3 Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight;
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.
- 4 Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart;
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.
- 5 High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

Irish, c 8th century

translated by Mary Byrne (1880-1931) versified by, Eleanor Hull (1860-1935)

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Opening Prayer

**Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen**

Prayer of Penitence

We have gathered here to worship God,
but are conscious of our unworthiness to do so.
Jesus challenged the hypocrisy of people who
'honour God with their lips but their hearts are far from him.'

(Mark 7:6)

Let us confess our sins to Almighty God, in penitence and faith:
When we devote much attention to satisfying our bodies but little to
satisfying our souls ...
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

When we like to be regarded as followers of Jesus
but avoid making any sacrifices for him ...
Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**
When we say we love God but fail to care for our brothers and sisters
in need ...
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent,
have mercy upon us, pardon and deliver us from all our sins,
confirm and strengthen us in all goodness, and keep us in life eternal;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Bible readings by Clare Crang

Ezekiel 18:1-4, 25-end

The word of the LORD came to me: What do you mean by repeating

this proverb concerning the land of Israel, 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? As I live, says the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Know that all lives are mine; the life of the parent as well as the life of the child is mine: it is only the person who sins that shall die.

Yet you say, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' Hear now, O house of Israel: Is my way unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair? When the righteous turn away from their righteousness and commit iniquity, they shall die for it; for the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is unfair.' O house of Israel, are my ways unfair? Is it not your ways that are unfair?

Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin. Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed against me and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn, then, and live.

Matthew 21:23-32

When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?' Jesus said to them, 'I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven", he will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" But if we say, "Of human origin", we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And he said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

‘What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” He answered, “I will not”; but later he changed his mind and went. The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, “I go, sir”; but he did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?’ They said, ‘The first.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

Reflection by Sue Nelms

This morning we find ourselves coming to the end of the season of creationtide. It has been quite a journey as we have seen various natural events or disasters take place during this period.

Across this season both here and at Ely Cathedral, David has spoken passionately about the conflict between the ethics of commerce and profit and its impact upon our world and today’s readings continue with stories of conflict. Modern life is difficult. We are challenged. Our behaviour is challenged and that means that our lives will never be straightforward and easy.

The first reading from Ezekiel contains a powerful challenge with the following words. ²⁷Again, when the wicked turn away from the wickedness they have committed and do what is lawful and right, they shall save their life. ²⁸ Because they considered and turned away from all the transgressions that they had committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. ³⁰ Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, all of you according to your ways, says the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions; otherwise iniquity will be your ruin’. (Ezekiel 18.27-30). The sentiment of those words echoes in the reading from Matthew’s gospel, perhaps not literally, but in implication.

This morning’s reading from Matthew’s gospel gives us two scenarios. In the first one, the chief priests and elders challenge Jesus and his

authority, wanting him to state who had given him the authority to say the things he had been saying. It would seem that they are not genuinely looking for the truth at this point; rather they want an answer that will condemn Jesus and give them power over him. That makes them seem like the wicked people from the Ezekiel reading.

Seeing through their words and actions, Jesus asks them a question, one designed to elicit an admission of the truth from them. Have you ever been asked a difficult question? I don't mean one like the questions you get on Mastermind or University Challenge – or even worse Only Connect! No, I mean the sort of question that really puts you on the spot, sometimes forcing you to nail your colours to the mast, so to speak. One that could have implications for your relationship with the questioner or maybe other people around you? That is the sort of question Jesus was asking when he asked 'Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?'

At that moment the chief priests and elders hold the keys to the kingdom of God in their hands and they blow that opportunity. They have the chance both to recognise and accept God's authority and his love, but they can't do it. Why can't they do it – surely that is why they are there? Because by doing so they will be turning their backs on the earthly prestige and power they enjoy in their positions as priests and elders. As politician Lord Acton once said 'Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely' and sadly the privileges and power enjoyed by the chief priests and elders had corrupted them to the point that they didn't dare to and couldn't recognise the authority of the God they were supposed to serve.

As Jesus responded, 'John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax-collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him'. By accepting that John was acting in the name and power of God, they would be admitting to the world that they had been wrong, that they had denied God and that their lives had been dedicated to holding on to power rather than serving God; holding on

to that power at all costs and that what they enjoyed at that moment was worth more to them than the promise of eternal life in God's kingdom. Sadly, it is the sort of behaviour that we have recently seen in some politicians and places like hospitals, who do their utmost to cling on to their power at all costs rather than being seen to admit that they might have made a mistake. As Elton John said 'Sorry seems to be the hardest word'.

Moving on to this morning's second story, the one of the helpful and not so helpful sons. Have you ever felt really let down by someone who has said that they will come and do something – perhaps help at an event or do a reading or get something for you that you need – and then they simply don't do it, leaving you hanging or frantically scrabbling trying to sort the situation yourself?

Alternatively, think of the joy that comes from someone who had said that they weren't available turning up anyway? Anecdotally tennis player John McEnroe would usually turn down the invitations he would get from schools and charities to support events because he never knew how long he would be playing in a tournament but he always kept a record of the dates. If he lost a match and was knocked out of that tournament, suddenly becoming available, he would then go along to the school or charity event and surprise them.

In our story we have two sons, one who says yes but doesn't follow through with the action and one who says no, but then actually does what is needed and this leads to the obvious question of who has done the right thing by their father? Going back to the chief priests and the elders, are they doing the right thing by God their father? No. They have heard the word of God but turned away in their actions rather like the first son. Instead of doing the right thing, they are seeking to get rid of the messenger by any means possible.

On the other hand, so-called sinners, such as the tax collectors and prostitutes, had also heard the word of God, but they welcomed and accepted it and allowed it to change their lives, joyfully becoming

followers of Jesus. They are the ones that Jesus says will be welcomed into heaven, not the chief priests and elders that you would have expected to be welcomed.

How do this morning's readings tie in with the season of creationtide?

The current climate situation is rather like this story. Governments and powerful people across the world that have said that actions are needed by everyone in order to care properly for God's creation – think of all of the hype around the COP conferences. We have all seen the devastating effects of climate change and global warming in the form of droughts, floods, melting of the polar ice caps and more. We have heard governments and politicians saying 'yes, yes, we need to do something' to press conferences and anyone who will give them airtime. But then when push comes to shove, they say 'but not now' – we have seen this in the backtracking of our own government over the last week or so. The problems faced by the world's three billion poorest people as a result of climate change count for nothing.

We squander the earth's resources. We send foodstuffs all around the world all year long rather than accepting that to each crop there is a season. We continue to live in a disposable world, dumping unworn clothing and electrical items that haven't broken, not making things to last like we used to (as my granny would say). People fly all over the place as often as they can – I heard someone say that he had taken the train to Morocco. Alright it took him 4 days and it generated 480kg of carbon; he later learned that the same journey by plane would have generated 1.2 tonnes! All of our actions have consequences, just as the actions of the chief priests and elders in this morning's passage had consequences.

We need to become a people that says yes and means it, whether that is acting to preserve God's abundant creation, or accepting and responding to our God's authority in our lives. We need to stand up for that world because it nurtures us and in return we need to defend it. God, our abundant, loving, generous God wants to work with us –

all of us – wouldn't it be wonderful if as a world we all accepted His authority over our lives and returned that love? Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in God:

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,
source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God the Son who took our human nature,
died for us, and rose again?

We believe and trust in him.

Do you believe and trust in God
the Holy Spirit who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

We believe and trust in him.

This is the faith of the Church.

This is our faith.

**We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen**

Intercessions prepared by Michaela McNeill

*After the words Father, hear our prayer, please respond **and grant us your Spirit.***

Father God, we pray for the world, starved of compassion and forgiveness ...

Father, hear our prayer
and grant us your Spirit.

For the Church, whose witness is often weakened by disunity ...
We pray for bishop Dagmar., and all ministers and people,

that our life together may bring honour to Christ.

Father, hear our prayer

and grant us your Spirit.

For all situations of violence, hostility and racial prejudice ...

We pray for our leaders, and for peace and justice between nations and within communities.

Father, hear our prayer

and grant us your Spirit.

For all families struggling in the face of poverty, disadvantage or disability ...

We pray that they will have encouragement and support to find a way through their troubles.

Father, hear our prayer

and grant us your Spirit.

For the lonely and the isolated, the rejected and the long-term unemployed ...

We pray that we will not forget them.

Father, hear our prayer

and grant us your Spirit.

For those who have died, especially ...

We pray for their loved ones left behind that comfort and hope will lessen their sorrows.

Father, hear our prayer

and grant us your Spirit.

For all who are burdened by worry, ill-health or pain ...

We pray that they will know relief and healing, through those who care.

Father, hear our prayer

and grant us your Spirit.

We remember with joy your unfailing love and pray that we may show our thanks not only with our lips but in our lives. Hear, O Lord, and

answer all our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Collect for the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity

Almighty God,
you have made us for yourself,
and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
pour your love into our hearts and draw us to yourself,
and so bring us at last to your heavenly city
where we shall see you face to face;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

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 forever. Amen.**

Hymn - Christ is the one who calls

I Christ is the one who calls,
the one who loved and came,
to whom by right it falls
to bear the highest Name:

and still today
our hearts are stirred
to hear his word
and walk his way.

- 2 Christ is the one who seeks,
to whom our souls are known.
The word of love he speaks
can wake a heart of stone;
for at that sound
the blind can see,
the slave is free,
the lost are found.
- 3 Christ is the one who died,
forsaken and betrayed;
who, mocked and crucified,
the price of pardon paid.
Our dying Lord,
what grief and loss,
what bitter cross,
our souls restored!
- 4 Christ is the one who rose
in glory from the grave,
to share his life with those
whom once he died to save.
He drew death's sting
and broke its chains,
who lives and reigns,
our risen King.
- 5 Christ is the one who sends,
his story to declare;
who calls his servants friends

and gives them news to share.
His truth proclaim
in all the earth,
his matchless worth
and saving Name.

Timothy Dudley Smith (b.1926)

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Notices

Concluding Prayer

Almighty God, give us wisdom to perceive you,
intellect to understand you, diligence to seek you,
patience to wait for you, a vision to meditate upon you,
and a life to proclaim you. **Amen**

(St Benedict)

The Grace

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, evermore. Amen
be with us all. Amen.**