

Wednesday Worship 11th November 2020

'Liturgy of the Ordinary' - Calling a Friend

Introduction

This week we again think about finding God in the everyday moments of life, based on ideas from the book 'Liturgy of the Ordinary' by Tish Harrison Warren. Today the subject is calling a friend, or the importance of having people to walk with us through life and faith. I'm also conscious that this video is going out on Armistice Day, and so I'd like to begin by remembering those who have fought and died in wars with the prayer for Remembrance Sunday.

Opening prayers and lighting of a candle

Almighty Father,
whose will is to restore all things
in your beloved Son, the King of all:
govern the hearts and minds of those in authority,
and bring the families of the nations,
divided and torn apart by the ravages of sin,
to be subject to his just and gentle rule;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: O God, our help in ages past

Prayer

Lord, from the moment we awake
to face the day ahead,
you are with us,
through good times and bad,
your presence enough for our needs.
Every day we will praise you

All **And extol your name for ever**

Through the hours of the day,
in our travels and work,
you are with us;
in decisions we must make,
your wisdom enough for our needs.
Every day we will praise you

All **And extol your name for ever**

As we lie down to rest
at the end of the day,
you are with us,
as we lay our fears at your feet,
your peace enough for our needs.
Every day we will praise you
All **And extol your name for ever**

1st Reading: Ecclesiastes 4.9-12

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Prayer of response

Lord and friend, we give thanks to you for friendship
and pray for those who feel alone in the world.
Make us people who care for one another.
All **Amen.**

Praise

This is love, not that we loved God,
All **but that he loved us and sent his Son.**
He is the sacrifice for our sins,
All **that we might live through him.**
If God loves us so much
All **we ought to love one another.**
If we love one another
All **God lives in us.**

Psalm 133

How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
life for evermore.

Psalm 134

Come, bless the Lord, all you servants of the Lord,
who stand by night in the house of the Lord!
Lift up your hands to the holy place,
and bless the Lord.
May the Lord, maker of heaven and earth,
bless you from Zion.

Prayer of response

Grant to your people, good Lord,
the spirit of unity, that they may dwell together in your love,
and so bear to the world the ointment of your healing
and the dew of your blessing; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

All **Amen.**

2nd Reading: Romans 12.9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Prayer of response

Lord, you call us to love.
Give us grace to love, honour and care for one another,
and to turn our backs on hatred and revenge.

All **Amen.**

3rd Reading: John 15.1-17

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide

in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Prayer of response

Dear Lord, teach us to love others the way you first loved us.
As we build relationships with others,
let them see you in the extent of our generosity,
the authenticity of our kindness, and the depths of our love.
All of those things are only possible through you,
the God who abides with us and calls us friends.

All **Amen.**

Hymn: I give to you a new commandment (Nardone)

Reflection

I have a friend who rang me one night to say that her husband had been taken into hospital. She needed both emotional and practical help and I was glad to give it to her, in the full knowledge that she would do the same for me if the situation was reversed. Thankfully, her husband eventually recovered but this time made it clear to me just how important our friendship is. This is the kind of friendship where two people know each other inside and out, the good and the bad bits, the strengths and the weaknesses, the secret fears and sorrows that are usually kept hidden. We find the beauty in each other, cheer each other on, and support each other with prayer.

Many churches have times when we talk to each other. This might be through the psalms, the leader reading a line and the congregation reading the next one, in a call and response pattern. It might be through prayers where a call is made by the leader and the congregation responds. It might be in a sermon when a preacher speaks to the congregation and they reply. At this time we're all together; some happy, some in pain, some tired, some bored. Together we are the church, showing up for one another and speaking words of life to our neighbours, even if it must be through screens for now. And we're talking to God together

as well. We're reminding him of his promises and our complaints, that we're all in this together, and reaffirming our desire to be his friends as he is ours.

Our Christian friendships work in much the same way. As we share our lives and faith we tell each other over and over again who we are and who God is. We speak and live good news to each other, in good times and bad, and we share that good news with others. Good friends are those who are willing to get in the dirt with us, see us how we really are and speak God's love into our lives. They don't preach or offer simple pat answers but instead stick with us in confusion, struggle and pain. Like the psalms, which don't give easy answers but cover all the complex messiness of being human, from ecstasy to deep depression, friends accept all of us. We call and they respond in the rhythm of friendship and community.

In more evangelical areas of the Church there's a strong focus on faith as an individual relationship with Jesus. This is, of course, central. We all need a close connection with Jesus. But it's not all of the Christian life. Throughout the Bible and the history of the Church God has called whole peoples, whole communities, to salvation and new life. From the very beginning God declared that it's not good for people to be alone. He called Abraham and his family to head a chosen people. He led the whole nation of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land. Jesus himself chose 12 people to be his friends and community and from them has sprung the millions of Christians throughout time without whom none of us would have come to faith. We, the Church, are in this together, even if physically separated. The friend I mentioned at the beginning moved away for a while. I missed her terribly but we adjusted and found ways to keep up our friendship, just as the Church now needs to find new ways to keep together in lockdown. We all need each other because we're all in this together, and together God calls us to community and friendship.

Of course, friendship is not always a simple matter. At times we misunderstand or hurt each other. We all need at times to forgive and be forgiven. And the wounds inflicted on us by our fellow Christians can be the most painful of all. Once it was suggested to me that I was struggling with a particular issue because I hadn't prayed about it. Not only was this not true but it was very hurtful to be met with judgement and criticism when I hoped for understanding and compassion. And others have suffered much worse at the hands of the Church. We must be careful how we act and talk to one another.

Plus, there's the unfortunate fact that not everyone we meet is someone we would naturally want to spend time with. Even those great Christian heroes Peter and Paul had arguments and rubbed each other up the wrong way. It's human nature to be drawn to those we find lovely and likeable. Yet Jesus shows us another way. He spent much of his time with the unlovely, the outcasts, the lonely, the misfits, the losers, those no-one else would be seen dead with. We may not like the woman who normally sits behind us in church or the couple who live next door but God loves and delights in them and challenges us to find the beauty in them. God calls us all to friendship, not just with those who it's easy to get on with, but also with those it's harder for us to like.

And if we're to create a community where all are included, all are friends, and which holds out the hand of friendship, peace and love to the world around us, then we must dare to ask God to help us love as he loves us.

Intercessions

Jesus, vine of life,
in your branches we are nestled
taking shelter and sustenance in the shade of your strength.
With thanksgiving we celebrate the growth and hope
we have found in placing our roots in you.
For in life you nourish us
and your Holy Spirit encourages us
to reach our full potential in the gifts we have been given
that others may know of your love.
May we grow in our friendship with you and with others
and may those we meet find a true friend in us.

God of love
All **Hear our prayer**

Lord, make us more than sour grapes and unripe olives.
In the hardships of the world
may we look beyond bitter politics and divisions,
fear and misunderstandings,
to find your love at the core of our relationships.
There may all people work with what we have in common
that we might grow in respect and trust
and work together to overcome all our challenges.

God of love
All **Hear our prayer**

May our branches bow
with the weight of the fruit you have bestowed.
Help us to look beyond our own needs,
to recognise those who are hungry for food, love and justice.
May we offer others the shelter they need
under the weight of your branches
so they find a rest from the cold and darkness,
the hatred and loneliness of this world.

God of love
All **Hear our prayer**

May your Spirit enable us
to value the gifts and talents of all.
May our leaves soak up your light and share it with others.
When we meet those who are worn down
with illness, loneliness, grief and abandonment,
may the light of your presence shine
in these encounters
that all might know your compassion.

God of love
All **Hear our prayer**

Gardener of all life,
as you trim and shape us for your purpose
may we place our prayers into your hands
and trust that new seeds may grow
through your renewing and empowering love.

Lord of the Church,
All **hear our prayer,
and make us one in heart and mind
to serve you with joy for ever.
Amen.**

Being made one by the power of the Spirit,
let us pray with confidence
as our Saviour has taught us:

All **Our Father...**

Hymn: Church of God, elect and glorious

Closing prayers

When we are stretched thin, challenged and doubting,
All **we walk with Christ, our Friend.**

When we are in the midst of the life-giving, the exciting
and the nourishing,
All **we walk with Christ, our Friend.**

When we worry about what the future will bring
or when we are filled with hope
All **we walk with Christ, our Friend.**

When we question every decision
and when we are truly certain,
All **we walk with Christ, our Friend.**

When we endure suffering or conflict and when all is peace and joy
All **we walk with Christ, our Friend.**

When we walk with hesitancy or dance with enthusiasm.
All **we walk with Christ, our Friend.**

May God's blessing be ours:
a blessing of loving kindness,
a blessing of hope and courage,
a blessing of listening and love.
God's blessing be ours,
now and always.
All **Amen.**

We go into the world
to walk in God's light,
to rejoice in God's love
and to reflect God's glory.

All

Amen.