

**Sunday 22nd August –  
Twelfth Sunday After Trinity**  
Led by Sue Nelms, LLM



**Opening Words**

Loving God, we have come to worship you.

**Help us to pray to you in faith,  
to sing your praise with gratitude,  
and to listen to your word with eagerness;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**Gathering Prayer**

Holy God,  
holy and strong,  
holy and immortal:  
have mercy on us.

**Holy God,  
holy and strong,  
holy and immortal:  
have mercy on us.**

*Silence*

Eternal God, source of all blessing,  
help us to worship you  
with all our heart and mind and strength;  
for you alone are God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever. Amen.

**Hymn – O God You Search Me and You Know Me**

O, God, you search me, and you know me  
All my thoughts lie open to your gaze

When I walk or lie down, you are before me  
'Ever the maker and keeper of my days

You know my resting and my rising  
You discern my purpose from afar  
And with love everlasting, you besiege me  
In ev'ry moment of life or death, you are

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord  
You have known its meaning through and through  
You are with me beyond my understanding  
God of my present, my past and future, too

Although your Spirit is upon me  
Still I search for shelter from your light  
There is nowhere on Earth I can escape you  
Even the darkness is radiant in your sight

For you created me and shaped me  
Gave me life within my mother's womb  
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you  
Safe in your hands, all creation is made new

## **Meditation**

Take up a comfortable posture. Close your eyes.

And first, we begin to centre ourselves.

Focus on your breathing.

Notice your breathing in... and breathing out.

Do not try and control it, but just focus on this breathing. In and out.

If you get distracted, do not worry.

But just bring your attention back.

Notice breathing in and out. In and out.

We are going to reflect this morning on a short passage from Exodus 20.3-6, using the Message translation.

<sup>3</sup> No other gods, only me.

<sup>4-6</sup> No carved gods of any size, shape, or form of anything whatever, whether of things that fly or walk or swim. Don't bow down to them and don't serve them because I am God, your God, and I'm a most jealous God, punishing the children for any sins their parents pass on to them to the third, and yes, even to the fourth generation of those who hate me. But I'm unswervingly loyal to the thousands who love me and keep my commandments.

## **Confession**

St Paul says

'Be imitators of God;  
love as Christ loved;  
do not grieve the Holy Spirit;  
put away all anger and bitterness, all slander and malice.'  
So let us confess our sins to God,  
who forgives us in Christ.

*cf Ephesians 4.30 – 5.1*

**Most merciful God,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
we confess that we have sinned  
in thought, word and deed.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart.  
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
In your mercy  
forgive what we have been,  
help us to amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be;  
that we may do justly,  
love mercy,  
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.**

May the God of love and power  
forgive us and free us from our sins,  
heal and strengthen us by his Spirit,  
and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

## **Readings by Joshua Vanneck**

### **Ephesians 6:10-20**

<sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. <sup>13</sup> Therefore take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. <sup>14</sup> Stand therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness. <sup>15</sup> As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace. <sup>16</sup> With all of these, take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to quench all the flaming arrows of the evil one. <sup>17</sup> Take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

<sup>18</sup> Pray in the Spirit at all times in every prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints.

<sup>19</sup> Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, <sup>20</sup> for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.

### **John 6.56-69**

<sup>56</sup> Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. <sup>57</sup> Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. <sup>58</sup> This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.' <sup>59</sup> He said these things while he was teaching in the synagogue at Capernaum. <sup>60</sup> When many of his disciples heard it, they said, 'This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?' <sup>61</sup> But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, 'Does this offend you? <sup>62</sup> Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? <sup>63</sup> It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words

that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. <sup>64</sup> But among you there are some who do not believe.' For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. <sup>65</sup> And he said, 'For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.'

<sup>66</sup> Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him. <sup>67</sup> So Jesus asked the twelve, 'Do you also wish to go away?' <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered him, 'Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.'

### **Reflection by Clare Bigg, LLM**

#### **Spiritual warfare.**

I don't know about you, but I am probably not cut out to be a fighter, and I am not at all sure what I think and feel about phrases in our reading like 'the wiles of the devil' and 'the cosmic powers of this present darkness'.

But when we look at the state of the planet with out-of-control fires and flooding and poisoned atmosphere and water;

When we look at the plight of Afghanistan and Yemen and so many war-torn places;

When we see the misinformation and hatred promulgated on the Internet;

When even in 21st century Britain, we realise that prejudice, scape-goating and injustice is still subtly endemic and sometimes overtly displayed -

Then we know that we have a battle on our hands and that Paul might have something to say to us.

The first piece of God's armour to keep us safe in the battle is the belt of truth. In today's climate of 'my truth', perhaps we need God's truth more than ever. We obviously need accurate data and analysis about, for example, global warming – how fast it is happening, why it is happening, what the consequences will be and how we might be able to prevent them. We also need accurate information to be able to counter the misinformation on social media about vaccines, benefits for asylum seekers, overseas aid and all the other issues about which

falsehoods are peddled. But it isn't just accurate data we need. If we are to engage in the battle for hearts and minds, we need the confidence that comes from God's truth. Being able to say with conviction 'The earth is the Lord's and everything in it' gives us an extra incentive to engage with the climate crisis and conservation. Knowing that God cares passionately about justice, and that He is generally on the side of the underdog, helps us to speak up for the marginalised and under-privileged, even when it is not a popular message. The belt of truth gives us confidence to speak and act without running the risk of our (metaphorical) trousers falling down.

The second piece of armour is the breastplate of righteousness. We are regularly reminded how quickly people seize on hypocrisy and double standards in the public sphere. Think 'Barnard Castle'. High standards are rightly expected of Christians, and we should do our best to live up to them. But before God, we know the only righteousness that counts is that of Christ: our status is that of forgiven people. This should give us confidence in the public sphere to say quickly and honestly when we get things wrong. It's not easy, not at all easy, to admit our faults, but in the long run honesty is the best defence against accusations of hypocrisy which, if fair, undermine our message.

And so we come to verse 15: I like the NRSV translation 'As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace' because it invites us to think about what might prepare the way for peace. Instead of consulting Google for help, we do well to turn to Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He came to reconcile us to God, and he did this by walking in our shoes, by becoming one of us, understanding us from the inside. And so I wonder if we can help ourselves to be well-shod by trying to walk in the shoes of people who are different from us – listening to their voice, reading their stories, understanding their point of view. Could walking in the shoes of others help us to become men and women of peace?

Next comes the shield of faith. In this context, perhaps our biggest faith obstacle is a mind-set of scarcity and helplessness rather than one of abundance and possibility. For example, when thinking about climate action we easily say, 'What can I do? The problem is so vast. What

difference will it make if I turn my thermostat down a degree or have an extra vegetarian day? Here are 5 loaves and 2 small fish, but what are they among so many?’ So easily we talk ourselves into a defeatist attitude. But we have an abundant, mighty God who does not plan to be defeated. Paul lived in Roman times, and each soldier wasn’t alone with his own little shield – no, they locked their shields together so that each man’s shield protected his neighbours as well as himself. The key to a shield of faith is in acting together, reminding each other of the stories of God’s provision and faithfulness, reminding each other that as small groups make small changes to their lifestyle, it catches on and grows. Attitudes and habits do change, if we act together, talk together, inform ourselves together, encourage one another to trust God, have faith and to keep going.

And of course we need to pray and listen together. I am jumping here to the end of the Ephesians passage, and the end of the Gospel. In the Gospel reading, following Jesus has become tough, and many give up and go home. Jesus asks his close disciples if they also plan to desert him and Peter makes one of his great declarations of faith: ‘Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.’ We need to pray and to listen to Jesus and the Spirit. We have recently been thinking about the Marks of Mission, and whether we think of ourselves as part of a mission or fighting a battle, we need to allow Jesus to change and equip us.

Paul encourages his Ephesian readers to prepare themselves for a struggle. And if in our time we want to be part of the solution for the world’s woes, not part of the problem, we do well to prepare ourselves too. We can inform ourselves about the truth, finding out and checking accurate data and analysis about the world and allowing the Spirit to lodge God’s truth deep in our minds. We can do our best to live with integrity, being honest when things go wrong. We can become people of peace as we walk in the shoes of people whose experience of life is different from ours. We can encourage one another to trust God as we act together for change. And we can pray, passionately and persistently, Thy Kingdom Come.

## **Affirmation of faith**

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.**

## **Prayers of Intercession led by Michaela McNeill**

After the words Lord, in your mercy please reply **hear our prayer.**

As ever, this week we have been bombarded with news – home and overseas, political and personal, tragic and trivial. We pray that Jesus is able to change the lives of these people wherever they may be, whoever they are. Please let them come to know you and to love you and to see what wonders you can do.... pause  
Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Last week there was other news; some earlier chapters of long running stories, some one-day wonders, some tragedies, easily forgotten by us, but just as sharp and painful for the sufferers now as then. Let us hope that Jesus and our Lord God is there during these dark times and that these people can draw from the strength within ... pause

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

This time next week the papers will be full of new stories, the TV will give us new images. New faces will be looking out at us; there will be new incidents for the pundits to debate. Let us pray now for one such area of concern or one section of society that is likely to crop up in next week's news – the Government, our church leaders, countries in difficulties, people in trouble ... pause

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

O God, set your blessing on us all as we begin this week together – on our world, our church, our community, our family and friends. Please also heal your suffering ones, raise up your broken ones, inspire your joyful ones. And give yourself afresh to us, as with our sisters and brothers, we stand before you in hope. For Jesus' sake. **Amen.**

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

### **Collect**

God of constant mercy,  
who sent your Son to save us:  
remind us of your goodness,  
increase your grace within us,  
that our thankfulness may grow,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

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.**

**Song: Bread of life, hope of the world**  
sung by St Martin's Voices

Chorus: Bread of life, hope of the world,  
Jesus Christ, our brother:  
feed us now, give us life,  
lead us to one another.

As we proclaim your death,  
as we recall your life,  
we remember your promise  
to return again.

Chorus: Bread of life, hope of the world...

This bread we break and share  
was scattered once as grain:  
just as now it is gathered,  
make your people one.  
Chorus: Bread of life, hope of the world...

We eat this living bread,  
we drink this saving cup:  
sign of hope in our broken world,  
source of lasting love.

Bread of life, hope of the world,  
Jesus Christ, our brother:  
feed us now, give us life,  
lead us to one another.

## **Conclusion**

Jesus, lord of time,  
**hold us in your eternity.**

Jesus, image of God,  
**travel with us the life of faith.**

Jesus, friend of sinners,  
**heal the brokenness of our world.**

Jesus, lord of tomorrow,  
**draw us into your future. Amen.**

Christ, who has nourished us with himself the living bread,  
make us one in praise and love,  
and raise us up at the last day;  
and the blessing of God almighty  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ.**