



The Sixth Sunday after Trinity Sunday 11 July 2021

Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you
and also with you.

Hymn:

- 1 Alleluia, Alleluia!
hearts to heaven and voices raise;
sing to God a hymn of gladness,
sing to God a hymn of praise:
he who on the Cross a victim
for the world's salvation bled,
Jesus Christ the King of glory,
now is risen from the dead.

- 2 Christ is risen, Christ the first-fruits
of the holy harvest field,
which will all its full abundance
at his second coming yield;
then the golden ears of harvest
will their heads before him wave,
ripened by his glorious sunshine,
from the furrows of the grave.

3 Christ is risen, we are risen;
shed upon us heavenly grace,
rain and dew, and gleams of glory
from the brightness of thy face;
that we, with our hearts in heaven,
here on earth may fruitful be,
and by angel-hands be gathered,
and be ever, Lord, with thee.

4 Alleluia, Alleluia,
glory be to God on high;
Alleluia to the Saviour,
who has gained the victory;
Alleluia to the Spirit,
fount of love and sanctity;
Alleluia, Alleluia,
to the Triune Majesty.

Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885)
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Prayers of Penitence

**Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore to us the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from your sins,

and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Praise

Let everything be said and done in the name of the
Lord Jesus,

giving thanks to God through Jesus Christ.

Sing psalms, hymns and sacred songs:

let us sing to God with thankful hearts.

Open our lips, Lord:

and we shall praise your name.

Meditation

We will now concentrate on these following words from Psalm
85.

⁸ Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,
for he will speak peace to his people,
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their
hearts.

⁹ Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,
that his glory may dwell in our land.

¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.

¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.

¹² The LORD will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.

¹³ Righteousness will go before him,
and will make a path for his steps.

Readings by Clare Crang

Amos 7.7-15

This is what he showed me: the Lord was standing beside a wall built with a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the LORD said to me, "Amos, what do you see?" And I said, "A plumb line." Then the Lord said,

"See, I am setting a plumb line
in the midst of my people Israel;
I will never again pass them by;
the high places of Isaac shall be made desolate,
and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste,
and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword."

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent to King Jeroboam of Israel, saying, "Amos has conspired against you in the very centre of the house of Israel; the land is not able to bear all his words.

For thus Amos has said,

'Jeroboam shall die by the sword,
and Israel must go into exile away from his land.'

And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom."

Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees. and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'

Mark 6.14-29

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him. But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the

prophets of old". But when Herod heard of it, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised."

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it." And he solemnly swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What should I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the baptizer." Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Sermon by David Newton

Well what depressing readings! Our Gospel passage feels particularly odd perhaps because Jesus is not the central character. Jesus becomes the prologue to the story of John the Baptist, in a reversal of the overall narrative. Mark's readers might well have wondered what had happened to this esoteric figure

from the desert who ate locusts and honey, and so Mark shares with his readers the grizzly details of John's death.

Mark tells the almost farcical story of how this man died because of Herod's libido and rash words; how he died because of a series of unfortunate circumstances coming together almost by chance. If Herod hadn't taken his brother's wife; if that brother's wife hadn't had an attractive daughter, who hadn't danced on a night Herod was drunk; if that daughter hadn't asked her mother what prize to get from Herod... if, if, if, John would have lived.

As it was, through this series of events that could so easily have been otherwise, John's disciples had to gather, take his body, and lay it in a tomb.

There is no happy ending to the story. It is pushing towards that dramatic genre, tragedy.

This strange insertion into the overall Gospel narrative is in fact a crucial part of the story. It reminds us that oftentimes things do not end well; things do not always end as we want. There is not always a happy ending – certainly not in this life.

This is a rather uncomfortable truth that we tend to seek to avoid, both as a society and as a church. We give each other clichés instead: it will all work out; everything happens for a reason; it'll be okay in the end, and so on.

In some 'ultimate' sense this is true: nothing can extinguish the life and love of God, and so yes all will be well in the end. And yet, to just jump to that 'ultimate horizon' too often misses the pain, the tragedy, the suffering, the difficulty of endings as we experience them here and now. John was beheaded, his disciples took him and laid him in a tomb. This was not a happy ending for John or his disciples.

Christianity is not meant to be a flight from pain, or a kind of false consolation that promises happy endings. Instead, the resurrection of Jesus – which shows us that divine Love and Life can never be overcome – gives us the resources we need to face whatever we might experience in this world of happenstance and contingency.

Everything does not happen for a reason. Stuff happens. We live in a world of ifs and if onlys... If, if, if things had worked out differently. If only this or that. If only the dancer had said what she wanted from Herod and not asked her mother, John would have lived. We live in a world that is not under our control and never can be.

The Good News does not deny these ifs and if onlys. It does not (although it sometimes is presented as such) provide some magical levers to control life around us to make it all work out. Instead the Good News is that we have all the resources we need in Christ to sit in the darkness. For we live in the knowledge that nothing, nothing, nothing can put the light out.

As Christians then who seek to bring the good news to others, we are called above all to simply 'be with' others in whatever circumstances they might be going through. We are called to sit in the places of pain and difficulty, not providing clichéd happy endings, but being a visible sign of the Love that cannot be extinguished.

Last week, Chris Westgarth, from Comberton was ordained a deacon in Ely Cathedral and now re-joins the team as a curate (based primarily in Comberton). At the ordination service the Bishop told the congregation what the job of a deacon is. Part of this commission is as follows:

[deacons] are to work with their fellow members in searching out the poor and weak, the sick and lonely and those who are oppressed and powerless, reaching into the forgotten corners of the world, that the love of God may be made visible.

This is the call to all Christians, but it is particularly incumbent upon those who are ordained to model such work, to make it visible as the ministry of the Church, and to enable others to engage in it.

Chris, and indeed each of us, are called to sit in the darkness that the love of God may be made visible – not to say everything is okay, not to bring false consolation or a false Gospel – but to

simply let the light of Christ shine in places of difficulty. Doing that does not require some great skill, or academic prowess or some particular knowledge base. Instead, we are like Amos, who was a simple herdsman and dresser of sycamore trees (whatever that even is). He was called to be a prophet, to share the Word of God to those who didn't want to hear it. He was called to resist the clichés of the day – that all would be well, and that Israel would prosper and their enemies suffer – and was instead to help the people to see clearly, to face up to the difficulties they of the day and the injustices of their society. He did so grounded and rooted in the Covenant Love of God which could not and would not be broken, however much the people stretched it.

So, we too are called to avoid false consolations and the promise of happy endings, and to know that whatever comes our way – whatever the contingencies and happenstance of life throws at us – the Love and Life of God can never, ever be extinguished. And that gives us all we need, our Daily Bread for each new day. Amen.

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in God
We believe in God the Father,
from whom every family
in heaven and on earth is named.

We believe in God the Son,
who lives in our hearts through faith,
and fills us with his love.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit,
who strengthens us
with power from on high.

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

Prayers of Intercession (Rick Nelms)

Today's intercessions will use words from the five marks of mission which we have been considering in recent weeks. We will use silence, confident that, as David wrote in today's psalm "Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts." Confident that we follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ who often went alone to pray. Confident that if we cannot find the words, then as Paul said "The Holy Spirit is here to help us. When we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit prays for us in ways that cannot be put into words and so all of our thoughts are known to God." [Romans 8:26-27]

Heavenly Father, we pray that the Church of Christ will proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom and will teach, baptise and nurture new believers.

silence

God of the Church, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for our stewardship of creation, that we will strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain and renew the life of the earth.

silence

Creator God, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for all the world's people. In our prayer we challenge violence of every kind.

silence

God of love, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for the queen and for the leaders of the nations. We pray for leaders to pursue peace and reconciliation.

silence

God of peace, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for our local communities. We pray for the transforming of all the unjust structures which people sinfully divide up society.

silence

God who created us all equal and loves us all equally, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for people who suffer in mind, in body or in spirit. We pray for all people who respond to human need by loving service and especially people who work in the NHS.

silence

God of comfort, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, we pray for the communion of saints. We pray for people who are dying. We pray for people who are grieving. We thank you for the lives of those who have died in faith, including those whose faith is known only to you.

silence

Surely Your salvation is at hand for those who worship You, that Your glory may dwell on Earth and in Heaven. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. Righteousness will go before You, and will make a path for Your steps.

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

The Collect

Merciful God,
you have prepared for those who love you
such good things as pass our understanding:
pour into our hearts such love toward you
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,
may obtain your promises,
which exceed all that we can desire;
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 for ever.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All: 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 for ever.

Amen.

Hymn

I And can it be that I should gain
 an interest in the Saviour's blood?
 Died he for me, who caused his pain?

For me, who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

- 2 'Tis mystery all : the Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
to sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
let angel minds enquire no more.
- 3 Long my imprisoned spirit lay
fast bound in sin and nature's night;
thine eye diffused a quickening ray -
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.
- 4 No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in him, is mine!
Alive in him, my living head,
and clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach the eternal throne,
and claim the crown, through Christ, my own.

Conclusion

The almighty and merciful Lord,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
bless us and keep us.**Amen.**

**All: 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.**