

**Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> September –  
Sixteenth Sunday After Trinity**  
Led by Sue Nelms, LLM



### **Gathering and Greeting**

God in Christ has revealed his glory.  
**Come let us worship.**

From the rising of the sun to its setting  
**the Lord's name is greatly to be praised.**

Give him praise, you servants of the Lord.  
**O praise the name of the Lord!**

### **Opening Prayer**

**We praise you, living God:**

you give strength to the earth that sustains us,  
you open your hand to feed all living things.

**We praise you, Lord Jesus Christ:**

you teach us with stories of seeds and weeds and harvest time,  
you call us to accept your word and bear much fruit.

**We praise you, Holy Spirit, fire of love:**

you are the breath of life in every creature,  
you refresh our thirsty souls with grace.

**Blessed be God, Source of Wisdom,  
living Word, abiding Spirit,  
Blessed be God for ever.**

### **Hymn**

Jesus is Lord! Creation's voice proclaims it,  
for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made.  
Jesus is Lord! The universe declares it.

Sun, moon and stars in heaven cry Jesus is Lord!

Chorus:

Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord!

Praise him with alleluias for Jesus is Lord!

Jesus is Lord! Yet from his throne eternal  
in flesh he came to die in pain on Calvary's tree.

Jesus is Lord! From him all life proceeding,  
yet gave his life a ransom thus setting us free.

Chorus

Jesus is Lord! O'er sin the mighty conqueror,  
from death he rose and all his foes shall own his name.

Jesus is Lord! God sends his Holy Spirit  
to show by works of power that Jesus is Lord.

Chorus

### **Meditation**

Their delight is in the law of the Lord  
and they meditate on his law day and night.

Like a tree planted by streams of water  
bearing fruit in due season, with leaves that do not wither,  
whatever they do, it shall prosper.

*Psalm 1:2-3*

### **Confession**

We confess our sin, and the sins of our society, in the misuse of God's  
creation.

God our Father, we are sorry  
for the times when we have used your gifts carelessly,  
and acted ungratefully.

Hear our prayer, and in your mercy:

**forgive us and help us.**

We enjoy the fruits of the harvest,  
but sometimes forget that you have given them to us.  
Father, in your mercy:  
**forgive us and help us.**

We belong to a people who are full and satisfied,  
but ignore the cry of those who are hungry.  
Father, in your mercy:  
**forgive us and help us.**

We are thoughtless,  
and do not care enough for the world you have made.  
Father, in your mercy:  
**forgive us and help us.**

We store up goods for ourselves alone,  
as if there were no God and no heaven.  
Father, in your mercy:  
**forgive us and help us.**

The Lord enrich us with his grace,  
and nourish us with his blessing;  
the Lord defend us in trouble and keep us from all evil;  
the Lord accept our prayers,  
and absolve us from our offences,  
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour.  
**Amen.**

### **Readings by Dona McCulloch**

#### **James 3.13-4.3, 7-8a**

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup> For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of

every kind. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

**4** Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures.

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

### **Mark 9.30-37**

<sup>30</sup> They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; <sup>31</sup> for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, 'The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again.' <sup>32</sup> But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

<sup>33</sup> Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, 'What were you arguing about on the way?' <sup>34</sup> But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. <sup>35</sup> He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, 'Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all.'

<sup>36</sup> Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, <sup>37</sup> 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.'

### **Reflection by Rev Robert Dolman**

#### **Welcoming a child**

Stuart and Carol Lawrence, twins; Judith Payne; Martin Glennie; Shirley Hobbs; David Keatley; Alison Russell. They are some of the ten or eleven year old fellow pupils I can recall from Miss Davies' class in

Coundon Court Primary School, rather a long time ago. Ordinary children from ordinary homes in an ordinary school in an ordinary city suburb.

It was an ordinary child like one of them who features in our Gospel reading today. The child was not particularly memorable, just average. So average and unmemorable that his or her name has not been recorded. Maybe in old age a man or woman would keep on repeating the story of how the preacher Jesus of Nazareth had singled them out from the crowd, put his arms round them and said words that at the time they didn't understand. Rather like some old people in the nineteenth century remembered how a venerable preacher called John Wesley had laid his hand upon their infant heads in blessing.

What did Jesus think about children? There are two different Gospel stories which shed some light on the question. In the episode we heard this morning, Jesus takes a child in his arms and says, 'Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me.' In another story the disciples try to push away the children whose parents want Jesus to bless them. They want to safeguard his privacy. Jesus is cross and says, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a child will never enter it.'

There is a clear overlap in the two stories. The Kingdom is at the centre of Jesus's preaching and children have an assured place in its hospitality. In the one story, Jesus identifies himself with the children. To reject children is to reject Jesus himself and to reject God. In the other story we learn that anyone at all who wants to enter the Kingdom must become as a little child.

So Jesus identifies himself with children. This is a remarkable thing to do; he is ranking himself with all those non-persons in his world who have no legal status or social standing. In Jewish thinking children were linked with the deaf and dumb and others without a voice. The central thing about the message of Jesus is that the Kingdom of God is for the little people, the outsiders who are vulnerable, the sick and marginalized who are often neglected and ignored, even despised.

When Christians began to understand that and to embody it in the life of the Church by seeing and treating people differently they were embarking on a quite new and distinctive pattern of behaviour.

For, remember that many human societies, not all primitive and savage ones either, have failed to rise to that level of compassion for those who are helpless and defenceless. In some cultures, for example, it was accepted practice to expose unwanted newly born children; that is, to abandon them on the hillside or in the bush and so leave them to the mercy of the elements and the wild animals. This might be because they were handicapped and could never be economically productive. It might be because they were girls like Judith Payne and Alison Russell who would not contribute to the military strength of the tribe. It might simply be that they were an extra mouth to feed.

It is important to remember that the Christian mission, with its belief in the unique worth to God of each individual, played a major role in the eradication of this practice. This began in the early Church and the struggle to maintain the value of human lives in this way reaches into modern times.

The nineteenth century Scottish Presbyterian missionary, Mary Slessor of Calabar in Nigeria, for instance, played an important part in the crusade against the infanticide of twins. The native tribes believed that twins like Stuart and Carol Lawrence were an abnormality and that one of the two was a child of the devil. As there was no means of telling which one, both had to be destroyed.

Jesus Christ undermines and subverts the traditional values and practices of society after society. The idols we create and worship are exposed and challenged. Often Jesus calls into question things that are honoured and enquires about the people we have let sink to the bottom of the pile.

And when Christians, like those brothers, the disciples James and John, aspire to be great and squabble for position, they are reminded that Jesus said he would be present in the lowest and most despised members of the social community. They are reminded that their calling is to be servants, not masters.

Some have vigorously opposed Christianity's concern for the weak and the emphasis it places on humble service. The nineteenth century

German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, for example, thought the weak were parasites on society. Empathy with the weak made you weak yourself. Nietzsche despised pity and mercy. They sapped the robustness of your humanity. And it wasn't the meek who deserved to inherit the earth but the powerful. Nietzsche loathed humility; what fired his mind and heart was his belief in power, conquest and victory. His hero was the Übermensch, the Superman. His ideas fed the mind of Adolf Hitler and his idea of a master race.

Few people today would claim to be disciples of Nietzsche but perhaps some of his ideas about power are more subtly influential than we care to admit.

And our own history in these islands is not unblemished, despite our Christian heritage. It has become fashionable to advocate a return to Victorian values. And there certainly are qualities in the Victorians we can admire: their inventiveness and entrepreneurial vision, their hard work, their evangelical zeal, their mission to civilize the world.

But there is a darker side too. You can read about it in the savage satire of Charles Dickens portraying the squalor of the Victorian slums. At the very age when Stuart and Carol Lawrence twins, Martin Glennie and David Keatley and the rest of us in Coundon Court School were about to transfer to a secondary school for several more years of free education, many Victorian girls were beginning work in unhealthy weaving factories and boys were embarking on a hazardous lifetime, decades, spent underground hacking seams of coal. One of my grandfathers was one of them. And not all Christians were in the forefront of wanting to change all that.

Even today our track record is badly scarred when children are trafficked from one country to another, or when in boarding schools, voluntary organizations, even churches, children are robbed of their innocence and damaged for life by horrendous abuse. The chilling words of Jesus's parable still rebuke and haunt us: 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Then, at the other end of life, in a few years Stuart and Carol Lawrence, twins, and the others, or some of them at least, will be in care homes. It may not always be wonderful but it is a distinct advance

on the harsh world of the Victorian workhouse where old couples were often separated and where younger people who had fallen on hard times were given a grim life sentence of backbreaking jobs, crushing bones or splitting rocks, or routine tasks of mind blowing tedium and where a ravenous little one called Oliver Twist dared to ask for more.

What is the test of a civilized society? In 1977 the Vice President of the United States of America, Hubert Humphrey said, 'the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children: those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, the handicapped.'

That is a manifesto for the way we are to treat children, and all the little ones whom Jesus welcomes into his Kingdom. What lessons do we learn? Maybe that an Established Church has too often been too closely associated with the rich and privileged. Maybe that a movement like Methodism has too often cosied up to any of its members who acquire celebrity in sport or entertainment or political life. Maybe that the real service of Christ is done out of the public limelight amongst the little almost invisible ones, in giving help and hope.

And what of the saying then, 'Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it'? Some have a bit romantically thought that Jesus meant that little children are pure and humble and innocent and that that is the qualification for entering the Kingdom. Of course, little children can be like that but they can also be selfish, aggressive, conceited, dishonest, manipulative and rude. Perhaps what Jesus has in mind is precisely their littleness, their inability to cope on their own, their dependence on God. And this after all is sound Christian Gospel doctrine, held right across the board.

Augustus Montague Toplady was a contemporary of John Wesley; they crossed theological swords as Toplady was a rather more extreme Protestant. But one Roman Catholic priest said that Toplady's hymn 'Rock of Ages cleft for me' exactly expresses what a Roman Catholic believes when he goes to Mass: 'Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless look to thee for grace.'



As we grow older we lose something of the sense of dependence. We lose the sense of awe and wonder at the magic of creation. It all becomes familiar and we are trapped in the drab routines of mundane daily life, concerned with being in control of things and with securing an identity and a future for ourselves. Wordsworth put it memorably: 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy. Shades of the prison house begin to grow upon the growing boy.'

When Jesus met an earnest young ruler, rich in the goods of this world but desperately seeking inner freedom from the prison house in which he felt immured, Jesus told him that his riches were the problem. He had to declutter his life if he wanted to be in touch with the trusting child within.

He had, to use the familiar phrase, to be born again, to become as a little child. And so it is for us all, from Coundon Court Primary School and everywhere else.

### **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 one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

### **Prayers of Intercession led by John Crang**

In the joy and hope of resurrection and as God's beloved children let us pray:

Eternal God, you crown the year with your goodness and you give us the fruits of the earth in their season: grant that we may use them to your glory, for the relief of those in need and for our own well-being.

We thank you for you for these gifts at this Harvest Festival-tide as we pray for ourselves and others:

Praying for ourselves

From the pages of novels, lines of poetry, Cinema screens and song lyrics - God of love - help us to discern your truth. In a flash of realisation, a surge of hope, a jab of conscience or a quiet reflection - God of wisdom - **help us to recognise your truth.**

From the insightful advice of a friend or the startling words of a stranger - God of grace - help us to hear your truth. When we find you in unexpected places. When your voice disturbs our complacency God of compassion - **help us to understand your truth.**

In a world of spin and sound-bites, tweets and texts, In the noise and clamour of everyday life God of stillness - help us to pause -- and listen for your truth, Forgive us when we misinterpret our own wishful thinking as your guidance. Whether you speak to us in a mighty symphony or in a still, small voice - open our hearts to receive your message of love, hope and compassion - **help us to hear your voice.**

Praying for others

For people forced to travel: refugees... the homeless... wayfarers. Be present with them on the road;  
**Be present to them.**

For people best by danger: living in war zones... victims of crime... those working on front lines... be with them in their anxiety:  
**Be present to them.**

For people lacking direction: the confused... the listless... the despairing... Show them the way:  
**Be present to them.**

For people whose way is barred; the hungry... the prisoners... the unemployed.... Set their feet on the road:

**Be present to them.**

For people wanting to turn back; the persecuted... the failed...the discouraged... Encourage and strengthen them:

**Be present to them.**

For people who wander in darkness: the depressed... the bereaved... the dying... Shed you light upon them:

**Be present to them.**

For people who often walk alone: the isolated... the handicapped... the housebound... Be their companion:

**Be present to them.**

Hear us as we remember those who have died in the peace of Christ, both those who have confessed the faith, and those whose faith is known to you alone, and grant us with them a share in your eternal kingdom.

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

### **Collect**

Lord of creation,  
whose glory is around and within us:  
open our eyes to your wonders,  
that we may serve you with reverence  
and know your peace at our lives' end,  
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.**

### **Hymn – Meekness and Majesty**

Meekness and majesty,  
Manhood and Deity,  
In perfect harmony,  
The Man who is God.  
Lord of eternity  
Dwells in humanity,  
Kneels in humility  
And washes our feet.

Chorus:  
O what a mystery,  
Meekness and majesty.  
Bow down and worship  
For this is your God,  
This is your God.

Father's pure radiance,  
Perfect in innocence,  
Yet learns obedience  
To death on a cross.  
Suffering to give us life,  
Conquering through sacrifice,  
And as they crucify  
Prays: 'Father forgive.'  
Chorus

Wisdom unsearchable,

God the invisible,  
Love indestructible  
In frailty appears.  
Lord of infinity,  
Stooping so tenderly,  
Lifts our humanity  
To the heights of His throne.  
Chorus

### **Conclusion**

Go in strong and growing faith.  
Trust in the tenderness of Christ  
to heal a bruised and broken world.  
**Thanks be to God.**

Go in eager and refreshing hope.  
Work with Christ risen from the dead,  
to fulfil the promise of a new creation.  
**Thanks be to God.**

Let us go in peace,  
to treasure and to tend the world God made and loves.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen.**