

COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION
SUNDAY 1 OCTOBER 2023 - TRINITY 17

COLLECT

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 for ever. Amen.

Psalm 25.1-8

- 1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul;
O my God, in you I trust; ♦
let me not be put to shame;
let not my enemies triumph over me.
- 2 Let none who look to you be put to shame, ♦
but let the treacherous be shamed and frustrated.
- 3 Make me to know your ways, O Lord, ♦
and teach me your paths.
- 4 Lead me in your truth and teach me, ♦
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you have I hoped all the day long.
- 5 Remember, Lord, your compassion and love, ♦
for they are from everlasting.
- 6 Remember not the sins of my youth
or my transgressions, ♦
but think on me in your goodness, O Lord,
according to your steadfast love.
- 7 Gracious and upright is the Lord; ♦
therefore shall he teach sinners in the way.
- 8 He will guide the humble in doing right ♦
and teach his way to the lowly.

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Philippians, chapter 2, verses 1-13

Imitating Christ's Humility

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

Therefore God also highly exalted him
and gave him the name
that is above every name,
so that at the name of Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Shining as Lights in the World

Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation (for Communion services only)

Alleluia! Alleluia!

Your word is truth, O Lord: consecrate us in the truth.

Alleluia!

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to Matthew, chapter 21. 23-32.

Glory to you, O Lord

The Authority of Jesus Questioned

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.

The Parable of the Two Sons

'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.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

A Reflection from Hannah...

The letter to the Philippians is written by St Paul, who is writing from prison, thanking the church in Philippi for the gift they have sent him- in Roman prisons you had to rely on your friends to feed you, and the Philippian Church had sent practical help. Paul's response is to encourage them to have the mindset of Christ. What is that? Well, he goes on to explain- 'who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage- rather he made himself nothing...'

We might know those words well- so well, that they feel safe and easy. I wonder is this how we think of Christ though? If we were to play 'word association' game with the word Jesus, what might we come up with? We may discover that we assume Christ is a good deal safer than this passage suggests. The words Paul uses are certainly not that!

'He made himself nothing. Taking the very nature of a servant, he humbled himself. He was obedient to death- even death on a cross.'

Perhaps one way to describe that mindset of Christ as Paul puts it, is to think of it as being downwardly mobile. Before his earthly life people had expected a messiah who would be kingly in every sense that they understood- powerful in battle, literally overthrowing the Roman empire, unmistakably there and known. Not someone who hung around some Galilean backwater, mixed with people of dubious reputation and then died- the humiliating, degrading, shameful death of crucifixion.

And the Christian way means that we too are invited into a downwardly mobile way of life. One in which nothing safe is promised, and in which we are encouraged to live bravely, sacrificially... in the pattern of Christ.

Part of that invitation is to trust that God will use our actions to bless others, even if we never see the consequences ourselves. Indeed, that's Paul's story; two millennia ago, he wrote a letter of encouragement to his friends in Philippi. That letter, borne out of the circumstances of imprisonment, of probable imminent death was, in spite of the unstable and unsafe conditions of the Roman empire, safely delivered to the church in Philippi. They held his words dear, they kept them, they responded to them. As far as his earthly life was concerned, that was all Paul knew. We know what happened to that letter, but Paul had to trust the rest to God. May we too have the mindset of Christ- to act in obedience and trust the rest to God.