

Basingstoke and Reading Methodist Circuit Service for Sunday 6th September 2020

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?”

Welcome to worship this morning. I wonder what the question above means to you. Perhaps it causes you to think about the television programme where people trace their family history with the help of experts. Perhaps it feels like a very impertinent question for a Sunday morning! As you worship where you are, take time to ask yourself “Who am I?” and, in response, recognise and know deep within you that you are a child of the living, loving God, made in God’s image, loved to the uttermost.

In verse 2 of our first hymn this morning “Born in song!” we are reminded that each one of us, you and me, bears the image of God; “Praise to God, for He is the one who has made us. Praise to God! We his image bear”.

Hymn: Born in song (Singing the Faith 21, Hymns and Psalms 486)

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| 1 | Born in song ! God's people have always been singing, Born in song ! Hearts and voices raised. So today we worship together ; God alone is worthy to be praised. | 4 | Sing the song ! God's Spirit is poured out among us. Sing the song ! He has made us anew. Ev'ry member part of the Body ; given his power, his will to seek and do. |
| 2 | Praise to God ! For he is the one who has made us. Praise to God ! We his image bear. Heaven and earth are full of his glory ; let creation praise him everywhere. | 5 | Tell the world ! All power to Jesus is given. Tell the world ! He is with us always. Spread the word, that all may receive him every tongue confess and sing his praise. |
| 3 | Christ is King ! He left all the glory of heaven. Christ is King ! Born to share in our pain ; crucified, for sinners atoning, risen, exalted, soon to come again. | 6 | Then the end ! Christ Jesus shall reign in his glory. Then the end of all earthly days. Yet above the song will continue ; all his people still shall sing his praise. |

Brian Hoare (b. 1935)

Prayers of Adoration and Confession and the Lord’s Prayer

Eternal God, creator of all that is seen and unseen we are here to worship you this day. We are here to praise you, to lift our hearts in worship; you alone are worthy of all the glory, all the honour and all the praise for you are God, our creator and sustainer.

We come this day Lord, knowing that we do not live lives that are continuous songs of worship to you. There are jarred chords, notes that sound out of place, passages of disharmony as we struggle in our relationships with others, as we see everyone as a human being made in your image, as we fail to love them and in so doing wrong your heart of love. We take a moment to reflect and to bring those times in our own lives, particularly in recent times, before you. We know that when we come before you and are truly sorry then you will forgive and so we come now and each make our own confession before you, the One who created and loves us.

SILENCE

Lord, you birthed this world and gave us life. We thank you that, because you loved this world so much, you sent Jesus who died and rose again that we might not live lives of mediocrity, but lives that are full to overflowing with your love. We thank you that we can know your forgiveness and each moment be energised by the power of the Holy Spirit for all that you call us to be and do in your name. May our lives be songs of praise and thanksgiving to you and may we reflect who you are in all we do, all we say and all we are. We ask this prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus and share together in the prayer He taught us to pray. We say together The Lord's Prayer.

The Lord's Prayer.

Reading Psalm 139: 1-14a

Reflection

A little while ago, on one of the Retreat Days at Silchester Methodist Church, we created fingerprint trees. We each had a small sheet of paper and painted the trunk and branches of our individual trees with a paintbrush. Then came the really interesting (and messy) element of the activity. The leaves were to be added by dipping a finger into a pot of green paint then each leaf was created with a fingerprint.

For me, the joy was in the process, rather than the product. Comparing my fingerprint tree to others, reaffirmed that my artistic gifting is much more in a musical direction! But I realised that my tree in its own way was special and valuable as all the others and there could never be another one the same as no-one else has the same fingerprint as me.

The process of 'creating' the fingerprint tree made a lasting impression on me; a reminder that, as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:10: "We are God's handiwork..." (NIV). You and I are created with the fingerprints of God, each of us was loved into being and will be loved into all eternity. As we live let us reflect the image of our Creator by showing and sharing God's love.

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To be loved by Almighty God is a cause for great celebration. We sing about that now as we sing "Come on and celebrate" – in which we are reminded that Jesus loves us and gives us life...or "There is no moment of my life" where we are reminded of how precious we are to our Creator.

[Hymn: Come on and celebrate \(Singing the Faith 44\)](#) or **There is no moment of my life (Hymns and Psalms 428)**

Come on and celebrate
his gift of love, we will celebrate
the Son of God who loved us
and gave us life.
We'll shout your praise, O King,
you give us joy nothing else can bring,
we'll give to you our offering
in celebration praise.

Come on and celebrate,
celebrate,
celebrate and sing,
celebrate and sing to the King.
Come on and celebrate,
celebrate,
celebrate and sing,
celebrate and sing to the King.

Patricia Morgan and Dave Bankhead

Reading: John 15: 1-17

SERMON

Three pairs of eyes looked out from the paper as I held it. Each pair of eyes was smiling and I reflected on the odd, yet strangely-comforting feeling of looking into my own eyes - only then they were over thirty years younger and not in need of varifocals! For as long as I can remember, I have loved photographs. I can certainly appreciate a photograph of a landscape but I especially love photographs with people in and will, given the opportunity, spend hours poring over albums, enjoying the memories the photographs evoke and the stories that lie behind them. On this particular occasion, as I held the photograph, and the eyes of my Grandma and Grandad smiled from the paper alongside my eyes, I was reminded of how they, and so many others, not least my parents, have helped to shape my identity – to shape who I am.

Rewind just over 2000 years ago and we find Jesus speaking to his disciples about who He is and who they are in relationship to Him. A core element of Jesus' teaching is helping people to understand more about who He is and in so doing to deepen in their relationship with God. Jesus uses objects or roles that would be familiar to those to whom He is speaking to share with them something of his identity – of who He is. These include Jesus describing himself as “The Good Shepherd”, “the Bread of Life” and “the Light of the World”. In the opening sentence of our reading from John's Gospel today, Jesus shares with his first disciples “I am the true vine”.

These words form part of what scholars have termed Jesus' ‘Farewell Discourse’, the final words of teaching he gives to his disciples in the Upper Room where they share in the Last Supper and before they reach the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus is arrested. Perhaps these words “I am the vine” are said in the Upper Room, perhaps as they travel to the Garden and Jesus spots a vine on the way. Whatever the exact location, the image of the vine would have been familiar to the disciples from hearing the Hebrew Scriptures in which God's people, Israel were described as the vine. Here then, in this final opportunity to share with his disciples before his arrest, Jesus reminds them who he is and who they are: “I am the true vine” says Jesus – “I am the vine, you are the branches...Remain in me and I will remain in you”.

Cut off from the vine – its source of nourishment and life – no branch will survive on its own. Jesus reminds the disciples then and us, as Jesus' disciples today, of where our identity lies – in Him – in Christ. In Ephesians 2: v 4 and 5 Paul writes “ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ, even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved”. Asked the question “Who do you think you are?” I wonder what you would say. Perhaps it would be something about your family relationships; perhaps something about your work or voluntary roles that you hold. We are reminded in this reading that our first answer to “Who do you think you are?” should be “I'm in Christ – a child of the living God”. When you remain in the vine you are attached to God by a love from which nothing can ever separate you. “Remain in my love” says Jesus in our reading from John's Gospel.

Remaining attached to the vine, remaining in Jesus love, living out our identity as children of God, not only has an impact on who we are but on those around us, not least in our relationships with others in the body of Christ – the Church. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused us and should continue to cause us, to do much thinking about where our identity lies as congregations. We have realised that, whilst our church buildings are prayed-in places that are significant to us, the church is so much more than our buildings and has continued whilst they have been closed. Our identity lies in Christ, not in our buildings. Banners have appeared outside churches and on social media stating, “The church is not closed; it has been deployed”. We have found new ways, not only of gathering as the people of God but new ways of sharing God's love with one another and our communities following Jesus' command to his first disciples in our reading from John's Gospel – “Love each other as I have loved you”. Perhaps your relationship with others including some people you have known for ages will have deepened through regular individual conversations rather than conversations in the “after-the-service busyness” or simply because, perhaps for a little while, the pace of life slowed down.

As someone personally bereaved because of Covid-19 I confess, at this time, to finding it difficult to think, speak or write about “opportunity” in the same sentence as the virus. But as congregations I do believe we need to guard against simply returning to “the way things were”. I believe we need to think deeply about what

we have learned over recent months – and what that means for what we lay down and what we take up in the future in order that we may, as Jesus says, bear fruit to God’s glory and show ourselves to be disciples of Jesus.

Looking at that photograph of me with my grandparents taken over three decades ago caused me to reflect on what people see when they look at me.

What do people see in my actions or expressions?

What do others ‘see’ as they hear my words?

These are questions we might each ask ourselves and strive for the answer to be that people see in us lives that point to Jesus. Alongside this is the challenge of how we see others.

Do we see all those who we encounter as made in the image of God or just those whose views align with ours?

Twice in the encounter in our reading from John’s Gospel, Jesus tells the disciples – “Love one another”. There is no “if” or “unless” attached to that command. Jesus doesn’t say “Love one another if…” or “Love one another unless…”. “Love one another” says Jesus. Our calling as those whose identity is in Christ, who remain in His love, is to love one another in ways that enable human flourishing, not diminishing, to love one another in ways that enable every encounter to be life-giving, May we, nourished and fed in our relationship with Jesus, be ready to share his love with others. May our lives be pictures in which Jesus is clearly seen. AMEN

‘Thoughtful Spot’

Either now and/or at a later stage, you may want to spend time in prayerful reflection. As the new Methodist year begins, how do you want to grow in your relationship with Jesus this year? How can you reach out with the love of Jesus to others? Share your thoughts with the Lord who loves you and take time to listen for what He wants to share with you.

[Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling \(Singing the Faith 503/Hymns and Psalms 267\)](#)

1
Love divine, all loves excelling,
joy of heaven to earth come down,
fix in us thy humble dwelling,
all thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
pure, unbounded love thou art;
visit us with thy salvation,
enter every trembling heart.

2
Come, almighty to deliver,
let us all thy life receive;
suddenly return, and never,
never more thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
serve thee as thy hosts above,
pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,
glory in thy perfect love.

3
Finish then thy new creation,
pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee:
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise!

Charles Wesley
(1707–1788)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Loving Lord, we thank you that we are yours, each one of us covered in your fingerprints. We thank you that when all else around us changes, we can know that there is nothing that can ever separate us from your love, a love shown most clearly the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Help us, by the power of your Spirit to continue to abide in your love and to show that love to others. AMEN.

As part of our Prayers of Intercession today we will use the hymn “For the healing of the nations” (Singing the Faith 696 or Hymns and Psalms 402”. You may want to use the prayers below or listen to what God is laying on your heart to pray for as you read the hymn verses.

For the healing of the nations,

Lord, we pray with one accord;

For a just and equal sharing

Of the things that earth affords.

To a life of love in action

Help us rise and pledge our word.

Gracious God, we pray this day for healing; healing between and within nations, healing between and within families, healing for individuals in body, mind, and spirit. We pray Lord, as we read in the prophet Amos Chapter 5 and v 24 “...let justice roll down like a river, and righteousness like a never-failing stream”. We pray that you will show us how we can be people of justice, peace, and healing where you have called us.

Lead us forward into freedom;

From despair your world release,

That, redeemed from war and hatred,

All may come and go in peace.

Show us how through care and goodness

Fear will die and hope increase.

We pray for all who are not ‘free’ this day; those who are held in captivity as a result of war, those persecuted or imprisoned for their faith, those who are ‘trapped’ in addiction, poverty or despair. We pray that you will show us who we might reach out to this day and show your compassion and the hope that only you can bring.

All that kills abundant living,

Let it from the earth be banned;

Pride of status, race, or schooling,

Dogmas that obscure your plan.

In our common quest for justice

May we hallow life’s brief span.

Lord, as we recognise that all humanity is made in your image, we pray for those who face discrimination, whose voices are stifled, or who cannot speak up for fear of their lives. We pray that in the 'brief span' of the earthly life we have, we may see all those we meet through your eyes, each uniquely created and gifted by you; may our words and actions contribute to 'abundant living' for all those around us.

You, Creator-God, have written

Your great name on humankind;

For our growing in your likeness

Bring the life of Christ to mind;

That by our response and service

Earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kaan (1929-2009) CCLI Song Number 3200067

Finally, Lord, we pray for ourselves. Help us to remain attached to you, the vine, and the source of all life. Help us to grow more and more in Christlikeness and to bear abundant fruit, fruit that will last, in Jesus name. AMEN.

As our service draws to a close, we sing together our final hymn which emphasises that each day we are called to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ and His great love to all whom we meet.

[Hymn God's spirit is in my heart \(Singing the Faith 404/Hymns and Psalms 315\)](#)

1

God's spirit is in my heart;
he has called me and set me apart.
This is what I have to do,
what I have to do:

*He sent me to give the good news to the
poor,
tell prisoners that they are prisoners no
more,
tell blind people that they can see,
and set the down-trodden free,
and go tell everyone
the news that the kingdom of God has
come;
and go tell everyone
the news that God's kingdom has come.*

2

Just as the Father sent me,
so I'm sending you out to be
my witness throughout the world —
the whole of the world:

3

Don't carry a load in your pack;
you don't need two shirts on your back;
God's workers can earn their own keep —
can earn their own keep:

4

Don't worry what you have to say;
don't worry, because on that day
God's spirit will speak in your heart —
will speak in your heart:

v. 1 and refrain Alan T. Dale
(1902–1979)

vv. 2-4 Hubert Richards (b.1921)

The Grace

As you say these words, hold in your mind and heart, those with whom you have been worshipping today.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, evermore. AMEN”