

The United Benefice of St John the Baptist, Shedfield and St Nicholas, Wickham

Being Church Together – At Church and At Home

Sunday 13th September, 2020

Trinity 14



At church or at home, we're being church, together

Welcome!



'Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (Matthew 18.18).

What are we doing when we worship? It's impossible to generalise, of course, but here's what it seems to me we might have in common:

- We're meeting together – wherever and however that might be.
- We're turning our hearts and minds towards God (perhaps with a sense of not having done very well in our discipleship).
- We're offering praise and love to God through our actions, words and offerings.
- We share in the family prayer and we ask for healing and peace.
- Through Scripture we hear how other people have experienced God in their lives and we remember together how in Jesus God made visible his love for us and his purpose for us.
- And then we make real in our everyday lives those things which we have done together, for the sake of the rest of God's world.

Jesus reminds us that being church together requires us to balance what we 'bind on earth' (to enable a community to work effectively together) with whatever we 'loose on earth' (so that a community can be free to move with the Spirit). This morning's focus is on 'being church together' in the changing times in which we find ourselves.

Although churches may now be opened for private prayer and public worship, the continuing coronavirus crisis means that you may not feel able to attend services in our church buildings. The ministry team has created this act of worship for you to use at home, in the anticipation that it will help the whole worshipping community, wherever we may be, to spend time together with God and to encourage us all to know that we are sharing this service with each other.

In church, a candle will be lit at the beginning of the service as we pray for those who are unable to be with us in person: perhaps if you are worshipping with us at home, you might light a candle too, as a focus for this time of shared prayer and reflection?

Call to worship

Lord,
 calm my thoughts as I come into your presence to worship you.
 Help me to be open to you,
 to hear your Word,
 proclaim your glory,
 and celebrate the good news of Jesus Christ.
 Focus my mind on your presence.
 Remind me that we are joining together in worship in church and at home.
 May your name be glorified in this time together,
 in words, in music, in sound, in silence.
 Amen.

Hymn: Tell out my soul

Read/pray the words or join in here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3E7QWLyDWe8>

- 1 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord;
 unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;
 tender to me, the promise of his word;
 in God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.
- 2 Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name:
 make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;
 his mercy sure, from age to age the same;
 his holy name, the Lord, the mighty one.
- 3 Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word:
 firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.

Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord
to children's children and for evermore.

Words: T Dudley-Smith (b. 1926) Tune: Woodlands

We pray together and ask for forgiveness

Sometimes we forget to do what God asks us to do or we do not listen when he speaks to us – sometimes on purpose, sometimes in weakness. Let's be still for a moment as we ask for God's forgiveness.

Perhaps you might clasp your hands together as if you were holding something... Take a few moments to remember the times when we have chosen to be selfish.

Father God, we are sorry that we are selfish. We forget to share everything that is good in our lives.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear us and forgive us.

Perhaps you might cross your hands over your body, touching your shoulders... Take a few moments to remember times when you have been slow to recognise God's presence in our lives.

Father God, we are sorry because we are unkind and uncaring. We don't trust you or ourselves, and we ignore the good news of your love.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear us and forgive us.

Perhaps you might place your hands on your knees or look at your feet... Take a few moments to remember those whom we choose to put out of our minds and our hearts.

Father God, we are sorry that we are lazy and thoughtless. We don't look up to you or out to your world.

Lord, hear us.

Lord, hear us and forgive us.

Perhaps you might hold out your hands, palms up...

Father God,

through Jesus you gave us

a kingdom that cannot be destroyed.

Forgive us our sins

and open our eyes to your truth.

Give us ears to hear your word,

and stretch our minds so that we might grow in faith.

Open our hearts so that we might serve you faithfully and well,
and worship you with all our being,
through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord.
Amen.

A Collect for today

Lord God,
we lift our hearts to you
in gratitude for your love to us.
Take our lives –
our work and our leisure,
the ordinary things of life and the special things,
the sadness and the joy.
Accept, we pray, our praise and thanksgiving
as we offer ourselves to you in worship,
through Jesus Christ, our Lord.
Amen.

This morning's reading

Matthew 18.18–33

¹⁸Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

²¹ Then Peter came and said to him, 'Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?' ²²Jesus said to him, 'Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.'

²³ 'For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. ²⁴When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything." ²⁷And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow-slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, "Pay what you owe."

²⁹Then his fellow-slave fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." ³⁰But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he

should pay the debt. ³¹When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³²Then his lord summoned him and said to him, “You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. ³³Should you not have had mercy on your fellow-slave, as I had mercy on you?”

Time to reflect – with the Revd Jane Isaac, Incumbent of the United Benefice of St John the Baptist, Shedfield and St Nicholas, Wickham

The early Christians were clear about what being church together was all about: Jesus’ message was about God’s kingdom, about the changing of the world order into something very different, about turning established values upside down. We know from Paul’s letters that putting those visions and values into practice wasn’t quite as straightforward! ‘Trust God, trust your Lord and Saviour, trust each other’ is his constant reminder to those first church members.

This morning’s gospel reading is a salutary reminder of how important it is that we trust each other if we are to balance what we ‘bind on earth’ with whatever we ‘loose on earth’ (so that we’re able to put down roots and grow our history and tradition whilst still being able to move with the Spirit). These are exciting, challenging, changing times to be church together, just as they were for those who travelled before us in the faith 2000 years ago. Just like us, they were working out how to be church in church and how to be church at home in changing times!

Whenever and wherever we worship, faithful Christian discipleship requires many things of us: it requires us to engage with the Scriptures, peopled as they are with those who’ve walked this road of discipleship before us – think of this morning’s Gospel story about how those workers came to understand their relationship with each other and how it mirrors Paul’s ideas about managing the life of the community of faith. Faithful discipleship also requires us to spend time privately with God, in silence or in words; and it requires a commitment to social justice, to caring for the poor, to charitable giving, to working for the good of our communities.

And Christian disciples are also required to meet together for worship. Here in the benefice and in common with churches all over the country, for the foreseeable that means we’re worshipping each of us in our own homes or worshipping in one or other of our churches. At home or in church, in whatever new normal we find ourselves, we’ll be worshipping together and sharing the same words, the same prayers, the same music. That’s your ministry team’s commitment to you, the worshipping community we’re privileged to serve.

What we do, and *how* we do it, and *when* we do it expresses and reflects our shared identity as a community of faith. Worship isn’t about us as individuals – it mustn’t be about ‘my’ 8 o’clock, ‘my’ evensong, ‘my’ parish communion. That doesn’t mean that we all have to do the same thing in the same kind of way, and these past weeks

have shown that we're a whole lot better at managing 'new normals' in church than we ever would have imagined! Our church backgrounds, our faith journeys, our worship preferences – they all vary from person to person, of course they do. There are those of us who, like the prophet Isaiah, are brought near to the presence of God in a temple filled with smoke; for some of us incense does nothing but bring on a tickly cough. There are those for whom a Wesley hymn leads to a vision of heaven – and there are those for whom Matt Redman provides 10,000 reasons for doing it differently. There are those for whom the awesome experience of 'God with us' draws away the veil that keeps us from seeing divine glory all around – and there are those who reach out towards divine glory through movement and drama and Messy Church.

It's not just Messy Church that's messy. *All* church is messy because when we come together to worship we have to accommodate our own tastes to the necessity as well as to the pleasure of being together, and that can be really difficult. It seems to me that we don't come to worship primarily for what we're going to get out of it. We come because of what we believe God is like – and what God is like is what Jesus is like, and because of that likeness our life is given meaning and purpose and hope. Worship is taking seriously who God is; worship is about nurturing the spark of divine life that's there in each one of us; worship is about putting into words and actions our commitment to letting that spark catch hold and burn. That's what we do, one way or another, every Sunday, being church together.

That's why I'm encouraging you to take the opportunity that's there in this new normal to explore and develop the ways in which we worship – taking all that's good from our past and shaping it for the time that is now and for the future, for the glory of God and for our learning and growing together in faith. Amen.

A time of prayer

We have reminded ourselves that Jesus is for every person. Let us remind ourselves of how we all belong together through the things in which we believe, as at home and in church we say:

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.

Now take the opportunity to read reflectively the Prayer of St Francis; or listen to one or both of these two very different interpretations:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2svZhZT6Pro> The choir of the Dragon School, Oxford

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pud1DZkeoBM> Guitarist Matt Beckingham's virtual church version

- 1 Make me a channel of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me bring your love.
 Where there is injury your pardon, Lord,
 and where there's doubt true faith in you.

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
 so much to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood, as to understand,
 to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

- 2 Make me a channel of your peace.
 Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.
 Where there is darkness, only light,
 and where there's sadness, ever joy.

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
 so much to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood, as to understand,
 to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

- 3 Make me a channel of your peace.
 It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
 in giving of ourselves that we receive,
 and in dying that we come to eternal life.

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console,
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul.*

Words (based on the Prayer of St Francis) and tune: S Temple (1928–1997)

Our Father,
who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory;
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Almighty God,
may we learn to know your presence every day
as we live out your message of love and hope
in our world, our homes and our churches.
Amen.

Hymn: Thy hand, O God, has guided

Read/pray the words or join in here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TGyNPrQ5rpk>

1 Thy hand, O God, has guided
thy flock, from age to age;
the wondrous tale is written,
full clear, on ev'ry page;
our forebears owned thy goodness,
and we their deeds record;
and both of this bear witness:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

2 Thy heralds brought glad tidings
to greatest, as to least;
they bade them rise, and hasten
to share the great King's feast;
and this was all their teaching,
in ev'ry deed and word,
to all alike proclaiming:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

3 Thy mercy will not fail us,
nor leave thy work undone;
with thy right hand to help us,
the vict'ry shall be won;
and then by all creation,
thy name shall be adored.
And this shall be their anthem:
one Church, one faith, one Lord.

Words: E H Plumptre (1821–1891) Tune: THORNBURY

Closing prayer *(based on a Jewish Sabbath morning prayer)*

May my life be one link in a chain of goodness.

As I say the prayers of my fathers,
help me to remember their devotion and faithfulness,
their joy and their suffering, which are in every word.
Holiness is my heritage: may I be worthy of it.

May this tradition live in me, and pass from me
to generations I shall never know,
enriched by the truth that I have found.

And when the service ends,
help me to bring that truth into the world in which I live.
May I love God above all,
and my neighbour as myself,
and may I be a living witness to the truth that never changes.
Amen.

Blessing

May the peace of God be in our churches.

May the peace of God be in our homes.

May the peace of God be in our hearts.

And the blessing of God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us all,
today and in the days to come.
Amen.

Note: This service draws on material from: ed. M Matthews, *Lit by the Light of God: Prayers and meditations through the year* (SPCK, 2005); *New Patterns for Worship* (Church House Publishing, 2008); *Reflections for Sundays, Year A* (CHP, 2016).