

Trinity 17 2021 – Rev'd Tim Clifford Hill

Mark 9: 38-end. James 5: 13- end.

Priests in the Church of England are bound by Church law to say Morning Prayer every morning.

And when we are on duty, your clergy - Roy, Rutton and I - gather in this church at eight o'clock in the morning to pray together. We are normally joined by a handful of regular attendees. Among them are Emily, our young people's minister, Rob and Ali Isherwood Crook and (my favourite attendee of all) Milo, Margie Nursey's black Labrador.

The service has a structure and is a calming way to begin the day, which I feel grounds me and prepares me for the day ahead.

At the beginning of every morning prayer service during this Trinity season, we start with the modern adaptation of a prayer written by Lancelot Andrewes. Lancelot Andrewes was a Bishop of Winchester, who died on the 25th September 1626 and was a translator of much of the Old Testament of what is known as the 'Authorised Version' of the Bible. The Church of England remembers him on 25th September - yesterday - every year. He was a highly influential preacher and was known for his gentle nature. A gentle nature which, I think, can be heard in the prayer that we pray every morning.

The prayer is this:

*Blessed are you, Sovereign God, creator of all,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You founded the earth in the beginning
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
In the fullness of time you made us in your image,
and in these last days you have spoken to us
in your Son Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.
As we rejoice in the gift of your presence among us
let the light of your love always shine in our hearts,
your Spirit ever renew our lives
and your praises ever be on our lips.*

You may have heard that prayer and found it familiar. Which it is to us here at St.Nic's!

For the past year we have been using Eucharistic prayer G on Sunday mornings. I happen to know that the liturgist who wrote Eucharistic prayer G was a massive fan of Lancelot Andrewes. And I happen to know that because I am married to his youngest daughter!

The beginning of Eucharistic prayer G is this:

*Blessed are you, Lord God,
our light and our salvation;
to you be glory and praise for ever.
From the beginning you have created all things
and all your works echo the silent music of your praise.
In the fullness of time you made us in your image,
the crown of all creation.*

You give us breath and speech, that with angels and archangels and all the powers of heaven we may find a voice to sing your praise.

I'm sure you can hear how similar those beautiful two prayers are.

Prayer is a key theme in our first lesson, from James, today. We heard, at the beginning of the reading that if any of us are suffering, we should pray. As the reading continued we heard that we should confess our sins and pray for one another.

Near the beginning of this service today we confessed our sins to God, in our intercessions we are going to pray for anyone we know who is suffering, mentally or physically. The whole of this service is wrapped in prayer. Prayer to God, who is creator of all, our light and our salvation. Who gives us breath and speech.

Turning to our Gospel today, it would be wrong of me not to remind you that the very vivid metaphors which Jesus uses with his disciples are just that - very vivid metaphors! I don't want to see you all, as you walk from church to the church rooms for coffee this morning, cutting off your feet or tearing out your eyes!

In Mark's Gospel in general, Jesus stresses the extreme nature of the self-sacrifice to which disciples are called.

We know that some modern day disciples are still losing their lives because of their faith in Jesus Christ. I've been conscious of that recently, particularly as I read the news about Afghanistan, where it is impossible to live openly as a Christian. A reminder of how fortunate we are to be Christians living in this country.

But we can still suffer, in our own way. As a church community we have suffered during the pandemic. We are still trying to find the best way forward, as we trial new service patterns, which is causing suffering to members of our own parish. And we are going to trial another service pattern, after Christmas, which may cause more suffering to members of our congregation, as we try to find a service pattern that works for as many people as possible.

I know from conversations that I have had this week that people are not finding it easy.

As we navigate out of this pandemic, trialing new ideas for how we worship Almighty God in this place, let us hold on to Jesus' words at the end of our Gospel passage - 'Be at peace with one another.' That is the main point of today's Gospel passage - that we live together in peace.

As followers of Jesus, in community with one another, let us try to live harmoniously, even at times when we disagree. Let the light of God's love shine in our hearts, as we travel through this post-pandemic journey together, praying both with and for each other.

Yesterday I heard the Archbishop of Canterbury speak, in Dorking. Someone asked him what he thought the message of Christianity is, in 2021.

The Archbishop responded, “Jesus says, ‘don’t be afraid because I am with you.’”

Remember those words this week, as we continue our journey together, guided by God. I would say that it is not only a message for 2021. It’s a message for our whole lives

Jesus says ‘don’t be afraid because I am with you.’

Amen