

The United Reformed Church (St Ives)

Sunday 27th June 2021

Fourth Sunday after Trinity

Service by Christine Macleod

Call to worship

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope: my soul waits for the Lord.

More than those who watch for the morning. More than those who wait for the morning.

Hymn. Guide me O Thou great Jehovah

Prayer of approach.

To be in your presence, to sit at your feet. When your love surrounds me and makes me complete.

This is my desire, O Lord. This is my desire.

To rest in Your presence. Not rushing away. To cherish each moment. Here I would stay.

This is my desire, O Lord. This is my desire.

Introduction – Inseparable companion

We are encouraged to be confident in the promises of God. The psalmist declares the goodness of our God in whom we can trust. The prayer opens with a cry rising out of the depths of alienation and distance for mercy - the unmerited grace of God. Then moves to forgiveness. Then waiting for God as an individual and as a community. Our God has promised love and redemption. In many ways we too are in a waiting period, waiting for the restrictions of lockdowns to cease and to explore our lives and callings after this phase in the world's history.

The New Testament reading will talk about giving and receiving as Christian communities. It is written to a church that has started something then had to pause and must continue.

First reading. Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

Lord hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

If you O Lord, should mark iniquities,

Lord who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,

and in his word, I hope: my soul waits for the Lord.

more than those who watch for the morning

more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord!

For with the Lord there is steadfast love,

And with him there is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Second reading. 2 Corinthians 8: 7 -15

Now as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in utmost eagerness, and in our love for you – so we want you to excel in this generous undertaking.

I do not say this as a command, but I am testing the genuineness of your love against the earnestness of others. For you know the generous act of our lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. And in this matter, I am giving my advice: it is appropriate for you who began last year not only to do something but even to desire to do something – now finish doing it, so that your eagerness may be matched by completing it according to your means. For if the eagerness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has – not according to what one does not have. I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much and the one who had little did not have too little'.

Hymn. As the deer pants for the water.

Reflection.

Today we can think about giving and receiving. We sometime talk about a blessing or a gift being like 'manna from heaven' and Paul writing to the Corinthians makes mention of this.

Back working as a physician, I appreciate the importance of good nutrition in keeping us healthy and building resilience. Since my childhood I have found photographs of people who are emaciated because of famine very distressing. We live in a world of plenty with enough to go round if we could only share. I was intrigued by the last sentence in the passage we read. *As it is written, 'The one who had much did not have too much and he one who had little did not have too little'*. This is also mentioned in the context of manna from heaven as the Israelites escape with Moses into the wilderness exodus.

Nutrition is a subject in my studies at Glasgow University on the Diploma in Hygiene and Tropical medicine. Malnutrition in all its forms remains a major public health problem throughout the developing world and is an underlying factor in over 50% of the 10-11 million deaths in children under 5 years of age who die each year from preventable causes. Worldwide approximately 60 million children are suffering from moderate acute malnutrition at any one time.

A little can go a long way. Lemons for scurvy caused by lack of vitamin C. Green vegetables for lots of the micronutrients. Carrots for vitamin A.

Today's COVID pandemic opens our eyes to the inequalities globally and how even in COVID pandemic some who are already wealthy have got richer, and many poor have become poorer.

The Corinthians excelled in many graces. Paul encourages them to excel also in the grace of giving. He sees the Jewish Christians in need while the Gentile Christians have ample. He encourages them to be generous and to give willingly.

Often when we are in trouble, we realise who our true friends are. At a point when we are vulnerable, they do not exploit us and give graciously out of love and the goodness of their hearts. The collection in the church appeal affords to test the genuineness of their love.

We often use such words in our offering prayers. *Loving God, we thank you for all your gifts to us. We ask your blessing on the gifts we bring this morning. For with them we offer ourselves in your services, - our time, our energy, and our love that your kingdom may be built here and throughout the world.*

To support the appeal for love in action Paul cites the example of Christ. 'For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich'.

We can be poor in many ways. Through ridicule, rejection, persecution, betrayal and suffering as well as material deprivation. Often all these come together. In the case of Christ, it culminated in the agony of Gethsemane and the cross. That was the cost to our Lord in playing his part in the full drama of redemption.

I have added a hymn, to allow us to reflect and to be thankful – 'How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear'.

Hymn. How sweet the name of Jesus sounds in a believer's ear.

I think the Corinthians were a bit like us. They had started out to do something and it got interrupted. Just like our lives have been interrupted by the pandemic. I sometimes give up too soon. I planned to go back to work for only one year, but the faculty is allowing me 18 months and so I must keep going on. Work can be absorbing and some days I am tempted to go on beyond this allocated time. However, at my age closure is advisable. What if we only have a limited amount to give. Paul advises the readers of the letter, in respect of their collections, to finish now what they not only began to do a year ago, but then eagerly desired to do. He explains that if the willingness is there and they give according to what they have it will be acceptable to God: they do not have to give beyond their means.

The phrase – 'the one who had much did not have too much and the one who had a little did not have too little' refers to the experience of the Exodus community. When God provided manna from heaven, the same phrase is used. The needs of all were met. No-one suffered want, no-one had over supply. Paul expected the relatively affluent Corinthians to supply the needs of the relatively poor believers in Jerusalem.

As we live in Christian community, Paul reminds the readers that if at some future time the positions of the churches should be reversed, then the plenty of the other will provide them with what they need.

With all the recent changes, some doors will close, but others will open. We too need to find ways of continuing what we have begun. It may take us down different paths and serving in different ways. This passage reminds us that there are many ways to give and to receive in the work of discipleship.

The next hymn "Brother sister, let me Serve You" shows church communities giving in many ways through a variety of ways of using their resources.

So, it may not be possible for us to do what we could physically do when we were younger, but we can still give and receive as we are able.

It is also gracious to receive. Paul touches on our riches in Christ. Salvation from sin and from ourselves, joy in giving and receiving, the hope of our salvation.

Hymn. Brother, Sister let me serve you

Prayer of intercession.

Take time to pray for those who are in poverty. Those in persecution and those in pain or distress.

Take time to wait on the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God.

Music of The Lord's my Shepherd (Crimmond) sung.

Blessing

Now go in peace, to love and serve the Lord; and the blessing of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit be with you forever. Amen.