

Worshipping at Home

Sunday 6th September 26

God of all individuals and all communities, of all giving and all receiving, grant us the stillness of spirit to give attention to you, and the generosity of heart to give attention to our neighbours. **Amen**

Hymn 28: Jesus calls us here to meet him

Prayers

God of our words and our actions, we come to you to learn that we may share with others, to listen that we may inspire others, to listen that we may learn from others, to be open that we may appreciate others, to become more like your Son, Jesus Christ, who invites us to care for other creatively, compassionately and constantly, in good times and in bad.

Holy God, we reach out to you in thankfulness knowing that you will bless us with stability in turmoil, courage in conflict and grace in unity. May we both challenge and change those things in ourselves, in our church, our community, and our world that dishonour your love for us and spoil our relationships with one another, so that we may grow in the likeness of your Son, and bring peace where there is brokenness – all to your glory.

Holy God, we ask your forgiveness for the times when we avoid conflict to preserve popularity and to avoid being challenged or criticised. Free us from fear and enable us to do conflict well.

We are sorry when we don't listen to those around us when they challenge our actions, our words, our complacency. Free us from pride and enable us to do conflict well. We are sorry when, as a church, we collude with that which is wrong and compromise when we should convict or speak out. Free us from falsehood and enable us to do conflict well. We ask in Jesus' name. **Amen.**

God of peace, your forgiveness makes us one and cleanses us from all our mistakes, wiping away our excuses, our justifications, our grudges, our mistakes. Thank you for your love which brings us hope, reconciliation and helps new beginnings to flourish. Help us when we speak with each other, be wise in our discernment and always faithful to you. **Amen.**

Readings: Romans 13:8-14 and Matthew 18:15-20

Hymn 495: Dear Lord and Father of mankind

Reflection

Where to start with a reading talking about people not getting on...! The reality of being a fully-fledged adult is that we spend our entire lives navigating the complexities of interpersonal relationships. Some of us seem to do it so much more successfully than others and others really struggle. Some don't seem to care that they can't manage it, and some of us spend an inordinate amount of our lives wondering what someone might have meant by this, or that, or why did they say that, or why don't they think this etc.

It is inevitable then, as properly functioning adults, to hold different opinions to each other and sometimes that will lead to conflict. Likewise with the actions we choose to take. And just with complex social relationships, some people cope with conflict better than others, adding another layer to our challenges with getting on with each other. I sometimes wonder how humans manage to actually get on. Or perhaps that's what good manners are for.

Our reading today talks of the very real possibility of a community functioning together. But it is also very realistic about what can go wrong in that community. Anyone who has ever lived with anyone else, will know that sharing your space, sharing your life with someone else can be really hard work. Inevitably, there are times when it goes wrong. But we don't abandon these relationships at the first sign of trouble. Instead, we try and work at it. Our reading is about God giving us a mechanism to put things right, for us to come together. But we have got to want to do that and it isn't easy.

Imagine you are travelling along a road at the speed limit and a car passes you very quickly. If there is just one car, you might think, “jerk”. But now imagine dozens and dozens of cars passing you. What happens, do you start to feel the fool for keeping to the speed limit? Does your speed start to increase – possibly without you even noticing because you are going with the flow? And suddenly, you find yourself doing something you might never have planned or feel comfortable with.

The same principle can be applied to whether we support a good cause (because everyone else is) or whether we don't (why should I do that?). Are we persuaded by other people's views – in which case how do we select the views we listen to, if they are going to matter so much? Or are we certain about your own view and are not open to any persuasion? In which case, are you certain that you are right? And what happens if you (or indeed the other person) are wrong?

And if one of you is wrong, how do we confront this behaviour in a loving and compassionate way? Perhaps it is starting from those two words – love and compassion. When dealing with individuals, it is hard to go over the top with someone if you actually really care about them. So, caring about them to start with is a good place to start. If we respect each other, we are more likely to be able to really see each other as individuals and not as a group lumped together.

Jesus recognises that community life isn't going to be straight forward. He gives us the guidance of how to speak to each other gently, but firmly. He starts small, go and speak to them individually, but he also gives us advice on what happens next, with a small group and eventually what should happen ultimately. It is important to be able to tackle problems and not sweep them under the carpet – because that way lies unhappiness for everyone. Family life, community life, church life and national life are but a series of relationships that need negotiating. But if we do it with the love and compassion that Christ has taught us, then we can do it well.

Hymn 706: Longing for light we wait in darkness

Prayers

Where there is conflict, **bring reconciliation and peace.**

Between nations and races, where there is oppression and abuse of power: **bring reconciliation and peace.**

In places of work, when conditions are governed by profit and the humanity of employees is ignored: **bring reconciliation and peace.**

In local communities, where neighbours cannot agree; where right are not respected: **bring reconciliation and peace.**

Between people of different faiths, different approaches to faith, different traditions: **bring reconciliation and peace.**

Within our church, within our families, within our home: **bring reconciliation and peace.**

Reconciling God, may we honour one another, see you image in our neighbour, and always work for justice, mercy and peace. We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace. **Amen.**

We share together the prayer that Jesus taught us: Our Father...

Hymn 696: For the healing of the nations

God of grace and glory, us the work of our hands for the blessing of others; the love of our hearts for the strengthening of relationships and the service of our lives for the building of community; all to your glory, **Amen.**

*Service compiled by Rev'd Barbara Evans-Routley
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