

SUNDAY DEVOTIONS
17 MAY 2020 – EASTER 6

OPENING PRAYER

Most Gracious Lord, Master, Messiah and Saviour of Humanity, we greet you with all humility. You are the first cause and the last effect, the divine light and the spirit of guidance, the alpha and omega. Your light is in all forms, thy love in all beings: in a loving mother, a kind father, in an innocent child, in a helpful friend, and in an inspiring teacher. Allow us to recognize you in all your holy names and forms. May the message of God reach far and wide, illuminating and making the whole of humanity as one single family in the parenthood of God. Amen.

SONG [I'm so secure](#) CCLI 1935925

PSALM 66:8-20 (*A version for today*)

Bless our God far and wide;
let the praise of the LORD be heard;
the LORD, the one who set us among the living,
who has not let our feet slip.
But you tested us, O God;
refining us as silver is refined.
You brought us into the wilderness,
and burdened us with wretchedness.
You let sickness control us,
we went through fire and water,
and you led us out from abundance.
I shall enter your house with my burnt offerings
and fulfil my vows to you;
those which my lips promised
which my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.
I shall offer burnt offerings of fat lambs
and the smoke of burning rams.
I shall prepare an ox and goats.
Come and hear, all you who hold God in holy awe;
I will tell you what the LORD has done for me.
I cried out to God with my mouth,
and high praise was on my tongue.
If I had cherished the bad things of life in my heart
my Lord would not have listened.
But God has truly listened,
and has been attentive to the words of my prayer.
Blessed be God,
because the LORD God has not rejected my prayer;
the steadfast love of the LORD I will retell a hundred times.

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PRAYER OF ADORATION

When it doesn't seem
to do any good, Creator God,
we dare to be your people,
to love those the world
would have us reject;

to be just in the face
of every reason to mistreat;
to be unafraid
of whatever awaits us.

When all the odds seem
stacked against, Jesus our Saviour,
we dare to live as
your sisters and brothers,
serving others
with our hands and hearts;
sharing in the burdens
of our world;
refusing to leave justice
orphaned with no hope.

When the wind seems to be
knocked out of us
by the blows of life, Eternal Companion,
we dare to breathe
joy upon those
caught in the net of hopelessness;
peace into all
the broken places around us;
wonder for all those
who have lost sight of you.

In you, we dare to live and breathe and be,
God in Community, Holy in One,
even as we pray. Amen.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Almighty God, we come before you with our exhaustion and burdens, our weary faces and tired feet. We come before you beat down by the world at times. Renew in us your Spirit. Lift up in us your steadfast love and strength. Call upon us to lean on each other, to share our burdens with each other and to help carry each other's load. It is not an easy life; it is not an easy call to follow you, but help us to hold on to the strength found in your love for us, that lead you to the cross and beyond into eternal life. In the name of Christ, our Rock and our Redeemer, we pray. Amen.

DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS

Christ suffered for sins once for all,
the righteous for the unrighteous,
in order to bring you to God.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,
Be at peace.
Your sins are forgiven.
Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG [Lord of the heavens](#) CCLI 1959736

BIBLE READINGS

[Acts 17:22-31](#)

[1 Peter 3:13-22](#)

[John 14:15-21](#)

SERMON [Keeping Christ's commandments](#) [sermon.mp3](#)

SONG [For you deep stillness](#) CCLI 2563901

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Mighty Creator, you have given us all we have – life and breath, friends and family, food, shelter and all we need. Help us to show our gratitude by returning to you a generous portion of our blessings. Help us also to share from our bounty with those who have less, for you are not far from us. In you we live and move and have our being. (Acts 17:22-31)

Steadfast Lord, you do not reject the prayer of those who call on you. People you love are being tested, being burdened with trials beyond our comprehension. We pray for those who live with violence and danger every day, in their homes, in their cities, in their nations. Rescue them, Lord, as you have promised, and bring peace. (Psalm 66:8-20)

Gentle God, you call us to testify to your mercy and goodness. You ask us to tell others about your grace and love as we have known it. You have washed away our sin through the waters of baptism and claimed us as your own. Raise up faithful preachers, teachers and volunteers for your Church. Make us eager to tell others what you have done for us so that they, too, may discover your presence in their lives. (1Peter 3:13-22)

Spirit of God, abide with all who seek your healing touch.

Today, we pray especially for...

You promise never to leave us, to send your power into our lives. We trust in your will and ask for your own courage to face each day. (John 14:15-21) Into your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy; through your son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

SONG [Thrive](#) CCLI 7006228

WORD OF MISSION AND BLESSING

Go now into the world.
Search for the God who is not far from each one of us.
Offer to all who ask an account of the hope that is in you.
Keep your conscience clear
as you live the commandments in love.

And may God greet your prayers with constant love;
May Christ Jesus give you life through his own life;
And may the Spirit of truth abide with you and within you, always.

KEEPING CHRIST'S COMMANDMENTS

Easter 6 Year A

Acts 17:22-31; Ps. 66:8-20; 1 Pt. 3:13-22; Jn. 14:15-21

17/05/2020

One of my favourite cartoon characters is Charlie Brown. He is for me a symbol of all human beings who face all the trials and trying circumstances of life and seek to find meaning in them. Charlie Brown is the one person who knows what it's like to carry his own cross, to live in a world of brokenness, of failure, of trying and not succeeding, and hearing again and again the good news of the gospel from his friend Linus to see him through the rough times.

In one of Charlie Brown's adventures, he is shown visiting Lucy who is at her psychiatric stand, offering her help for five cents a go. Charlie sits down and says, "I need help—tell me a great truth. Tell me something about living that will help me."

Lucy asks, "Do you ever wake up at night and want a drink of water?"

"Sure" responds Charlie brown, "quite often."

Lucy then says, "When you're getting a drink of water in the dark, always rinse out the glass because there might be a bug in it. Five cents, please."

Charlie walks away saying, "Great truths are even more simple that I thought they were."

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is talking about a great truth of life. In verses 15 and 21 of chapter 14, Jesus is saying that if a person wants to follow Christ, that person will keep Christ's commandments. In verse 15 of this passage, Jesus says;

If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

and in verse 21 he says,

They who have my commandments and keep them, are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.
(NRSV)

Sandwiched in between these two verses are John's account of Jesus talking about the coming of the Spirit. Today it is these two passages that form the beginning and the end of this overall passage, that I want to focus on.

You know, Christians (and I include you and me in that category—just in case you weren't sure and didn't quite make the connection)—Christians (including you and me) have a tremendous responsibility in our Christian faith—both in regard to our witness within our fellowship and our community, and in regard to our own personal salvation.

Every Sunday (well, that's the ideal, isn't it? *Every Sunday*) we come to church and in our worship—our songs and our prayers, our hearing of the Word of God and our reflection—we offer up praise to God and we talk about our love for God. In our worship and in our fellowship together we also declare our oneness with God and with each other. We are, as was affirmed in last week's epistle reading, "a royal priesthood, a holy nation". We are people who have been set apart by God as God's children—as brothers and sisters in Christ—destined for eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Yet, in spite of this, it has been my unfortunate experience—and the unfortunate experience of many Christians, both today and throughout all of history, that it is Christians who are some of the most hurtful, rigid, uncompromising and ungodly of all people. As you read through both ancient and modern church history and anecdotal evidence of today, there would seem to be no end to the injustice that "so called" Christians can inflict upon one another.

Now, to offer some balance to that last statement—lest I be accused of being overly negative, maudlin and depressive—it has been and is also Christians who are some of the most encouraging, supportive, loving and godlike of all people that I know. And I hope that that's the same experience for you.

But, the point I am making here, is: How many of us fit totally into that last category *all the time*. How many of us can truly say that we have never spoken evil of another person—possibly even someone within our own congregation, or our own family? How many of us can say that we have never done anything hurtful to another—or acted in a way that is contrary to your confession of faith in Christ? (If you think you pass the test, give me a call and I'll explain a few things to you—like reality.)

The reality, of which I speak, is that our human nature—such as it is—our hearts, as the Scriptures refer to it—are filled with all kinds of evil and wickedness. Now, I know that's not the way we want to live, but you know, sometimes it's really hard not to succumb to these kinds of temptations. In spite of our best intentions, we regularly fall over into sinful thoughts and practices. No matter how pious we think we are, we are always less pious than what we ought to be.

How then can we live the Christian life with integrity?

Well, if you want to live the Christian life with integrity, you have to live it in humility. I'll say that again: If you want to live the Christian life with integrity, you have to live it in humility. What do I mean by that? What I mean is that in order to live the Christian life, with all the relevant expectations of right attitudes and behaviour—if you want to live as God wants you to live—you must humble yourselves to the will and expectation of God, not ours and not other people's wills and expectations. You must follow God's way, not the way of our sinful nature.

“If you love me,” Jesus said, “you will keep my commandments.” “They who have my commandments and keep them, are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

Here is Charlie Brown’s great truth—that “something” about living that will help him cope with life. It is also *our* great truth—that “something” about living that will help us in our Christian walk.

To love Christ is to want what Christ wants. To want what Christ wants and so endeavour to fulfil Christ’s commands by being obedient to them, is our expression of love for Christ and for God—and, by the way, it’s also our expression of our love for one another.

The payoff is this: If we love Christ and fulfil his commands, we will enjoy God’s blessing in our lives—the blessing of God’s Spirit abiding in us—the blessing of Christ, in the Holy Spirit, revealing himself to us in all his glory—the blessing of true oneness of fellowship with God and with one another.

Charlie Brown was right when he said, “Great truths are even more simple than I thought they were.” The truth of keeping Christ’s commands is a simple truth, yet it’s an extremely profound one. If we truly love Christ, then we will *want* to keep his commands—we will *want* to serve him—we will *want* to love one another and serve one another—and we will *want* to do it for Christ’s sake and for God’s sake and for one another’s sake—not our own sake. And that’s where the humility bit kicks in.

Those who love Christ and so strive to keep his commands are those who deny themselves for the sake of God and for the sake of others. They are those who always want to see the good in another rather than the bad. They are those who, when things go wrong in their lives, continue to praise God and seek the blessing that comes out of adversity. They are those who carry their crosses without complaining, without judging and without blaming someone else for their discomfort. Nor do they boast in their suffering. They handle it quietly, humbly and prayerfully.

May each of us who profess to love Christ, learn what it means to keep his commands. May we learn how to truly love one another as Christ loves us. May we learn how to give ourselves up for the sake of God and others as Christ gave himself up on the cross for us. And may we learn how to humbly walk before our God in Spirit and in truth.

To him be all praise, honour, glory and majesty. Amen.