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**Sunday, 11th September 2022**

**Proper 19 | Ordinary 24**

**The Rev’d Nigel Uden**

**Call to Worship**

Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;

let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,

and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

*Isaiah 55.6-9*

**Prayer of Approach**

Eternal God,

we come seeking you, but not to test you,

nor in finding you to bind you to an image or a gesture.

We need from you no tricks to prove you exist.

No miracles.

Just a clearer sense of your love,

by which all things are made

and we are each brought to completion.

Let it be so, in this sacred hour,

and in our every hour,

through Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Prayer of Confession**

“Fools say in their hearts, ‘there is no God’.”

God, you are beyond our ken; your ways are not our ways, and your thoughts are not our thoughts; for you are very big, ‘a sun without a sphere, and a sea without a shore.’

And that’s right. Why would we put trust in a god so small that the poor reach of our mind could contain you?

But to acknowledge your mystery is not to deny your existence; nor to refute that you are responsible for ours; less still, is it to pretend that we do not need you.

So, with the Psalmist, we are sorry when we live as if we aren’t accountable to you – as if our lives aren’t examined by your call to truth, justice and love.

We regret any time that we fail to see you in people who are poor, people who are marginalised, people who are disadvantaged, people who are weak. In this penitential moment, we confess how our abuse of those around us is an affront to you, the one who is within us.

Above all, we confess how our disrespect and naivete, our pride and hypocrisy, our self-sufficiency too often give the impression that we do not seek to do your will, to enjoy your freedom, or to accept your salvation.

Silence

By the work of your Spirit in us we ask you to preserve us from that folly which says there is no God, and rather to look to you to deliver us and restore our fortunes, that we might rejoice and be glad.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

‘The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’ Your sins are forgiven for his sake. Thanks be to God.

*I Timothy 1.15*

**Prayer of Illumination**

Eternal God, we are aware that sometimes our unbelief is born of ignorance. As we turn to the Scriptures now, we pray that your Holy Spirit will interpret them to us, so we discover the grace of our Lord overflowing for us with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Amen

*after I Timothy 1.13-14*

**All-Age Introduction**

Eeyore’s birthday didn’t get off to a good start. No one remembered it, and it seemed he’d have no presents. He was being particularly Eeyorish about it all. But when Pooh Bear was also unhappy that Eeyore’s birthday had gone unnoticed, the old grey Donkey was even more. We read, “‘It’s bad enough’, said Eeyore, almost breaking down, ‘being miserable myself, what with no presents and no cake and no candles, and no proper notice taken of me at all, but if everybody else is going to be miserable too’ – ”

A few pages later, how lovely it is to read of his surprise and happiness when both Pooh and Piglet turn up with gifts. An empty honey jar, for putting things in, and a burst balloon for putting into a jar for putting things in. Eeyore ended up “taking the balloon out and putting it back again, as happy as could be…”. He didn’t think anyone cared, but then found they did.

I wonder if the lost sheep was like that donkey, and thought no one cared? Imagine that sheep’s amazement when realising that the shepherd had decided to ‘go after the one that is lost until he finds it’. Could it be that, in the same way the jar and balloon helped Eeyore believe he mattered to Pooh and Piglet, so the ‘lost and found sheep’ story enables us to believe that we matter to God – matter so much that God sent Jesus to find us and bring us home, even as we were still wandering? The hymn helps to express how wonderful that is to us.

**Readings**

*Jeremiah 4.11-12, 22-28* | *Psalm 14*| *I Timothy 1.12-17* | *St Luke 15.1-10*

**Sermon Notes**

These readings highlight God’s capacity for disappointment and anger, and God’s defining nature which is to have mercy.

*Jeremiah 4*

Jeremiah is a set of writings from about 617-586BCE. Through the reigns of five kings, Jeremiah writes of how the people are vulnerable to other nations’ power, and of how they themselves fail to live up to the expectations of being in a covenant relationship with God. In verse 27, Jeremiah writes of how he hears God express the severity of the situation (‘the whole land shall be a desolation’) – and the hope (‘yet I will not make a full end’.) This contrast points to one of the overall themes of Jeremiah, that judgement and punishment occur, but not in order to write off the people, but to enable a renewal of the covenant, with the prosperity and peace to which that leads.

*Psalm 14*

Psalm 14 has the hallmarks of so-called Psalms of Lament. It bewails the state of godlessness, but ends with a tentative statement of confidence in a time when the Lord restores the fortunes of the people. This Psalm is quite like Psalm 53. Both contrast fools, those who think God an irrelevance, with wise ones, who ‘seek after God’.

*I Timothy 1*

With II Timothy, this is one of the so-called Pastoral Epistles, with guidance for Christian leaders. Again, in I Timothy 1, we see the contrast between human failing and divine mercy. Paul writes of himself as a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a person of violence, as one who acted ignorantly in unbelief. But God has acted with the patience, mercy, grace, faith, and love that are in Jesus Christ. This, rather than his own achievements, is the source of his hope, and the basis of his charge to the Christian leadership for which Paul is renowned

*Luke 15*

This chapter has three parables about God’s instinct to welcome those who have been ‘lost’, characterised in a sheep, a coin and child. Again, one might focus upon the contrast between what might be, condemnation, and what God in Christ offers, the promise of new life and and the commission to serve.

So, a sermon that drew upon these passages might look at the either/both personal lives and society and find plenty to feed the sense that failure and flaws make us deserve what Jeremiah calls ‘a full end’. But God’s heart will not let God do that (cf Hosea 11.8). God’s default is to redeem, to buy back, to restore, to offer new beginnings and abundant life. It’s not a cheap option, in that such steadfast loving kindness stirs the wise one, if not the fool, to respond with faith, faithfulness and a commitment to radiate the light of God’s radical love in so shadowy a world.

**Affirmation of Faith**

Lord, you have always given bread for the coming day;

**and though I am poor, today I believe.**

Lord, you have always given strength for the coming day;

**and though I am weak, today I believe.**

Lord, you have always given peace for the coming day;

**and though of anxious heart, today I believe.**

Lord, you have always kept me safe in trials;

**and now, tried as I am, today I believe.**

Lord, you have always marked the road for the coming day;

**and though it may be hidden, today I believe.**

Lord, you have always lightened this darkness of mine;

**and though the night is here, today I believe.**

Lord, you have always spoken when time was ripe;

**and though you be silent now, today I believe.**

*from the Northumbria Community’s Celtic Daily Prayer*

**Prayers of Intercessions**

Today’s Psalm regrets how easily people turn aside from God, and forget their accountability to God. It uses several images, which offer the hooks upon which our intercessions are hung. In the silences, we have space for personal prayers.

As the Psalm says, ‘they are corrupt’, let us pray that by God’s grace at work in us corruption no longer twists our motives until all live for others’ advantage.

Silence

As the Psalm says, ‘they do abominable deeds’, let us pray that by God’s grace at work in us atrocious behaviour is replaced by compassionate charity, and those who suffer are helped and comforted.

Silence

As the Psalm asks, ‘are there any who are wise?’, let us pray that by God’s grace at work in us knowledge and understanding might grow for our reconciliation to God, and for the common good.

Silence

As the Psalm says, ‘they eat up my people as they eat bread’, let us pray that by God’s grace at work in us none shall be consumed by another’s neglect or cruelty nor any be content with having too much until all have enough.

Silence

As the Psalm says, ‘they do not call upon the Lord’, let us pray that by God’s grace at work in us we might all know our need of God and how, in Jesus, God meets that need until our cup overflows.

Silence

As the Psalm says, ‘the Lord is their refuge’, let us pray that by God’s grace at work in us we might make provision for vulnerable people who have no home as a refuge from destitution, no friends as a refuge from loneliness, nowhere to seek asylum as a refuge from war, no faith in Christ as a refuge from guilt about sin or fear about death.

Silence

As the Psalm says, ‘when the Lord restores the fortunes of his people’, let us pray that, by God’s grace at work in us, we might emerge from recent years of trauma, tragedy and shadows, into a season of peace, prosperity and shalom until the Kingdom comes, and God brings all things to completion, on the day of Jesus Christ, Amen.

**Offertory Prayer**

The resources we have to fund the church vary from person to person. Some have a widow’s mite, some a king’s ransom. Some spend plentifully, some save carefully. Some have experienced theft, some have lost their coins. Whatever we have available, and feel moved to offer for the work of the church, and for other charitable purposes, comes to us first from God. So we dedicate it in prayer:

Generous God, everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your own hand.

*I Chronicles 29.14*

So we dedicate it to be used for your purposes

in and through the Church,

to source of new beginnings and resilient love,

because of Jesus Christ, Amen

**Communion Liturgy**

**Invitation**

Hear the gracious words of our Lord Jesus Christ: Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

I am the bread of life; those who some to me shall not hunger, and those who believe in me shall never thirst. Those who come to me I will not cast out.

*Matthew 11.28 and John 6.35-37*

**Words of Institution**

Hear the narrative of the Institution of the Lord’s Supper as it was recorded by the apostle Paul.

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for﻿ you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

*I Corinthians 11:23-26*

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise**

With joy we give you thanks and praise,

Almighty God, source of all life and love,

that we live in your world,

that you are always creating and sustaining it by your power,

and that you have so made us that we can know and love you,

trust and serve you.

We give you thanks that you loved the world so much

that you gave your only Son so that everyone who has faith in him

may not die but have eternal live.

We thank you that Jesus was born among us;

that he lived our common life on earth;

that he suffered and died for us; that he rose again;

and that he is always present through the Holy Spirit

We thank you that we can live in the faith that your kingdom will come,

and that in life, in death and beyond death you are with us.

Therefore with all the company of heaven, and with all your people,

of all places and times, we proclaim your greatness and sing your praise.

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,**

**Heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

**Hosanna in the highest.**

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

**Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy Lord God, by what we do here in remembrance of Christ

we celebrate his perfect sacrifice on the cross

and his glorious resurrection and ascension,

we declare that he is Lord of all;

and we prepare for his coming in his Kingdom.

We pray that through your Holy Spirit we may be your people,

this bread may be for us the body of Christ

and this wine the blood of Christ.

Accept our sacrifice of praise;

and as we eat and drink at his command

unite us to Christ as one body in him;

and give us strength to serve you in the world.

And to you one holy and eternal God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,

we give you praise and glory, now and forever. **Amen**

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Breaking and Sharing**

The body of Christ was broken, the blood of Christ was spilled, for us.

Let us eat and drink in faith and in thanksgiving.

*We eat and drink.*

**Prayer after Communion**

God, you allow us to see such marvellous goodness

and have spread it before our eyes in the sacrament.

God, enlighten more and more the eyes of our understanding

so that we may grasp what is the height and depth,

the length and breadth of your love toward us.

What *depth*, that your love is real however low life plunges us.

What *height*, that your love cannot be bettered.

What *length,* that your love knows no limits*.*

What *breadth*, that your love embraces us all.

Grant us to contemplate that goodness with such delight

that we may be transformed into the image of your own graciousness

and may be all love toward you

and toward one another. **Amen**

**Blessing**

To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God,

be honour and glory for ever and ever.

And may grace be with you. Amen

*I Timothy 1.17, 6.21*

**Hymn Suggestions**

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| **Hymn** | **RS** | **StF** | **CH4** | **MP** |
| How Shall I Sing That Majesty? | 661 | 53 | 128 |  |
| It Is A Thing Most Wonderful | 503 |  |  | 346 |
| Have Faith in God, My Heart | 499 | 466 |  |  |
| All My Hope on God is founded  | 586 | 453 | 192 | 16 |
| *Key:* *RS = Rejoice and Sing, StF = Singing the Faith, CH4 = Church Hymnary 4, MP = Mission Praise* |