

Sunday 4th July 2021 – 13th in Ordinary
Deacon Sally Wheadon “All are welcome”

We invite you to spend a few moments with God, using this short act of worship that has been prepared for you to use knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.

Welcome and Call to Worship

Holy Trinity, you are neither monarch nor monologue but an eternal harmony of gift and response: through the Uncreated Word and the Spirit of Truth you include us and all creation in your extravagant love; through the Wisdom of God, who raises her voice to call us to life. Amen.

Hymn – StF 418

We had a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all
throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

Tell of his birth at Bethlehem
not in a royal house or hall but in
a stable dark and dim, the Word
made flesh, a light for all.

Tell of his death at Calvary, hated
by those he came to save,
in lonely suffering on the Cross;
for all he loved his life he gave.

Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and
hell that we might share his victory.

Tell of his reign at God's right hand,
by all creation glorified.
He sends his Spirit on his Church
to live for him, the Lamb who died.

Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.

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Prayer of Adoration

Yours, O Lord, is the greatness,
the power, the glory, the
splendour and the majesty.
Everything in the heavens and on
earth is yours, O Lord.
This is your kingdom and we
adore you as the one who is over
all things. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Powerful God, forgive us when we
have not used our power to
influence for good but for our
own purposes; when our actions
have hurt and excluded others;
when we have allowed greed, fear
and pride to get in the way.

God, forgive us.
Let our thoughts, our words and
our actions glorify you and reveal
your presence and purposes.
Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We thank you merciful God for
you forgiveness and healing,
for your grace and mercy
and the comfort of the Holy Spirit.
We thank you Lord Jesus that you
always had time for people.
Even when you were tired and
needed a rest, when the crowds
gathered your compassionate
heart healed and restored all
those who came to you.
Thank you that you are kind and
caring and lavish your love upon
us. We thank you that your self-
giving love has set us free
to be the people you have called
us to be. We thank you that you
never leave or forsake us.
Thank you, Lord Jesus, our
Shepherd and King. Amen.

Hymn StF 255

The kingdom of God

Is justice and joy,
For Jesus restores
What sin would destroy;
God's power and glory
In Jesus we know,
And here and hereafter
The kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God
Is mercy and grace,
The lepers are cleansed,
The sinners find place,
The outcast are welcomed
God's banquet to share,
And hope is awakened
In place of despair.

The kingdom of God
Is challenge and choice,
Believe the good news,
Repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners
Brought Christ to his cross,
Our crisis of judgement
For gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come,
The gift and the goal,
In Jesus begun,
In heaven made whole;
The heirs of the kingdom
Shall answer his call,
And all things cry glory
To God all in all!

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Bible Readings

1) Mark 6:6b-13

Then Jesus went around teaching from
village to village. Calling the Twelve to
him, he began to send them out two by
two and gave them authority over
impure spirits.

These were his instructions: 'Take
nothing for the journey except a staff –
no bread, no bag, no money in your

belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.'

They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed with oil many people who were ill and healed them.

2) Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'

Others said, 'He is Elijah.'

And still others claimed, 'He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.' But when Herod heard this, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!'

For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl,

'Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you.' And he promised her with an oath, 'Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.'

She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?'

'The head of John the Baptist,' she answered. At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: 'I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a dish.'

The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, and brought back his head on a dish. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

3) Mark 6:30-44

The apostles gathered round Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'

So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. 'This is a remote

place,' they said, 'and it's already very late. Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.'

But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.'

They said to him, 'That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?'

'How many loaves do you have?' he asked. 'Go and see.'

When they found out, they said, 'Five – and two fish.'

Then Jesus told them to make all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.



1Mark 6 30-34 Compassionate Shepherd

REFLECTION:

I wonder how many people reading this today are left handed. And if you are, I wonder if you've experienced what I've experienced over the years. You pick up pen and people say "Ooh, I didn't know you were left handed!" Or they say something else which I can't repeat here because on investigating it actually means something quite rude to do with using the right hand for certain things and the left hand for certain other things! Or worse still I've had people raise their eyebrows at me as I'm writing and simply say "*sinister!*" Having shared with a friend recently how wearing it can get at times when people feel the need to point out that I'm left-handed, she sent me a Bible reading from Judges which she came across in her daily devotions. And she thought of me because in this reading it said that "the Lord raised up for them (*the Israelites*) a deliverer, Ehud son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man. It's not often that left-handed people get a mention in the Bible, we hear a lot about "the strong right-hand" but not the left. And as I was pondering why the writer thought it necessary to specify that Ehud was left-handed, I read on and found a few verses later that the Israelites' enemy, King Eglon, is described as 'a very fat man.' Now actually if you read the story as a whole, you can see the reasons why the writer deemed it

necessary to describe these details but it made me think how we all, for whatever reason, apply labels to people. We seem to need to categorise people so we pick out certain details of people's physique or characteristics, or maybe we use status or occupation to describe them.

And our second Bible reading this morning is all about people of status isn't it. It's about a King who invites his high officials, military commanders and leading people of Galilee to his birthday banquet. And placing this story where it is in Mark's Gospel is truly inspired to my mind because immediately before it we have the story of Jesus' sending out the disciples to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God, a story in which they are told to take nothing for the journey except a staff. They are told to take no bread, no bag, no money and not even a change of clothes.

And we pick up that story again in our third Bible reading, it begins "The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught" and it then goes on to tell the story of the feeding of the five thousand.

But in between we have this story of King Herod and by including it where he does, the gospel writer is drawing our attention to two contrasting kingdoms: an earthly kingdom where only the powerful and elite are welcome and the Kingdom of God

where **all are welcome** whatever label the world may have given them.

If we look at the story of Herod and his kingdom, his birthday banquet takes place behind closed doors and only certain people are privy to what goes on. No doubt there was an excess of food and drink and the story suggests that there was some kind of exotic dancing involved such that Herod promised the daughter of his wife Herodias who had danced for his guests that she could ask for anything she wanted, even up to half his kingdom. Now this played right into the hands of Herod's wife as she had been looking for a chance to rid herself of John the Baptist for a long time because John had pointed out her and Herod's wrong doing. And so this night she saw her chance and didn't hesitate when her daughter sought her advice on what she should ask for. She replied immediately "the head of John the Baptist." Now strangely enough, even though John pointed out Herod's wrong doing, Herod quite liked listening to what John had to say. He recognised him as a righteous and holy man and so to date had given him his protection but unfortunately for John, on this occasion, pride came into play. Herod had made a promise to his daughter "Ask me for anything you want and I'll give it to you" and he was too proud to go back on his promise and so that night an

innocent man, a righteous and holy man lost his life. How often do we see that today in worldly kingdoms, people who dare to speak out against brutal and oppressive regimes which serve the needs of the elite are locked up on false charges, or disappear or have their lives taken from them.

And so having told this story of Herod and his earthly kingdom, the gospel writer picks up the story of the sending out of the twelve disciples. And we see that although Jesus and the disciples were hoping to get some rest after their travels, the crowd recognised them and went ahead of them such that when Jesus and the disciples arrived in the boat, the crowd who had hurried there on foot were already there waiting for them. But Jesus did not complain, he did not dismiss them, he did not put his own needs before the needs of the people, rather he had compassion on them. He recognised that these people had no voice, no power, no one to represent them and they recognised in Jesus someone who not only noticed them but cared about them deeply. They were sheep without a shepherd and they were drawn to Jesus.

Now no doubt Herod's birthday party was in the evening and likewise it was getting late when the disciples came to Jesus reminding him that the people would need something to eat. But despite having earlier been sent out without food or money to

proclaim the Kingdom of God and having come back perfectly safe and well to tell Jesus all they have done and taught, the disciples slip back into their old ways here. Instead of trusting in God to provide, they complained about the amount it would cost to feed this vast crowd. Jesus, however, asks them to go and see what they can find and they come up with fives loaves and two fish. Simple food, nothing fancy, but we are told that after Jesus gave thanks and broke the loaves, the disciples distributed the bread and the fish such that **all were satisfied** (*five thousand men let alone women and children*) and yet there were twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish left over.

So, as I said earlier, we see two contrasting Kingdoms: an earthly kingdom where only the elite and powerful are welcome, where there is greed, lust, pride and where those who speak out against injustice and wrong doing lose their lives and the Kingdom of God which is open to all and where all are welcome. Remember in the Christmas story, the angels came first to the shepherds but the kings were also led to the Christ child. This is a Kingdom where lives are transformed and all are valued equally and all are satisfied. This is a Kingdom where the more you give, the more you will receive and no matter how little you have to give, as long as you offer it willingly in faith,

God will take it and use it to further his Kingdom here on earth. I know in which kingdom I prefer to live, I wonder which kingdom most appeals to you.

Hymn – SOF 2299

God of the moon and stars,

God of the near and far,
God of the fragile hearts we are,
I come to you.

God of our history,
God of the future that will be,
what will you make of me?

I come to you.

*God of the meek and mild,
God of the reckless and the wild,
God of the unreconciled,
I come to you.*

*God of our life and death,
God of our secrets unconfessed,
God of our every breath,
I come to you.*

God of the rich and poor,
God of the princess
and the whore,
God of the ever-open door,
I come to you.

God of the unborn child,
God of the pure and undefiled,
God of the pimp and paedophile,
I come to you.

*God of the war and peace,
God of the junkie and the priest,
God of the greatest and the
least, I come to you.*

*God of the refugee,
God of the prisoner and the free,
God of our doubt and certainty,
I come to you.*

*God of our joy and grief,
God of the lawyer and the thief,
God of our faith and unbelief,
I come to you.*

*God of the wounds we bear,
God of the deepest dreams we
share,
God of our unspoken prayer,
I come to you.*

God of a world that's lost,
God of a lonely cross,
God who has come to us,
we come to you.

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Prayers of Intercession

Holy God, We give thanks for the life and witness of John the Baptist and we pray for all who have been imprisoned for their faith, for all who at this time are facing persecution or danger, for all who stand for freedom and justice.

Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

Holy God, support all who seek to support others, all who care for

the homeless and poverty-stricken, all who work with prisoners or outcasts. Give courage to all who seek to live in simplicity, to all who sacrifice themselves that others may live.

Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

Holy God, we pray for those who lack the resources they need, for communities with poor medical supplies and a shortage of the covid vaccine, for all who lack food or shelter and those denied a proper education.

We remember all who are sick, all who are in distress and all who mourn.

Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

Holy and Loving God, we thank you for your care and compassion And we bring these prayers before you in Jesus' precious

name. **Amen.** *(Extracts from David Adam)*

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn – StF 407

Hear the call of the Kingdom

lift your eyes to the King;
let his song rise within you
as a fragrant offering
of how God, rich in mercy,
came in Christ to redeem
all who trust in his unfailing grace.

Hear the call of the kingdom
to be children of light,
with the mercy of heaven,
the humility of Christ;
walking justly before him,
loving all that is right,
that the life of Christ
may shine through us.

*King of heaven,
we will answer the call.
We will follow,
bringing hope to the world,
filled with passion,
filled with power to proclaim
salvation in Jesus' name.*

Hear the call of the kingdom
to reach out to the lost
with the Father's compassion
in the wonder of the cross,
bringing peace and forgiveness,
and a hope yet to come:
let the nations
put their trust in him.

Refrain

Keith Getty (born 1974), Kristyn Getty (born 1980) and Stuart Townend (born 1963)
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Closing Prayer

God give us grace, to become the
people you have called us to be,
that we may live to your praise
and glory.
Amen.