

Swaythling Parish

Sunday 17 January 2021

Second Sunday of Epiphany

Welcome

Below is a service sheet for you to use at home. You can also find our Sunday morning reflection on YouTube channel, available at 10am on Sunday, (and afterwards). Please search for "Swaythling Parish" on YouTube to find and view it.

If we can support you in any way at the present time, or you would just like to chat, do please get in touch:
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Introduction from Rev Peter Dockree

Welcome to our service today, however you are joining us. This Sunday is the second Sunday of Epiphany, and Ann will be reflecting with us on listening to God.

Greeting

Grace mercy and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you

And also with you.

The Lord be with you

And also with you

Prayer of Confession

My brothers and sister, not out of dread and fear
but believing that God is faithful to forgive,
let us rid ourselves of what we need to carry no longer.

**Eternal God, maker of the skies above,
lowly Christ, born amidst the growing earth,
Spirit of life, wind over the flowing waters,
in earth and sky, you are there.
O hidden mystery, sun behind all suns,
soul behind all souls,
in everything we touch, in everyone we meet,
your presence is around us, and we give you thanks.
But when we have not touched
but trampled you in creation,
when we have not met but missed you in one another,
when we have not received but rejected you in the poor,
forgive us, and hear now our plea for mercy.**

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May the God of love
Bring us back to himself,
Forgive us our sins,
and assure us of his eternal love
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Eternal Lord,
our beginning and our end:
bring us with the whole creation
to your glory, hidden through past ages
and made known
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Hymn: Christ whose glory fills the skies

1 Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
Christ, the true, the only Light,
Sun of Righteousness, arise,
triumph o'er the shades of night;
Dayspring from on high, be near;
Daystar, in my heart appear.

2 Dark and cheerless is the morn
unaccompanied by thee;
joyless is the day's return
'til thy mercy's beams I see;
'til they inward light impart,
glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

3 Visit, then, this soul of mine;
pierce the gloom of sin and grief;
fill me, Radiance divine;
scatter all my unbelief;
more and more thyself display,
shining to the perfect day.

C Wesley (1740). Public Domain

Readings

1 Samuel 3: 1-10

The boy Samuel is helped to hear God's call.

Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. The word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread.

At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to

grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' and he said, 'Here I am!' and ran to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call; lie down again.' So he went and lay down. The Lord called again, 'Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said, 'I did not call, my son; lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. The Lord called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."' So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

Now the Lord came and stood there, calling as before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

John 1: 43-end -

Jesus refers back to the story of Jacob's ladder Genesis 28: 10-17 - to describe his work.

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of

Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming towards him, he said of him, 'Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!' Nathanael asked him, 'Where did you come to know me?' Jesus answered, 'I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you.' Nathanael replied, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!' Jesus answered, 'Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these.' And he said to him, 'Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.'

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

A Reflection from Ann Lewin

It's hard to know where we are at the moment: the usual markers that give us a framework for living have gone. We don't go to work in the same way, or do the school run; we can't hold face to face meetings or have social gatherings. It's often hard to remember what day of the week it is.

The readings the church gives us to ponder on each week don't help us much at the moment either. Before Christmas we knew where we were in the story, as Advent led us up to the birth of Jesus, but since then chronology seems to have deserted us. The Wise Men came at Epiphany, when Jesus was probably a toddler; then last week we were thinking about the beginning of Jesus' ministry as he was baptised, next week we shall be with him at a wedding in Cana, and the week after that we will be thinking about him being taken to the Temple when he was six weeks old. This week we have a pause in this yo-yo effect, as we are offered the opportunity to think about listening to God, and how we respond.

In our first reading we heard about young Samuel, who had been God's gift to Hannah, releasing her from what at the time was perceived to be a punishment, her inability to bear a child. In return, when he was old enough, he was given back to God to serve in the local temple, helping the old priest, Eli, who was virtually blind. One night, Samuel thought he heard Eli calling him, and it took Eli a little while to realise that the young boy was being called by God. Eventually Samuel was able to connect with God: 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening'. We don't know what God said to him, but that was the beginning of a long life of service as a leader among the Jewish people. He was a game-changer: he oversaw the development of his fellow Hebrews from being a collection of tribes to being a nation united under a king. He anointed Saul, and

then David to be king, and was advisor to both of them. And all because he first listened.

All through the Jewish scriptures there are complaints by the prophets that people were not listening to God or keeping his laws. That was why Jesus came into the world, God's word made flesh, to help people relate to God and live the best lives that humans could live.

In our second reading we heard about two people who met Jesus and responded to him, but in very different ways. We don't know anything about what conversations Philip had with Jesus. All we know is that when Jesus said, 'Follow me', Philip did just that. And the first thing he did was to find Nathanael who took rather longer to respond. When Philip said that he had found Jesus of Nazareth, who was the person the Jews had been waiting for, he was very sceptical about anything good coming from that place: he was from a neighbouring village, Cana. Perhaps the rivalry between football clubs and the towns or cities that are their homes that we know about, is not such a new thing after all. But whatever happened when he met Jesus, he stayed around, and was one of the group of followers who met Jesus by the lakeside after the resurrection. So he must have listened and learnt as he developed his relationship with Jesus.

All these examples remind us that listening is a very important part of our relationship with God. God communicates with us in many different ways; Not many people nowadays seem to hear God speaking to them directly as

Samuel did: we are more likely to hear God as we read the Scriptures, especially through the words of Jesus, or by hearing someone talking about him, or suggesting a course of action that we had not thought about. We don't always want to hear what is being said either – perhaps that is why often think about prayer as talking to God: 'Listen Lord, for your servant is speaking', rather than following Samuel's example.

What has all that got to do with us as we go through another period of lock-down? We don't know where we are. But what if we use the time to learn to listen again? What might God want us to hear? In the very early days of their history, the Jewish people kept on complaining about the hardship of life as they wandered in the desert on their way to the promised land. They blamed Moses for leading them away from what they thought of as normality where they had food and shelter, into an uncertain future. In the 21st century we hear people saying that they want things to go back to normal. But it is becoming clearer as time goes on that whatever normal is, it will be different. What are we humans, Christians and others, being called towards?

Throughout Advent and Christmas, stars appeared in many windows. The wise men followed a star which led them on a very long journey, possibly lasting a couple of years, and they probably felt tired and fed up, and perhaps wished they were at home in comfort. But they kept going, and recognised God in the unlikely setting of a stable. Perhaps in this

Epiphany season, they can encourage us, tired and fed up as we probably all feel at times, to keep going, and keep hoping. They can remind us that it is OK to feel tired and fed up – that is not weakness, but being realistic. Weakness is giving in to despair, and ceasing to trust that God is ultimately in control.

As well as a star, I have had a poster in my window with some words that I need to remind myself of, and to keep on exploring: love, joy, peace and hope. What is God saying to us about each of those words? There have been many signs of love in the care people have shown to others in many acts of kindness. Is God asking us how we can build on the compassion and dedication people have demonstrated during these difficult months, so that we transform our communities and the world into something better than it was before all this happened?

It may seem strange to talk about joy when there is so much suffering and misery round us. We have to take all that seriously, but not let it overwhelm us. Joy doesn't mean being or feeling cheerful all the time, it wells up from a growing confidence in God's faithfulness. Is God asking us to work at trusting that whatever happens, God will never let us down?

The need for peace is obvious – we don't have to look far to see that. We may feel that we can't do much about the big questions, but we can all do something in our relationships. We can challenge injustice; we can take care about the way that we treat others, especially people

whose beliefs and habits are different from ours. Are there aspects of our national or local life that we could give our attention to, and try to make a difference?

Above all we need to keep hope alive. Hope isn't wishful thinking about things will turning out all right in the end. Hope is looking for positive ways to live, challenging fear and despair. Is God calling us to work at keeping hopeful?

There is a prayer written by an American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr in the last century which might become our prayer as we go on in hope:

*God give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things that
should be changed,
and the wisdom to know the difference.*

Prayers

Let us pray for our world, our community and those in need around us.

Lord we pray for those struggling to hear your voice in these times. Those who feel alone. Those who are battling anxiety and mental health.

We pray for those frustrated by the ongoing nature of the covid pandemic. We pray for those grieving loved ones and those whose long term health has been impacted.

We pray for all of us that we may hear your voice in these troubled times.

*God give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things that
should be changed,
and the wisdom to know the difference*

Hymn: Will you come and follow me.

- 1 Will you come and follow me
if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know
and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown,
will you let my name be known,
will you let my life be grown
in you and you in me?
- 2 Will you leave yourself behind
if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind
and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare
should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer
in you and you in me?
- 3 Will you let the blinded see
if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free
and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean
and do such as this unseen,
and admit to what I mean
in you and you in me?

- 4 Will you love the 'you' you hide
if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside
and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found
to reshape the world around
through my sight and touch and sound
in you and you in me?
- 5 Lord, your summons echoes true
when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you
and never be the same.
In your company I'll go
where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow
in you and you in me.

J Bell & G Maule © 1987, WGRG Iona Community.

Closing Blessing

Thank you to everyone for worshiping with us today.

May God give us light to guide us,
Courage to support us,
And love to unite us,
Now and evermore
and may the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be among you and remain with you always.

Amen

(B.O'Malley)

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