

A Service for the Third Sunday after Trinity, 28 June 2020 – Dean Sarah

On Sunday mornings the clergy team, with support from other members of the parish and recorded music, will take turns to lead a service of reading, hymns, reflection and prayers, which will be posted on YouTube and social media. This is a written summary of the service, to be shared with those who don't have access to the internet. Here is an edited version of the latest service, led by Dean Sarah. This is the first Sunday on which clergy in St Davids Diocese are able to record in their Churches, but any wider engagement of others in the service is still not permitted by Welsh Government regulations.

Introduction: Dean Sarah

Welcome to our Sunday Service, as we share in music, readings and prayers from our dispersed Cathedral Community. After three months away, the clergy are able to record for broadcasting from the Cathedral itself, so here I am in the Trinity Chapel – but others continue to record from their homes, while we are only allowed to be open for private prayer.

We begin with a simple prayer of confession, asking for God's cleansing and forgiveness, so we may be ready to hear and receive all he desires to give us in this time together:

Most merciful God,

we confess to you, before the whole company of heaven and one another,
that we have sinned in thought, word and deed, and in what we have failed to do.

Forgive us our sins, heal us by your Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ. Amen.

We pray the Collect for today, the Third Sunday after Trinity:

Almighty God,

you have broken the tyranny of sin

and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts

whereby we call you Father:

give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,

that we and all creation may be brought

to the glorious liberty of the children of God;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, Amen

The Opening Hymn

The Reading: Jayne MacGregor reads the Gospel According to St Matthew, Chapter 10, verses 40 to 42

Jesus said, 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; and

whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.’

The Address: Dean Sarah

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

It has been a very special week in the life of the Cathedral. I do not know how long ago we have had a period like this, when our building has been closed for public worship, and the faithful have had to pray in their homes.

But Friday, just over a week ago, the First Minister of Wales announced that from Monday, we could reopen our churches for private prayer, if we could fulfil conditions for social distancing and adequate hygiene, after close to 3 months’ closure.

Bishop Joanna decided that, if the people of our parishes could not enter churches for prayer and worship, then it was only fitting that clergy similarly should share in this discipline. And so, on Monday morning, for the first time in 3 months, I sat in the Dean’s Stall in the Quire, and said Morning Prayer – in preparation for opening the Cathedral for all who wish to come.

As 10 o’clock arrived, I said a prayer by the 17th century bishop Thomas Ken, that God would bless our doors and keep them doors wide open to all in any kind of need, and closed to all that is harmful [see below], and then Jenny pulled up the ancient heavy bolts, and flung them open!

And what does a wide open door say? It declares an unequivocal Welcome – the sort of welcome of which our gospel reading speaks.

There is a two-fold welcome here: we are to welcome others as Christ welcomes us, and to welcome others as if they were Christ.

And it is because we know ourselves welcomed by Christ, his arms spread as wide as the cross – his embrace able to encompass the needs of the entire world, the pains of all of humanity, the hurt of all of history – because his welcome is wide enough for everyone who is willing to receive it; with no-one who is beyond his invitation – then we should also extend that welcome, that invitation, in his name, to everyone who comes our way.

The welcome of the Cathedral this week has been very special. We still live with the Welsh Government’s call to ‘stay safe, stay local’ and our parish is very small – but so many of the ‘usual suspects’ have come! And we have been able to greet one another, at a safe distance!

‘It’s really you!’ we say. Some have sat and paused a while in prayer and reflection. But there has also been the joy of conversation – nothing particularly special, on the face of it, but actually, a profound delight just to be able to speak about what we have been through, and to listen to others do the same.

There’s something deeply sacramental about this – to be present to one another, as we share deeply of ourselves, with those whom we know particularly, as brothers and sisters in Christ, members together of the body of Christ – a body that has been separated for so many weeks, but which, even in the first small ways, is beginning to come back together.

We know God meets us everywhere, and the prayers we have offered in our homes are as valid as those we make within these walls. But for so many, our experience, like those of so many centuries before us, is that we have been helped by being here, to come close to God in a particular way. It is as if this place is soaked in the prayers of the faithful over so many centuries, that when we are here, all this is amplified for us – God’s holy, loving presence – in which we, when we come even in our ones and twos as we have done this week, also find ourselves caught up in holy love, present to one another!

And so we not only offer, but we also receive, the welcome of Christ – to us in this place, but also which we share with one another.

And then there is a further call to us all – to share this welcome, this invitation, this hospitality, with others too. Perhaps these strange past weeks have made us more sensitive to what really matters, and to the nature of holy community, within and beyond the body of Christ.

Perhaps what we are experiencing in and around the Cathedral this week is a taste of what we are called to more widely, as the country begins to think about what it might mean to ‘build back better’ – to hold on to the most important lessons of this challenging time, and deliberately to work at consolidating habits of not merely looking after ourselves in a narrowly conceived way, but rather realising that our own well-being hinges upon the ability of all of us to look out for one another.

And it’s not a matter of keeping tabs on who has done whom a good turn, and to whom good turns are owed. Rather, it’s realising that doing good to others is actually an investment that will bring good to everyone, ourselves included.

‘All things work together for good, for those who love God’ wrote St Paul (Rom 8:28). There’s no situation so bleak God can’t bring good out of it. Perhaps the coronavirus is just what we have needed, to open our eyes to God’s call to live lives of compassion and care – to live, expecting always to give and receive welcome to all of humanity.

So, as the government gradually opens up restrictions, and we have new opportunities before us, how shall we use them?

Well, what better than the words of the Collect for today 'Give us give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service' – the service of lives laid down in love for one another, for the wider world – sharing the welcome of Christ crucified whose arms embrace the whole of creation, the whole of space and time.

Amen

The Prayers: Revd Don MacGregor

[To include The Lord's Prayer]

The Closing Hymn:

The Blessing: Dean Sarah

The peace of God which is beyond all understanding
guard your hearts in the knowledge and love of God and
of his Son Jesus Christ and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and
the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always.

Amen.

'O God, make the door of this house
wide enough to receive all
who need human love and fellowship,
and a heavenly Father's care,
and narrow enough to shut out
all envy, pride and hate suffering.
Make its threshold smooth enough
to be no stumbling block to children,
nor to straying feet,
but rugged and strong enough
to turn back the tempter's power:
O God, make the door of this house
a gateway to thine eternal kingdom.'

Prayer of Thomas Ken