

Good morning everyone! I hope you are all well. Once again, I'm sharing some prayers and reflections that I hope will help us as we pray and worship at home. I'll include here a link to the Youtube video of the reflection, and attached is also a copy of the reflection. I hope that those of you with access to facebook have been enjoying Revd Carole's Night Prayer videos on evenings midweek - many thanks Carole. You'll find them on the parish facebook page and website.

Except for those who have asked not to receive a printed copy, you should all soon be receiving a pack with a letter from me and some worship resources, especially for Ascension Day, Pentecost and Trinity Sunday. Reflections for those occasions will be put emailed out and posted online as we go through, although I will be including a hard copy of those reflections on the letter where I know people do not have internet access.

The other thing I would like to try out this week is to have a Zoom chat. If you've not come across Zoom before (and I'd never heard of it before lockdown!), it is a video conferencing app which a lot of people are now using for virtual meetings. I had my first proper taste of it last week with some of the clergy in the Deanery, and it wasn't anything like as difficult or offputting as I thought it might have been! Whilst I don't think we're yet at the point some parishes are, of being ready to use it for worship or for PCC meetings etc, as it is likely that a lot of people would not be able to take part, I have set up a meeting this week just for any of us who would like to have a chat online and see one another's faces again. That will be on Thursday of this week (21 May) at 11am, for just half an hour or so. The ID for that meeting is 319-891-1457 and there is a password which is Kings1. I know some of you have already used Zoom - if you haven't, but are game for giving it a go but are not sure how, email me and I can give some guidance. And if all that leaves you thoroughly confused, don't worry! Nobody has to join in, but I thought it would be worth giving it a go, now it is clear it will be a little while before we can have a get together in person.

Thank you for your prayers in relation to funerals that have been taking place, and please continue to hold our local funeral directors in your prayers. I am glad to say that the pressure on them seems to be easing a little now, which is a good sign. The forthcoming services in our parishes are for: Joan Collier at 11am on 22 May, Sadie Nelson at 11.30am on 27 May, Raymond Green at 2pm on 27 May, and Stephen Hudson at 12 noon on 2 June.

Love and prayers to you all,

John

<https://youtu.be/fdEYl4VrE0g>



"If you love me": A Reflection for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

A Reading from John 14.15-21 and a Reflection by Revd John White on Jesus' words, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments".

[youtu.be](https://youtu.be/...)

Worship and Reflection for the 6th Sunday of Easter

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia!

Faithful one, whose word is life:
come with saving power
to free our praise,
inspire our prayer
and shape our lives
for the kingdom of your Son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.

Psalm 95.1-5

O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving: and shew ourselves glad in him with psalms.

For the Lord is a great God: and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are all the corners of the earth: and the strength of the hills is his also.

The sea is his and he made it: and his hands prepared the dry land.

O come let us worship and bow down: and kneel before the Lord our Maker.

For he is the Lord our God: and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Collect

God our Redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son;
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,

so by his continual presence in us he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Acts 17.22-31

Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, 'Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your own poets have said, "For we too are his offspring."

Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judge in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.'

John 14.15-21

Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

'I will not leave you orphaned: I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. 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.'

Reflection

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments". *If you love me*. Taken out of context, and spoken by somebody other than Jesus, those words could and should

ring all sorts of alarm bells. It can be a phrase suggestive of emotional manipulation or even abuse.: “If you really loved me, then you would do this for me, then you would give me what I want”. “If you love me” It suggests conditionality, a love that needs to be proved or that is dependent on meeting the demands of the other party. As I have sometimes said to couples in wedding sermons and marriage preparation sessions, the word “if” does not appear in the marriage vows. True love is a gift. It is marked by grace. It does not depend on keeping conditions or keeping commandments.

But I don't think that is what Jesus is saying. “If you love me, you *will* keep my commandments”. Jesus is not trying to persuade the disciples to do what he asks. He is not suggesting that his love for them, or theirs for him, is conditional upon them doing the right thing. The logic of the sentence is quite different. Perhaps we'd be better translating it as: “Because you love me...” It is not about conditions, but consequences and connections. Keeping the Lord's commandments, to love God, to love our neighbour, to love one another, simply flows naturally out of loving Jesus. If you love me, you will keep my commandments; it's just what happens.

A thread that runs through this Gospel reading is that everything is connected: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit – and those who believe and trust in that one God – so that what becomes true of one can be seen as true of the others. In last week's reading, of which this is a continuation, Jesus told Philip, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father”. Here we are assured that if we know Jesus, we know the Father, and we will know the Spirit whom the Father sends to live within us. All are bound in the perfect unity of love, and we share in that love. “On that day”, says Jesus, “you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you”.

The love of God is not, then, something that we have to aspire to or earn. It is, for the believer, something that has become part and parcel of our very being. It is the air that we breathe. It is the water in which we swim. And so keeping the commandments of love is not a matter of making strenuous efforts to do what we have been told we should do. It is far simpler than that. It is a matter of living and moving and walking in the love of God, that surrounds us and that fills us.

Perhaps it comes back to what I was saying about marriage. The point of the marriage vows, and the declarations of love within them, is not to make husband or wife feel bound to act against their own desires and interests by begrudgingly loving the other because that is what they once promised to do. The vows are there to provide one another with the assurance of being loved, within which secure framework each may be most truly and fully themselves. That assurance is symbolised in the giving of rings, with words that start “I give you this ring”, but which end “within the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit”.

And that phrase is not just a routine formula, to give a Christian gloss on the marriage service. What it does is to place all our loves and all our lives within the all-encompassing love of the One who is Love, the God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”, says Jesus. Not reluctantly, or under duress. Not fearfully, as if we will be rejected if we fail. And not proudly, as if it is some kind of virtuous achievement. If we love him, we will keep his commandments, naturally, as the outworking and expression of who we are and who we have become. We will keep his commandments of love because we live and move within the love of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Prayers of Intercession

Father of all, you hold all creation in your hand and love us with an everlasting love. Pour out your blessings on us and all the world. Give us grace to know you, to love you, and to serve you, in the name of Jesus and in the power of the Spirit. Amen.

Give wisdom and courage to governments across the world as they seek to implement the best measures to combat the coronavirus pandemic. May they be led by the interests and well-being of all, and especially of the poorest and most vulnerable. Where restrictions on our movement and activities are necessary, give patience where that is needed. Where there needs to be a resumption of working life, may there be the proper measures in place for that to happen safely. Especially at this time we pray for our schools; for teachers, headteachers, governors and staff; for parents; and most especially for children. Where difficult decisions are to be made about who returns to school and when, may those decisions be made with clarity, caution and courage.

We continue to pray for all those who care for and treat the sick. May the staff in hospitals and care homes be provided with the resources that they need. Give rest and strength to those who are struggling with the demands of their job. Be with all those whose work places them in the frontline. We pray for those who are returning to work, and for those for whom that is not possible.

We pray for your church, and especially for those in positions of responsibility and leadership; for our archbishops and bishops, and for Louise as she prepares to take on the role of full-time Area Dean. We pray for her parish of Dosthill, and for all our neighbouring parishes in vacancy at this time. Give grace and strength to the church wardens in those places. May the churches throughout this area be steadfast and faithful in prayer and service throughout this time.

We pray for our local communities, and especially for those who work in different ways to care for those who live here. This week, we pray particularly for all those living on The Hawthorns & The Larches in Kingsbury; St Edmunds Road in Hurley; Whateley Lane in Wood End; and Wigston Hill in Baxterley. Build up our common life together, that we may be good neighbours to one another.

Father, we hold before you all who are sick, whether at home, in hospitals, or care homes. Pour out your healing upon them. Where it is possible, restore them in health and strength; and where they are at the end of life, give them comfort, peace, and the knowledge of your love.

Amen.

Father, we remember those who have died...
Help us to trust in the promise of Jesus,
that he has gone ahead to prepare a place for all your children in your presence.
In due time, turn our tears of grief into tears of joy. **Amen.**

Blessing

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the eternal covenant,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
be with you all, now and always
Amen.

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