

5th May, 2024

The paper-version Service



To Begin: Find a Bible and a comfortable place. If safe, light a candle and read prayerfully through the service. If you have access to worship music, choose a song and listen to it as you begin or read, or even sing, the song from this Sunday's Service.

Opening Prayer: Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Song:

O to be like Thee, blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer;
Gladly I'll forfeit all of earth's treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.

O to be like Thee, O to be like Thee,
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy
fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.

O to be like Thee, full of compassion,
Loving, forgiving, tender and kind,
Helping the helpless, cheering the fainting,
Seeking the wand'ring sinner to find.

O to be like Thee, lowly in spirit,
Holy and harmless, patient and brave;
Meekly enduring cruel reproaches,
Willing to suffer, others to save.

O to be like Thee, O to be like Thee,
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy
fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.

O to be like Thee, Lord, I am coming,
Now to receive th' anointing divine;
All that I am and have I am bringing,
Lord, from this moment all shall be Thine.

O to be like Thee, while I am pleading,
Pour out Thy Spirit, fill with Thy love,
Make me a temple meet for Thy dwelling,
Fit me for life and Heaven above.

O to be like Thee, O to be like Thee,
Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art;
Come in Thy sweetness, come in Thy
fullness;
Stamp Thine own image deep on my heart.

Philippians 1:18b-30 – Worthy

The Sermon by Robert Hughes

Today's reading from Philippians will be repeated soon. It's part of our, postponed for now, sermon series. So, for the moment, we'll look at how Paul wanted to be understood. That is all-important because, from recent evidence, we know that the authentic voice of scripture is lost by translations that try to do our thinking for us. However well-intentioned, whether we're contending with an 'old fashioned' word like 'abide', at the centre of Archdeacon Richard's Christening sermon last week, or a potentially problematic word like 'partnership', unpacked for us by Timothy James the week before, our understanding is at stake. To be surer of the sense intended by the ancient authors, we sometimes need to reach for a straightforward translation of the words they actually wrote.

Paul's central Message

The presence of the (Holy) Spirit is the foundation for our reading from Paul today. He exhorts the congregation at Philippi ('encourages' is not a strong enough word) to stand firm in what he calls the 'one Spirit' (v27). He has a growing conviction that it's the Spirit that has so far brought him safely through his own dangers. And that's probably because he still has God's work to do. Perhaps he hasn't written this very clearly, but his sense of purpose and direction shine through, nevertheless. His point here is his belief that the same divine inspiration, the same 'Spiritual Intuition' is driving the growing faith of the Philippians. They mustn't give up on it. It won't let them down.

Paul speaks of the Spirit more than anyone else - but not in a consistent or measured way. He responds to his inspirations with enthusiasm and excitement, but not always with clarity. (I'm rather that way myself!).

We can struggle to comprehend the very idea of a Spirit. My grasp of pneumatology is weaker than I would like (and I suspect it's that way for most of us). So these verses from Paul's letter might be tricky to unpack. And yet it's an important passage. Though the effect of the Spirit on our lives is huge, it's hard to come to a rational understanding about anything so ephemeral, anything you can't see or touch. That is why, in order to understand, we must think about our own powers of intuition! I'll get back to that shortly. But first

What does Paul mean by 'worthy'?

The word 'worthy' Paul uses in v27 is paradoxical. He seems sometimes to suffer what today's generation calls imposter syndrome - an unhelpful self-consciousness which calls what we are doing into doubt. Paul spent years trying to have Jesus silenced. And now he faces death himself for saying the same things - for 'evangelising'. So, he asks himself, is he really a fit person to follow in Jesus' footsteps'? Does he deserve to be seen as a martyr? Has he 'earned' such an acknowledgment - such a concrete sign of Jesus' forgiveness.

But back to the plainer meaning. Since his conversion on the Emmaus Road, Paul has used his life to bring others to share his own faith. He has 'preached Christ'. Not with words from a pulpit, not with official authority; not bathed in the warm glow of public acclaim and not always with popularity. He has introduced the essence of Christ into the lives of others by allowing the Spirit of Christ to speak through his life - through what he 'is'. What he stands for speaks for itself. The implication for us is clear. Our worthiness consists in the values we live by - values inspired and energised by the Spirit we have received.

How does Paul understand the 'provision of the Spirit of Jesus' (v19)?

I have a book written by John Levison, entitled 'Filled with the Spirit'. It's a 430 page tour de force, a comprehensive survey of the scriptural evidence. And, if it's made anything clear to me, it's that divergent religious claims have turned our understanding of the Spirit into a kind of theological porridge. Did we receive God's breath when we received life; or when we were conceived; or born; or Christened; or Baptised; or at Pentecost; or individually in response to particular need? The answer is ... Yes, yes to all that!

The Bible as a whole locates the Spirit in us all, 'sees' it as the centre of the virtue and wisdom that God places within us. And although Paul's understanding of it is at times elusive, other writers (and Luke in particular) connect it fundamentally with inspired interpretation of scripture and revealed knowledge - something I have already referred to as Spiritual Intuition to distinguish it from 'sixth sense'. You might call it an inner leading.

In God's world - the 'Real' world - life is ordered in a natural way, God's way, an order of priorities we can learn, and learn to anticipate. Some ways fit that order, some endanger it. And the presence of what Paul calls the 'One Spirit' provided by God helps us to discern the difference, and to know how and when to respond to the needs 'He' draws to our attention. Ethics are rooted in the sanctity of life, and their values are enshrined by our faith in order to influence the way we behave. We act out of this 'love' - not out of 'simple 'kindness' - but because (as Timothy said from here a fortnight ago) we acknowledge our partnership with God in the enterprise of life.

What measure would Paul use to gauge the Philippians' 'progress' (v25)?

Paul tells the Philippians that God keeps him safe so he can help to build their trust in Jesus; help them consolidate their faith and take joy from it - for, as Paul acknowledges in v28, their growing faith has opposition. So progress in this context means discovering the resolve - the determination they need to continue to the end. The signal of their 'arrival' will be the assurance they display that they have recognised the Holy Spirit lies within them.

That same presence prompts a last observation on today's reading - on the growing importance of the Holy Spirit to the world at large: The institutionalisation of Church has brought a form of separation - a division of labour between

Ministers and the rest of us. There are sacred elements to priesthood, jobs reserved for them alone. But ministering to God's people is not one of them. Everyone here shares the burden of that responsibility. And our growing experience of life in secular Western culture shows more clearly than ever our need of the ever present Spirit. From where else will we find the energy to minister to fellow travellers on the paths back to God?

Sixth Sunday of Easter: 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. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer: *Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.*

Blessing to be declared over yourselves, St Andrews and The Good Shepherd, the communities around us and our whole nation. 'The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24-26 NIV).

At the Church of the Good Shepherd

- Tea and Chat: May 15th at 2pm in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Bowls: May 15th at 2pm in the Church.
- Coffee and Questions: May 22nd at 10.30am in the Church Hall.
- Tea and Praise: 3pm Sunday, TBA
- The Community Cupboard, 2:45pm every Thursday in Church.

For Further information:

This paper and all parish details are on the website at <https://www.pariahofmedsteadandfourmarks.co.uk>