

Service for Sunday 28 June 2020 Revd Pauline Crispin

Loving God, although we are in our different places, we gather in response to your invitation; together, welcomed by you. May the warmth of your welcome inspire and enhance the worship we offer to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Proverbs 15:22. Without counsel, plans go wrong, but with many advisers they succeed

This Coronavirus crisis has demanded new and frequently changing plans across so many sectors. Pray that as people work together, their plans to work for good would succeed; and that systems would continue to function, for the sake of the common good.

Sing or read:

- 1 I will sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
how he left the realms of glory
for the cross on Calvary :
*Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
of the Christ who died for me,
sing it with his saints in glory,
gathered by the crystal sea.*
- 2 I was lost ; but Jesus found me,
found the sheep that went astray,
raised me up, and gently led me
back into the narrow way :
- 3 Faint was I, and fears possessed me,
bruised was I from many a fall ;
hope was gone, and shame distressed me ;
but his love has pardoned all :
- 4 Days of darkness still come o'er me ;
sorrow's paths I often tread ;
but the Saviour still is with me,
by his hand I'm safely led :
- 5 He will keep me till the river
rolls its waters at my feet ;
then he'll bear me safely over,
where the loved ones I shall meet :

Francis Harold Rowley (1854–1952) Reproduced from *Singing the Faith* Electronic Words Edition, number 323
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Proverbs 15:25 The Lord tears down the house of the proud but maintains the widow's boundaries.

We serve a God of justice, who desires that the vulnerable members of our society will be protected. Pray that the elderly and at-risk would be able to access the help that they need and pray for all those key workers responsible for delivering it.

Introduction to the reading: In the gospel reading for this week Jesus is back to teaching the basics. And what could be more basic than Christian hospitality. This lesson is not so much about what to do; as it is about who and why we welcome.

First the disciples need a quick shot of confidence. Jesus has called them to ministry. And they have left family and livelihood to follow him. Their decision has not always been appreciated by those they are serving. The disciples sense a growing hostility to Jesus and a danger to themselves. Jesus comforts them saying: He that receives you receives me, and he that receives you receives him who sent me. Beyond the encouragement for the disciples, there is an enduring lesson here for clergy and congregations. Shepherds are called to lay down their life for God's flock. It is not a job or even a career. It is a vocation. And the answer to God's call can only be complete commitment to serving his people. In Christ "to lead" means to serve... and serve... and serve. In this gospel Jesus also instructs congregations that they must make service possible. It is Christ's own model.

The lesson this week is from Matthew's gospel is a lesson in hospitality. Jesus is so focused on welcoming the stranger that he uses the word "welcome" six times in just two sentences.

Matthew 10:40-42 "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."

Reflection on the reading: The whole idea of hospitality in this gospel is a way of showing Christian love. But how much of the hospitality we offer is simply an exchange for hospitality we expect to receive from others? Or are we only ready to offer welcome to those who are similar to us? Christian love (or indeed any love) does not work that way, we do not give out expecting to receive, or at least we should not. **The love we offer should be** a witness to the unconditional love of Christ. It is not reserved for those who we like or for those who are like us, but deliberately directed to the least among us... or as Christ calls them in this gospel: these little ones. That is the theory, anyway. What is the practice like?

In recent weeks apart from Covid-19 we have seen and heard of some appalling news. The killing of George Floyd and then a week or two later the killing of Rayshard Brooks, both by police officers. It seems that neither of these men were above suspicion, but surely, they did not deserve to be killed. Are you less sympathetic or even indifferent because of their status and colour, or are you horrified, as I am, by the whole situation?

On Saturday evening, Khairi Saadallah went on a stabbing spree in Forbury Gardens, Reading. Were you shocked and appalled by the stabbing as I was? His victims were three gay men, James Furlong, David Wails and Joe Ritchie-Bennett. It makes me ask the question, 'if the three men had not been gay, would the press have said... 'Three straight men were killed'...? I guess not! When the fact that the three were 'gay' were you less sympathetic or even indifferent because of their status and sexuality? or are you horrified, as I am, by the whole situation?

So far there has been almost no interest expressed in the possible motives of the attacker. Quite possibly there is a mental health component. Is there any other reason why a migrant from Libya who was given asylum in the UK might want to go around stabbing people? Does

it mean that we can take one step away from the actions of the killer because is wasn't 'one of us.' He is from another country, does this mean we can distance ourselves?

So far, the most analysis there has been is to inform us all of the wonderfulness of the victims. We can learn that the victims were not just 'proud gay men' who attended Reading Pride, but that at least one of them, James Furlong, was also 'a strong advocate for the Black Lives Matter movement.' Perhaps if Khairi Saadallah had known how involved in social activism his victims were then he would have left them alone and stabbed some people who never much bothered with such things or kept themselves to themselves.

The BBC news has managed to talk about the three Reading victims without once saying that the police think they might have been targeted because they were gay. All that has nodded to that possibility was a tribute from someone who said that the victims were part of the LGBT community.

Just a few days ago a Burnley football fan chartered a plane trailing a banner which read 'White lives matter.' I wouldn't disagree with the statement. However, I would like to finish by stating: - 'All lives matter!' We receive unconditional love and are welcomed, by God, sinners though we are. As we are welcomed so we should welcome others. We are reminded by Jesus, 'let he who is without sin cast the first stone. Also our text reminds us of our task, "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." As human beings we are all children of God, made in His likeness. The creed and the colour and the name won't matter, Amen

Dear Lord, we pray for those in power,
may they be hospitable to those who need support and help,
as well as to those who will pay and flatter them.
We pray for the Church, that it may be hospitable to its critics,
to people of other faiths and traditions, to those who express doubt.
We pray for ourselves, that we may be hospitable neighbours.
We pray for those who care for the weak, that they will be hospitable
whatever the needs that confront them.
We pray for the marginalised, that they will encounter hospitality,
that the world will become a hospitable place where they are noticed. Amen.

**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 for ever. Amen.**

Sing or read

- 1 When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there ?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there ?
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
were you there ?*
- 2 I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there ?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there ?
- 3 I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there ?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there ?
- 4 When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there ?
When I needed a shelter, were you there ?
- 5 When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there ?
When I needed a healer, were you there ?
- 6 Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there,
wherever you travel I'll be there.
*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter,
I'll be there.*

Sydney Carter (1915–2004)

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The Blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, be with you, with those you love and with those you ought to love, this day and for evermore. Amen

