

11th Sunday After Trinity 2020

Welcome

Welcome in the name of Christ. God's grace, mercy and peace be with you.

In today's Gospel reading, we see the wonderful faith of Peter in action. Peter, I think, is someone who can offer us a great deal of reassurance as we journey together as Christ's disciples. Before we hear the reading, the collect for today.

Today's Collect

God of glory, the end of our searching,
help us to lay aside all that prevents us from seeking your kingdom,
and to give all that we have to gain the pearl beyond all price,
through our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Gospel Reading – Matthew 16.13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then he sternly ordered the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah

Reflection

The last time I told someone I was training to be a vicar, they literally choked on their drink. There was a sudden sense of panic in their face as this person felt that having sworn in front of me earlier in our conversation, they had committed some great offence. I have to say, this wasn't an unfamiliar experience. It seems to be the case that as soon as I tell people that I am a trainee vicar, their perception of me changes, sadly, not always for the better! Sometimes, though, I've noticed that people seem to feel the need to change their behaviour in some way whilst they're in my company. In reality, this is something I experienced long before I felt a call to ordination. As many of you now know, I have been a Christian for most of my life, and in my experience (perhaps this will ring true with you), when people have learned about my faith, they have sometimes started to treat me differently as their perception of me suddenly changes. I think people often craft an image of what a Christian must be like in their minds, an image of a very pious, holy and immaculate individual, one who lives a righteous life, one who follows their God

unwaveringly as they take on their call to discipleship with steadfast integrity and faith. If they only knew. This image people sometimes craft scares me a bit. It's certainly not an image I have ever lived up to. I have never been the "perfect Christian." I make mistakes more times than I can count, I'm far from being the unshakable disciple, my faith is certainly not unwavering. I am so far off from the glory of God in the way I conduct myself, especially so in private, when I feel no one is looking. That image of me that people sometimes conjure up when I tell them about my faith or my calling is, in reality, distorted and wrong.

There's a lot going on in today's Gospel reading: it is a crucial moment as the Disciples, and indeed we, come to understand more about who Jesus is, but we also see Jesus' love for a flawed and wonderful human being who professed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Peter is one of my favourite people in the Bible. I love reading about him because in him, we see someone who loves Jesus and wants nothing more than to follow Him, and yet, he is someone who traverses his path of discipleship not without some sticky moments along the way; his faith is far from unwavering, his conduct, far from immaculate. From his hesitancy to throw his fishing nets over the side of a boat at Jesus' request, to denying he even knows Jesus three whole times after He has been captured, Peter, it seems, does not live up to this perfect image of Christianity either. But we see in this reading that this is okay. In spite of all his flaws and failings, Jesus declares that Peter, an ordinary man who makes more than his share of mistakes, is the rock upon which He will build His church, and we see that God goes on to do amazing things through Peter throughout his life. This, to me, is a huge comfort. If Peter, the rock upon whom Jesus said He would build His church, didn't get it right all the time, if Peter made mistakes, if Peter was just an ordinary person who loved the Lord, maybe it's alright that I am too. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it's unimportant to undertake our call to discipleship with all the strength, courage and integrity we can muster, but rather that, like Peter, it's okay to be imperfect, to not live up to whatever image people have of what a Christian "should" be, because God is bigger than that. Just like with Peter, God loves us unconditionally, and works through us when we're not doing so well as well as when we are. The church is, after all, made up of people like Peter: beautiful, flawed individuals whom Christ loves. Jesus asks: "who do you say I am?", and we have the assurance that He is the one who faithfully loves us as His children in both our best, and perhaps more importantly, in our worst moments.

Prayers of Intercession

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for who you are. We pray that as we consider your infinite power, wisdom and love, that we would know that you love us in our entirety, and that neither our successes or our failures could ever change that.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for your church in this uncertain time, especially as we continue to ask questions about what it might look like in the future, in light of the pandemic the world is facing. Please guide us, that we may continue to serve you and the communities we are in, all to your praise and glory.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us

Lord Jesus Christ, we pray for your great creation. In a time when humanity seems so polarized, we ask that you would help us to remember that we are all your children, and that it is our duty to care for one another in a hurting world, irrespective of who we are or where we come from.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us

Lord Jesus Christ, we remember those who work tirelessly to improve the quality of life of others, and to care for the unwell, as well as those in their care. We remember particularly, staff and residents at our Local Health Centres and at Monet Lodge, Ashley House, Holmfield and Brocklehurst.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us

Lord Jesus Christ, we know that you are the Messiah, and that your salvific work extends to all. We pray for those those who are suffering from physical, mental or spiritual ill health, and ask that they might know something of your comfort.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for your compassion and your promise of salvation. In a moment of quiet, we pray for those who have recently died and those whose anniversary falls at this time, as well as the loved ones mourning their passing.

Lord, hear us

Lord, graciously hear us

Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the love you showed to your Disciple, Peter. May we know that we are afforded that same love, and may we be challenged to extend that love to others as we begin a new week.

Merciful Father,

**accept these prayers for the sake of your son,
our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.**

We join all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus gave us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.**

Closing Prayer

In darkness and in light,
in trouble and in joy,
help us, heavenly Father,
to trust your love,
to serve your purpose,
and to praise your name;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.