

Sunday 6th June: Prayer and Reflection

Hymn: 129 The Lord is King

<https://youtu.be/pkLzRQ7Jdao>

Prayer of Approach and Confession and the Lord's Prayer

Loving Heavenly Father,

we gather as your people, your family, your church, to worship you and to praise you for your constant presence among us.

We thank you that for all your goodness and greatness you still welcome us into your presence.

We come to worship you, to sing your praises and to commit ourselves to you once again.

We come in all our weakness and all our failings rejoicing that in Christ we have been cleansed and made new; that through him, you have set your mark upon us, and called us to be your family.

Forgive us when we fail you,

our lives betraying our calling and your love.

Forgive us for those times when people look to us to give an example of what it means to be a part of your family and we fail to meet their expectations and to do the loving thing we should.

Loving heavenly Father,

help us truly to be a holy people, reflecting your love, showing your compassion, and responding to your guidance.

Renew and restore us through the love of Christ and the inspiration of your Holy Spirit.

Touch our hearts, we pray, and strengthen our faith

so that we may always work for you, care for our brothers and sisters in Christ and the people and world you have given us

to the glory of your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord who taught us to pray saying:

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 debts as we

forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever Amen.

Bible Readings: 1 Samuel 8:4-11 & 16-20, Mark 3:20-35 (GNT)

Hymn: SGP 72 Lord Jesus Christ, you have come to us,
https://youtu.be/QA_g98O42Q4

Reflection

Families – we all have them!! And Jesus is no exception he came into our world to live as one of us and so even Jesus had a family.

Family is as foundational a concept in the Bible as anything else. The Bible begins in Genesis, not with talk of nations and tribes...but families and it's the stories of families that we hear throughout the Bible - big families - real families. Families with moments of dysfunction so great it makes your head spin—and actually makes one stop and think about what the phrase “biblical family values” might actually mean.

There are many other great metaphors to describe the relationship between God and humankind - King and subjects – as we heard in our first reading from 1st Samuel -Master and slaves is another – but the metaphor of family is so strong it's the one that stays with us.

We read in the Bible that we are heirs with Christ, that we are God's children: God's daughters and sons who bring great joy as well as great consternation.

¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. (Romans 8:16-17)

And so, coming to God and becoming a part of God's Kingdom is really like...coming home - to family. Just as family gather together so the children of God – you and I – gather together and we give this family a special name – the name of church. Each

one of us has their own family and yet each one of us is called to take our part in the family of God.

Of course for the past year we haven't been able to gather as we would like however, even in our own families we haven't been able to gather together as we would have liked. Thankfully we seem to be getting to a better place with all these restrictions and there have been significant changes this week in our church guidance that we will be able to put into place in the weeks ahead.

Our reading from Mark's Gospel says that Jesus went home.. and Jesus' family is either frustrated with him, or just plain worried about him. They hear that Jesus is drawing crowds again, and they go to restrain him—because people are talking. Some people think he's crazy and his family is either embarrassed, or worried of what might become of him.

I used to think that Jesus family must have been quite distressed when he said the words "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" It's almost as if he is disowning his family, but that is not the case. Jesus doesn't ask this question to exclude his mother and brothers, but rather to set the stage for expanding the concept of family to include all those who do the will of God

If anything these words should make us think about our actions and our understanding of what God really wants us to do.

A study about families was conducted with 500 family counsellors and they found that the top traits of *successful* families are: Communicating and listening, affirming and supporting family members, respecting one another, developing a sense of trust, sharing time and responsibility, knowing right from wrong, respecting privacy, having rituals and traditions and sharing a religious core. (*Focus on the Family Bulletin*, December, 1988).

Another survey of strong families said that: family members gave one another compliments and sincere demonstrations of approval; they tried to make the others feel appreciated and good about themselves, they coped with crisis situations by being willing to take a bad situation, see something positive in it and focus on that; in all areas of their lives - meals,

work, recreation - they structured their schedules to spend time together, families were committed to one another and promoted each person's happiness and welfare, invested time and energy in each other and made family their number one priority. These families spent time talking with each other. They also listened well, which shows respect. *(From a national survey of strong families conducted by the Human Development and Family Department at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln 1983)*

Families are so important. Our own families are special to us and God has given us a special duty of care regarding them but he has also given us a duty of care regarding one another in our church family. All these things that I've just quoted about families can be transferred to our church family and our relationships with one another.

It has been a hard time over this past year and more, yet we have tried to communicate with one another and support one another in the best ways we could, we have reached out to one another whenever we could in whatever way we could albeit at times all it could be was a phone call or shouting at one another at the door. We have continued to meet on zoom and in church whenever we could. We have taken a bad situation and found some of the positive things to focus upon. We have showed our love and care by observing the restrictions and trying to keep everybody in our church family safe.

In verse 25 Jesus we're told that Jesus said: 'If a family divides itself into groups which fight each other, that family will fall apart.' Professor William Barclay said that True kinship is something that goes beyond blood ties. True kinship lies in common experience, common interest, common obedience and common goal."

Soon....very soon we will be able to celebrate together once again, we will be able to spend time together, to worship together without restrictions, we will be able to share a meal, to spend time together and catch up with all the news, good and bad, of our church family members and show our support for those who have

gone through bad times recently, uplift the sad and celebrate with those who have had to delay sharing their joy with others.

I've said before that the source of the word community is very probably two words that have become joined together – common and unity... community.

We join together here as the family of God, as a united community, tied with bonds of love and care - joined here in answer to Christ's call, heirs of God, brothers and sisters of Christ...sadly only some of us can be here together.. .but soon we will be able to join together and perhaps one of the first things we might do is to celebrate Holy Communion together.

If you go online you will find many sites that start with the words, 'The family that eats together stays together.'
'A shared family meal is about a loving as well as a functional relationship. Parents should insist on it – and it shouldn't be an austere part of the day. It is a time of laughter', *(said the Mail online on the June 9th 2012).*

We may not be laughing today because of the experiences that we have been going through recently but we should be celebrating, because we have been called children of God, because we are heirs with Jesus Christ because we are united as the family of God, because Jesus calls us his family, his brothers and his sisters. God has called us to a common purpose to share his word and his love and to grow his family. We join together and celebrate what God has done for us in Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayers for Others:

Loving Heavenly Father,
you have called us to be your people.
Through your grace you have welcomed us into your family,
united in Christ.

We thank you for the great community to which we belong and above all for the fellowship we experience, for it is here within this fellowship that we are able to work out our membership through word and action.

Help us, we pray, through the love and care and service we offer to one another and to the world to show what our membership means.

Help us to constantly discover new avenues of service to one another, new opportunities to further your kingdom, new ways in which we can make known your love.

We pray for our world and give thanks that some of the restrictions under which we have been living have been lifted and we pray for all those places in our country and our world where the Covid Pandemic is still rife we pray for vaccine provision for all people, for your healing presence with those who suffer and your comfort for those who grieve.

We pray for peace in all those places where unrest and violence and war rules especially we pray for peace in Israel/Palestine. On this the 77th anniversary of D Day we remember all those who gave their tomorrows so we could enjoy our todays. We also remember all those in our armed forces who continue to give their commitment and dedication and lives for our freedom and our peace.

God of all the world,
we praise you for calling us into your family,
for choosing us even though we are imperfect,
for trusting us even though we make mistakes,
for not giving up on us even when we give up on ourselves,
for offering so much more – even when we would settle for less.

God of all the world,
for drawing us into a deeper relationship with you and with one another, we praise you –
individually and together, we praise you.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord our Savior and our brother.
Amen

Hymn: 694 Brother, sister, let me serve you

<https://youtu.be/hlNoxoOocZs>