

Service led by Pauline Fleck on 25 January 2022

WELCOME

In Matthew 18: (19-21) Jesus said:

“Again, I tell you truly that if two of you on the earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by My Father in heaven.

For where two or three gather together in My name, there am I with them”.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not just seven times, but seventy-seven times”

In love and forgiveness let us greet each other

in the Love of Christ

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAdRk9c1R1o>

‘Do not be afraid’



Today we come together on zoom, from many parts of this country, perhaps from many parts of the world, to share our love, joys, fears, companionships, and fellowships with each other.

Isaiah 43

But now, this is what the LORD says - he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze.

For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour; I give Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead.

Since you are precious and honoured in my sight, and because I love you, I will give men in exchange for you, and people in exchange for your life.

Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west.

I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth - everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.

Matthew

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Later that night, he was there alone, and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.

"Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

Homily

“Do not be afraid for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are mine.”

I have spent most of my life being afraid. Fear, if I'm being honest, was one of the main things that held me back from coming out. I did not dare to be myself. There was so much I stood to lose and what I might gain seemed risky, uncertain, perilous. God's whisper in my heart was easily drowned out by the clamour of those who doubted, who dissuaded, who told me it was wrong, that those I loved would suffer. Even, the voice in my head told me, God might punish me for it.

It makes me wonder now what kind of God I believed in. Probably like so many of us I made God in my own image, a projection of my own ego, a small, mean judgemental and punitive God. The first commandment forbids us to make images of God and bow down before them. We think it refers to graven images, to idolatry. Surely it's really about the idols we create in our own heads and worship which we then try to maintain at all costs even when they are pathological and destructive.

Before I came out I made a number of faltering, hesitant attempts but each time felt myself sinking and afraid. It took the hand of the Lord eventually to more or less drag me kicking and screaming out of my cowardice and to find that walking on the water of my true self wasn't impossible after all. Sometimes the water gets quite choppy and the tide seems to flow against me but I haven't drowned.

Of course in a sense God is to be feared. As it says in Hebrews, it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Here is what Laurence Freeman from the World Council for Christian Meditation says about fear:

“The great negative force of the unconscious is fear. There's the fear of anxiety (the fear of punishment, the fear of pain, the fear of being rejected) and this word called 'dread'. And this negatively dark side of fear often for religious people and in the popular mind, even for non-religious people, is associated with an image of God which is really a product of theophobia, phobia about God –

The fear of a frightening God, a God who will punish, who does not let us off the hook, does not really forgive -

A massive and powerful projection from our own unconscious or what we could only call the superego, meaning what we think we should be like. Because we were told so often, maybe as children, this is what you should be like and what you are is bad; what you are like, what you are doing, what you want to do, is shameful and against God's will. And therefore, you cannot be a child of God, you cannot be lovable while you are like you are.

And then, if we're trained sufficiently in that mentality, it's a very hard and long process to shatter that image of God because it has become such a powerful force as an image, as a system in our unconscious. And because it has been generated by the unconscious and it operates in the unconscious it's very close to us, it's very much part of us. And we have to go to a much deeper level, to be able to expose it and eventually dissolve it and become free from it.”

I wonder how much of the internalised transphobia many trans people suffer from comes from or is linked to what Freeman calls theophobia – that is fear of a false God, a God of our own creation. A projection from our own unconscious.

Not the God of Jesus. Not the God who tells us not to be afraid. Not the God who holds out God's hand to us when we feel that we are beginning to sink. Not the God who wants us to be whole and complete and live lives of courage, adventure, creativity and eager to be evermore renewed and changed.

That is the God I believe in. The God who has called me by my name.

SHARING SADNESS

But not all are or can be happy at this time. Some will be absent from this meeting but would like to be present, some are facing fears, troubling situations, illness, crises, and personal concerns.

Either silently or aloud let us bring to mind those we know and others in such situations and pray for them as we wish.

Jesus Said: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid". (John 14:27).

So we pray for all those who are facing fears, challenges, sadness, grief and distress.

Lord, grant us all your Peace, that we may all face the future with calmness and confidence in the true knowledge and fellowship of the Love of Christ

SHARING THANKS

There are many things to be thankful for.

Sometimes we may not be able to perceive these amidst our own concerns, but they are there. Either silently or aloud let us bring mind those for whom give thanks. Thanks, for things that have happened, for families and friends who have supported us, for opportunities, for celebrations, for our friendships, and for the help and care we have received. Let us give thanks for these and pray for them as we wish.

Paul Said in Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit". So we bring to mind all the things we are thankful for, and give thanks for these, and all we receive in the Love of Christ.

SHARING HOPES

As we leave the past let us now look to the future and to our hopes and desires. Either silently or aloud, let us bring to mind those things we hope for, for ourselves, family, friends, futures, things to happen in the world.

In Zephaniah 3:17 it is written *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope."*

Grant us lord the freedom to see these hopes and to work for them, so that all may be fulfilled.

CLOSING

Lord, we thank you for our fellowship this evening. Inspire our hope, diminish our fears. Forgive us for those things which we ought to have done, but have not done, Give, us strength and courage to being the fruits of our fellowship of and your Gospel to the world

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Say together in your own version and your own language

SHARING THE PEACE

And as you share your peace Lord, let us now share our peace with each other

The peace of the Lord be with you

RESPONSE: And also with you.

Share peace in whatever way appropriate

Closing hymn:

<http://sibyls.gndr.org.uk/online/eveningmeetings/SuN0310a/ElaineHouse.mp4>



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.