

**Order of Service – 6 September 2020**  
**13th Sunday after Trinity**

*Services are now taking place in our churches - check the Holyford website for details of times and locations.*

**Opening Prayer**

Eternal God, source of all blessing,  
help us to worship you  
with all our heart and mind and strength;  
for you alone are God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
for ever and ever. **Amen**

**Confession**

Most merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
we confess that we have sinned  
in thought, word and deed.  
We have not loved you with our whole heart.  
We have not loved our neighbours as ourselves.  
In your mercy forgive what we have been,  
help us to amend what we are,  
and direct what we shall be;  
that we may do justly, love mercy,  
and walk humbly with you, our God. Amen.

*(From the New Zealand Prayer Book)*

God forgives you. Forgive others.  
Forgive yourself. **Amen**

**Collect**

Almighty God,  
you search us and know us:  
may we rely on you in strength  
and rest on you in weakness,  
now and in all our days;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

**Romans 13.8-end**

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet';

and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armour of light; let us live honourably as in the day, not in revelling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarrelling and jealousy. Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

### **Matthew 18.15-20**

'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

### **Reflection on the Gospel – John**

So what do we make of this man Peter? He is of course a top-notch saint and one who holds the keys not only to the kingdom but to heaven itself.

What do we make of these words: "whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven....."

These words are about serious offences, but also about agreement as well. It's Matthew's community talking to itself – talking about disputes between members of the church, and serious offences, which included things like fraud, and members of the community suing each other.

So the first and most important thing it says is that whatever agreements you come to will be blessed by God.

Others would say that this is the early church trying to find a way of describing its own power, the power it has to bind God to decisions made on earth. That's a very big power, isn't it, and the problem is that it's easily distorted. It becomes the Inquisition. It becomes the power of the church to excommunicate people not just from the church and from communion but from heaven itself.

In a way these words are about inclusion and exclusion, and the church is sometimes good at both – good at welcoming, good at making people feel comfortable, good at showing an open door to all kinds of people from all kinds of backgrounds. But it's important to say that we're equally good at excluding people as well. If you can remember or imagine a time when you felt uncomfortable in church, where there was religious code going on that you couldn't decipher, where you felt embarrassed or uncertain because you couldn't find your way in an order of service and didn't know what was going on.

One approach to this reading is to think that whenever an institution believes that it knows what God has in mind, believes what decisions it should make on behalf of God, we should not only ask serious questions, we should probably worry.

Power is a dangerous thing. Jesus had a very ambiguous relationship to power – in fact, he tends to mistrust it, particularly when it's in the hands of corrupt officials, where it's a question of institutions persecuting people who have nothing. It's difficult to find positive models of leadership, but they are there in the parables and we learn a little bit of what Jesus has in mind when we think of a good leader of a community.

Community works best when everybody's story is heard, when the needs of the minority are attended to – the needs of the quiet, the people who don't push hard. Community isn't just about the results achieved by the well-heeled and the sharp-elbowed, to quote one Conservative MP.

Many people, including I think most London cab drivers, believe that the problems of the world would be solved if we had one or two benevolent dictators. Life would be so much simpler if people just did what they're told and didn't ask questions.

The problem is of course is that dictators are never benevolent. They are there to exercise power. They support power groups and they have favours to repay. Usually someone will end up being oppressed.

Jesus knew that and reacted strongly to the power groups of his time, whether they were power groups from the Empire or power groups from the Temple.

We live in a time where political campaigning provokes division, where people on opposite sides of an argument find very little common ground. It's a strange time – a time of fear, anxiety, tension. We're living alongside Covid-19, and that's a strange experience for us all, because half of the world feels normal, and the other half feels strangely frightening. Even today, as we speak, we have lockdowns in Glasgow and other urban centres across the country, and yet you and also know that our seafronts have been really crowded with people for the last two weeks. We're not sure what to make of this world, but we are sure of one thing; it makes people on edge, it makes them argue about other things, about small details. It makes people come into situations of conflict.

That's why what Jesus says about binding and loosing needs to be taken into context with everything else he said about power and judgement. This passage seems to give power and authority to people who can control others, seems to give special licence to people to say 'you are a member'... 'you are eternally blessed' or 'you are eternally excluded'.

Jesus says 'judge not'. He talks about mercy as well as judgement. He talks about kindness to strangers, he talks about the needs of the poor – those who are oppressed by judgment.

Mahatma Gandhi said "leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people." We live in a world where political campaigns push people apart. We've become really good at deception and division, hiding the truth under a canopy of lies. More than ever before we need leaders who are attentive to the truth; leaders who listen, leaders who remember where they have come from.

Peter, the great founding saint of the church, came from very simple origins. He was a fisherman; he ran his own business. He wasn't a man of letters, he wasn't a scholar; he was hardly equipped for what he was called to do. And thatness an important part of our story because it was someone from very simple origins – somebody we hope always remembered where he came from.

We need to keep listening to each other's stories; we need to keep paying attention to each other's needs.

And sometimes we need to trust our leaders just to be ordinary people – to get things wrong some of the time. Because authority without humility just plays into the hands of spin doctors. We need less fake smiles and more honest feet of clay. We should trust people because they have their flaws, because we are all dented.

When Jesus talks to his friends he says very little about putting people in charge. He's more interested in how we live and work together. When you're judging how far we've done our small part in building the kingdom, that one word really matters: *together*.

Together we listen, together we learn and grow, and together we change, and we build.

### **Hymn – Thine Be The Glory**

Thine be the glory, risen, conquering Son;  
endless is the victory, thou o'er death hast won;  
angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
kept the folded grave clothes where thy body lay.

*Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son,  
Endless is the vict'ry, thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb;  
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
let the Church with gladness, hymns of triumph sing;  
for her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting. *Chorus*

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life;  
life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife;  
make us more than conquerors,  
through thy deathless love:  
bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above. *Chorus*

### **Prayers**

Loving God, we praise you for the world you created and all that is good in it. We give thanks for this beautiful place we live in.  
We give thanks for peace, quiet and safety.  
We pray for those parts of the world where there is little peace today.  
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank you, gracious Father, for your great love for the world.  
You made us, Lord, and we are yours.

Set us alight with love for you and for our neighbours.  
Inspire us to be the change you hope for.  
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father we thank you for all your gifts to us.  
Help us to see your presence in all things and in all people.  
And we give prayerful thanks for those who continue to protect us and keep us safe. We give thanks for all those who support, serve and feed us in these difficult times.  
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Let us not be afraid to bring our weakness to you in prayer.  
We pray for all those who feel cut off from friends and family.  
We hold in prayer everyone we know who is unwell, and those who care for them. In a moment of quiet we name in our hearts those in need of God's healing presence today.  
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank you for those we have loved and see no longer, remembering those who have died recently and family and friends who mourn their loss.  
We thank you for the people who have inspired us, lifted us up.  
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

In love you made us, in love you lived our life as Jesus.  
In love you send your Spirit into all the world.  
That love makes us one family.  
Together we pray the prayer that Jesus taught the world:

**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.**

## **Closing Prayer**

Risen Christ,  
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:  
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life  
and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen**

## **Blessing**

Loving father who loved the world so much  
you sent your child to live in poverty as one of us,  
open our eyes to see him once again  
as he comes among us again in love  
and may the blessing of the Father, Son, And Holy Spirit  
be with us and those we love, today and forever. **Amen**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.  
**In the name of Christ. Amen**

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