

Called to be worshipful #1
Sunday, 19 July 2020

O Lord, open our lips

All and our mouth shall proclaim your praise

Blessed are you, creator of all,
to you be praise and glory for ever.
As your dawn renews the face of the earth
bringing light and life to all creation,
may we rejoice in this day you have made;
as we wake refreshed from the depths of sleep,
open our eyes to behold your presence
and strengthen our hands to do your will,
that the world may rejoice and give you praise.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All Blessed be God for ever.

Homily – part 1

We've moved to the south-west corner of St Thomas's Church now, to be close to the font. The font is traditionally located close to the main door of the church, and indeed in all five of the churches in our parishes that is the case. Fonts are near doors to be reminders to us every time we come into church that our journey as Christians begins through water. Water crops up all the time in the Bible, and it is a symbol of washing, been cleaned. It is a symbol of judgement. It is a symbol of death, of the grave, of the tomb, into which we sink at our baptism before bursting up again into the light. So that down and then back up again movement is itself a sign, symbol of our death and resurrection which is God's gift to us when we participate in his death and resurrection.

So the font is a good place to make our confession. So in a moment of quiet let us call to mind all that we have said and done and thought, as well as those things which we have forgotten to say or do, which have separated us from one another, and from God.

Confession

We confess to you our selfishness and lack of love:

fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

We confess to you our fear and failure in sharing our faith:

fill us with your Spirit.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

We confess to you our stubbornness and lack of trust:

fill us with your Spirit.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

Psalms 23 – Stuart Townend version.

Homily – part 2

As I said at the beginning, we are thinking today about the way in which Christian people are “called to be worshipful.” And Fiona and I thought that we would take this in two chunks. And we begin this morning by thinking about why we worship in the first place. Why do we worship?

And one of the problems we have I think is that we are a bit non-specific when we use the word worship. We use the word worship when we mean lots of other things. We often use it as shorthand for ‘singing’. So, you know, someone leading a service might say, “now we’re going to have a time of worship”, when actually of course we probably mean that now we’re going to sing some hymns and songs. So we often use the word worship when we mean singing. I suspect we are going to get better at not doing that over the next few weeks as we go back into church, because of course one of the things we’re not going to be allowed to do at least to start with is to sing together. But we will certainly be worshipping together.

We also often use the word worship when we mean a church service. You sometimes see on notice board something like: times of worship 10am and 6pm. And indeed you might have spotted at the beginning of this service I refer to it in the video as “morning worship”. And there’s nothing wrong with that, as long as we remember that worship is a much bigger thing than 45 minutes together as the church family. And we don’t worship in order to sing to God, or in order to learn from the scriptures, or in order to share fellowship with one another. All of those things might happen in a time of worship, but they’re not the reason for it.

The reason for worship is worship. The reason for worship is worship. Worship is a response to being loved by God. It’s really as simple as that. And is amazing is that. We worship God because we recognise that he deserves it. We worship God because he’s worth it. God got there before L’Oreal!

Worship is a response. And all through the Bible we find that when God does amazing things, the people respond in worship. And we are going to hear now verses from the old Testament describing one of the most famous events in the history of the people of Israel, and how they respond to their deliverance.

Exodus 14-15 (selected verses)

1 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. ²²The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

30 Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. ³¹Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

15 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

‘I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

² The LORD is my strength and my might,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

³ The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing.

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead.

All And Christ shall give you light.

You have died and your life is hid with Christ in God.

All Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead.

Set your minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on the earth.

All And Christ shall give you light.

When Christ our life appears
you will appear with him in glory.

**All Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,
and Christ shall give you light.**

Homily part 3

The people of Israel are delivered from slavery in Egypt by passing through the waters of the Red Sea in safety. It's an extraordinary passage, and one that we read every year in the darkness of the night before Easter day. It describes the lengths that God goes to, to save his people. It is a prefiguring of the death and resurrection of Christ, that going down deep into the dark cold waters of the tomb before rising up into the light and the glory of the day. And the only response that the people of Israel can make to that wonderful salvation is to praise God. Is to worship. So Moses and the people of Israel do exactly that, and Miriam takes up a tambourine and the people sing.

That is why we are people "called to be worshipful." We are called to be worshipful because we have been saved. It is the natural response to love so amazing, so divine. It is what happens when broken humanity walks face first into amazing grace. It is the only proper answer to love.

Just one other example from the Bible of worship as a response to God's grace. When Zechariah and Elizabeth, the parents of John the Baptist, learn that they are going to have a baby they struggle to believe it. And if you remember the story, Zechariah doesn't quite manage to accept what the angel Gabriel says to him, and so he is struck dumb. He is unable to speak. And it's only at the point where the baby has been born, and they're asking what his name is going to be, and Zechariah writes on a bit of paper "his name is John" that God opens his lips again, and he is able to speak. And what does Zechariah do? he sings to God. And the words that he uses are words that are so important, so full of faith that they have become what we now refer to as the Benedictus, which is the song, the hymn of praise, that we use every single day at morning prayer. Every morning the church begins her day with the words of response of a doubting and frightened man when he suddenly realises that God has come close to him. And so that's exactly what we're going to do now. Let's sing the Benedictus together.

Luke 1:67-79: Benedictus – metrical version as hymn

Affirmation of faith

We say together in faith

**All Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.**

We believe in God the Father,
who created all things:

**All for by his will they were created
and have their being.**

We believe in God the Son,
who was slain:

**All for with his blood,
he purchased us for God,
from every tribe and language,
from every people and nation.**

We believe in God the Holy Spirit:

**All the Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'
Even so come, Lord Jesus!
Amen.**

Prayers:

[We pray that Christ may be seen in the life of the Church.
Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy, hear us.]

You have called us into the family of those who are
the children of God.

May our love for our brothers and sisters
be strengthened by your grace.

Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy, hear us.

You have called us to be a temple
where the Holy Spirit can dwell.

Give us clean hands and pure hearts,
so that our lives will reflect your holiness.

Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy, hear us.

You have called us to be a light to the world,
so that those in darkness come to you.

May our lives shine
as a witness to the saving grace you have given for all.

Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy, hear us.

You have called us to be members of your body,
so that when one suffers, all suffer together.

We ask for your comfort and healing power
to bring hope to those in distress.

Jesus, Lord of the Church,
in your mercy, hear us.

You have called us to be the Bride,
where you, Lord, are the Bridegroom.

Prepare us for the wedding feast,
where we will be united with you for ever.

Jesus, Lord of the Church,

**hear our prayer,
and make us one in heart and mind
to serve you with joy for ever.
Amen.**

Collect

Creator God,
you made us all in your image:
may we discern you in all that we see,
and serve you in all that we do;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn – Praise, my soul

Blessing

Let us bless the Lord.

All Thanks be to God.