



Nineteenth Sunday of Trinity

Morning Prayer

Dispersed community prayer at 10:30am

(But God will hear our prayers anytime!)

*You are invited to guard time for us to be together, united in prayer in one faith,
to our one Lord*

You may wish to prepare by lighting a candle

◆ denotes an optional pause to keep silence and meditate on the words

🔊 Denotes optional audio / video version from the church website:

<https://widcombe.church/our-churches/church-life/church-online/>

Preparation

O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Give thanks and praise God

Blessed are you, Sovereign God, creator of all,
to you be glory and praise for ever.
You founded the earth in the beginning
and the heavens are the work of your hands.
In the fullness of time you made us in your image,
and in these last days you have spoken to us
in your Son Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh.
As we rejoice in the gift of your presence among us
let the light of your love always shine in our hearts,
your Spirit ever renew our lives
and your praises ever be on our lips.
Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Blessed be God for ever.

The night has passed, and the day lies open before us;
let us pray with one heart and mind.

◆
As we rejoice in the gift of this new day,
so may the light of your presence, O God,
set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

Psalm 133. The Blessedness of Unity – A Song of Ascents

¹ How very good and pleasant it is
when kindred live together in unity!
² It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,
life for evermore.



*Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.*

The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body,
and the life everlasting.
Amen.



Hymn 

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Fill me with life anew,
That I may love what Thou dost love,
And do what Thou wouldst do.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Until my heart is pure,
Until with Thee I will one will,
To do and to endure.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
Till I am wholly Thine,
Until this earthly part of me
Glows with Thy fire divine.

Breathe on me, Breath of God,
So shall I never die,
But live with Thee the perfect life
Of Thine eternity.

Intercessions

When we pray I'm going to say "Lord of All", and if you respond "Bring Peace".

Lord we want to thank you for our world, for the beauty of it. For the weather the sun and the rain, the plants and the animals. Help us to care for this creation, to bring glory to you.

Lord of All, ***Bring Peace.***

Lord I was to thank you for the diversity of this world. Thank you for all the different countries and all the different people in these countries. Let us take a moment to think of one country. And Father we bring this country to you, we lift it up to you and pray that you would give the leadership of that country wisdom and that they would follow your wisdom. We pray for an end to oppression and we pray a blessing on that country.

Lord of All, ***Bring Peace.***

Jesus thank you for the way you are using covid to draw people to you. We pray that more people would find you. We pray that you would weaken and stop this virus and that you would reduce the spread of it. Enable doctors to find cures and vaccines.

Lord of All, ***Bring Peace.***

Father we pray for those leaders and those in authority. We pray a blessing on the Queen and ask that you would grant her wisdom. We pray for Boris and the government, that they would follow your wisdom and that they would also be blessed. We lift up BANES council to you that they would take your council and follow that. We lift up heads of companies, heads of schools, heads of churches, especially Tim and Jenny, Lord that they would know your peace and know what things to do, and what things to lay down or not to do, to keep everyone safe and bring glory to you.

Lord of All, ***Bring Peace.***

In a moment of silence we bring those who we know who are ill, or in need or who are struggling. Jesus would you bless them, would you give them your peace and would you lead them on your path.

Lord of All, *Bring Peace*.

We pray for ourselves that day by day we'd see you more clearly, we'd love you more dearly and follow you more nearly.

Lord of All, *Bring Peace*.

Jesus, lamb of God, have mercy on us. Jesus bearer of our sins, have mercy on us. Jesus redeemer of the world, give us your peace.

Amen

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

◆

The Word of God 

Old Testament reading: Numbers 20: 1-13

Water From the Rock

20 In the first month the whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried.

² Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron.³ They quarrelled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord!⁴ Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? ⁵ Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"

⁶ Moses and Aaron went from the assembly to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell facedown, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. ⁷ The Lord said to Moses, ⁸ "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink."

⁹ So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as he commanded him. ¹⁰ He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" ¹¹ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank.

¹² But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

¹³ These were the waters of Meribah,^[a] where the Israelites quarrelled with the Lord and where he was proved holy among them.

New Testament reading: Matthew 8: 23-27

Jesus Calms the Storm

²³ Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. ²⁴ Suddenly a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. ²⁵ The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!"

²⁶ He replied, "You of little faith, why are you so afraid?" Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

²⁷ The men were amazed and asked, "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!"

Reflection

You know one thing I am really certain of in life, in work...in everything, is that starting strong is good - but finishing strong is everything.

What do I mean by that?... Well, one of the many things I love about the Bible is that it portrays its heroes warts and all! It's not overly romantic or fanciful about those seeking to follow God but rather sometimes offers some searingly honest accounts of the woeful frailties of good people... Sadly, there are many great characters in scripture who ran so well for a while, only later to stumble and fall – some catastrophically! David for example was an amazing man after God's own heart. A worshipper who wrote amazingly intimate and worship-invoking psalms, who defeated giants and inspired a nation. In later years however, when he should have been leading his people, he commits adultery and then arranges to have Bathsheba's husband Uriah, one of his loyal mighty men, killed in battle (2 Samuel 11). Or there's King Solomon, who longs for and is endowed with extraordinary Godly wisdom bringing unprecedented prosperity to Israel, who later allows his many wives to turn his heart to idolatry (1 Kings 11:3-4).

In 2 Chronicles we meet the godly King Jehoshaphat, who later allies himself with the wicked Ahab and his evil son. Or there's King Joash who starts by repairing the house of the Lord with sweeping reforms, but later abandons God, turns to idols, and murders the son of the man who had raised him. The list goes on....and they offer to us all a warning that starting well is no guarantee of finishing well.

So where's this cheerful sermon going? Well, today in our wilderness series we hear the sobering account of Moses, one of the greatest men of God in history, stumbling near the finish line. His mission and longing had been to lead God's people into the Promised Land. But now he appears to make a single catastrophic mistake - and consequently is told that he can't now be the one to lead Israel into the land. So what *is* really happening here – and what we can *we* learn in these sobering days?

In the midst of this desert parched land, no doubt still grieving the loss of his sister Miriam, Moses faces a mutinous people, accompanied only by Aaron. He needed a solution from God – a God who had provided water before - a God who would *surely* come through again? So, prostrate, the brothers approach Yahweh – it's a good meek starting position – one of humble adoration, intercession and dependence, we're told that "...*the glory of the Lord appeared to them*" (Numbers 20:6). He experiences the glory of the Lord, he hears the voice of the Lord and receives the command of the Lord... "*Take the staff...gather the assembly... Speak to that rock before their eyes, and it will pour out its water*"... "*So Moses took the staff from the Lord's presence, just as he commanded him.*" Fantastic... "*He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock*", great!...and then it all begins to unravel. "*and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank*" (Num 20:9–11).

Ok – so he hit it!? Twice actually – but it's not a big deal right? I mean – water still came out, eventually – after the second hit!?

But Moses had struck the rock when God had told him to simply speak to it... And that's significant because, of course, back in Exodus 17, Moses had already been through this once before – the time God *had* told him to hit a rock.

So why did he hit it this time? Well, I guess we'll never really fully know. But maybe he hadn't really been listening... I think he was angry, fed up of the people always moaning, maybe still raw over Miriam's death, angry at the world, the sand, the heat... and maybe angry with God for the place they'd all found themselves in. And for me that thought is a sobering one. Because for Moses it has unimaginable consequences – "*Because you did not trust in me, (says the Lord) to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites...you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.*" After everything – Moses now isn't getting in!

You see, I think Moses, in modern day parlance, may well have suffered with what we'd now refer to as anger management problems and, you may laugh, but Moses was angry when he killed the Egyptian taskmaster who he found beating a fellow Israelite (Exod. 2:11-12; Acts 7:23-24). And forty years later, when confronting Pharaoh, even though the Lord had specifically prepared Moses by telling him that He would harden Pharaoh's heart, when Pharaoh repeatedly refuses to let Israel go, Moses "*went out from Pharaoh in hot anger*" (Exod. 11:8). And later, when Moses finds the people worshiping the golden calf, in anger he smashes up the Ten Commandments (Exod. 32:19). Now you might argue a lot of this was 'righteous' anger but for me these unchecked, unresolved, unsubmitted patterns of behaviour is partly what now, some 40 years later, causes him to strike the rock in anger, *twice*, which results in him being excluded from the Promised Land.

The Scottish hymn writer, George Matheson, once said, "*There are times when I do well to be angry, but I have mistaken the times.*"

Maybe your besetting sin isn't anger, but whatever entangling sin keeps tripping *you* up, Moses' failure to deal with it, warns us all to take seriously the need to identify that fault, to recognise our need of God's mercy, forgiveness and healing, to bring it to God, to seek his mercy and transformation and *see* it nailed on the cross, before it causes us personally to stumble catastrophically.

Now maybe to a modern reader, it might seem a rather minor detail of *hitting* rather than *speaking* to the rock? ...But to God, the *little* details *really* matter – and so they should for us. When God graciously speaks to us, He doesn't waste words – everything He says is important, beautiful, full of wisdom, authority, life and power. And so if we, to our detriment, take those words lightly or irreverently, with disdain or disregard - the outworking of that can

be ruinous. Now of course we know that mercifully, God is patient, gracious and forbearing – but let's never forget that He is God - the King of Kings – He's the Holy One.

I'm reminded of a section from C.S. Lewis's brilliant novel, *The Lion the Witch & the Wardrobe*:

"Aslan is a lion - the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh" said Susan. "I'd thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion" ..."Safe?" said Mr Beaver ..."Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."

God is looking and longing for faithful sons and daughters, not impetuous toddlers. So, the challenge for me, for us all in these serious days, is to take God seriously. To take His living word, His words of life seriously. Let's not simply shrug off God's commandments as though they're not a big deal. What may seem to be a relatively small thing to us, may in fact be a really big thing to God. Developing the habit of a hearing ear and heartfelt Godly obedience can only bring an abundance of life to help us run fast and run strong.

In the flowing of the water, Moses filled an obvious and urgent need - but he missed the main point. The main purpose was to see God honoured as holy, as the ultimate provider, the one true, all sustaining, entirely faithful source of life and provision. Instead, in his anger at the problems Moses faced, in front of a crowd he wanted to both rebuke and wow, Moses found himself on a slippery slope.

"Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?"

We? The sassy implication of that question is that *Moses and Aaron* were able to bring water from the rock! Suddenly God is relegated to the side-lines, He's out of the equation. It's all become about Moses and his leadership. It's been said that, 'they who claim power to themselves, deny it to God.' So Moses whacks it in a show of power, bravado, frustration, anger – who knows?... and we don't know how quickly he hits it again – but when nothing happens he does. ...I like to think it's after a bit of a worried double take.

Violence was done to the rock, when only a gentle word was needed. And the staff given to Moses as a holy symbol of authority is turned into a mere human club.

Interestingly, God, in his mercy, does bring water gushing from the rock in spite of Moses' disobedience. God wanted after all to provide for Israel. But this act for Moses meant more than just a rebuke – he blew it and for him there were real lasting consequences.

So as I reflect on my life – not as vicar or church leader, but simply as a man, a Father, a husband and most importantly a child of God – I long for my life to have purpose and meaning, and I long to know I'm pleasing God, obeying Him, not just in the big things, but in the small things, in the daily decisions and choices I make, the paths I chose to walk along, the places I choose to find rest – the commands I read in His word and the voice of His Spirit. For me finishing strong is everything and to finish strong, I need to be stepping and running in obedience and faithfulness moment by moment, day by day.

So will you join with me today by renewing your decision to receive and know Christ and be fully known by Him; to yield every hidden corner of your heart, mind and soul to His light; to receive His forgiveness and embrace His Kingly rule over every part your life. If you've never done that before, maybe today is a great opportunity to make Jesus King of your life. It's really simple. It only requires you to ask.

Jesus says this:

Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me (Rev 3:20)

Lord in these difficult, darkened days, we open up to you and say yes to you Jesus. We hear, we submit, and we obey.

In my life, Your Kingdom come, Your will be done. Amen.



The Collect

Faithful Lord,
whose steadfast love never ceases
and whose mercies never come to an end:
grant us the grace to trust you
and to receive the gifts of your love,
new every morning,
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Being made one by the power of the Spirit, as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

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.



To Conclude

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from
all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.
Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

