

**Collects, Readings and Reflection for the 2nd Sunday after Trinity
13th June 2021**

*You can use this sheet in conjunction with our recorded service
which you can find here https://youtu.be/xD_c3F-tl4M,
on the Christ Church Shamley Green YouTube channel
or via the link provided on our website www.shamleygreen.net.*

COLLECT

Lord, you have taught us
that all our doings without love are nothing worth:
send your Holy Spirit and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love,
the true bond of peace and of all virtues,
without which whoever lives is counted dead before you.
Grant this for your only Son Jesus Christ's sake,
who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

FIRST READING

Ezekiel 17:22-end

22 Thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out.
I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs;
I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.
23 On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it,
in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar.
Under it every kind of bird will live;
in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind.
24 All the trees of the field shall know that I am the LORD.
I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree;
I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish.
I the LORD have spoken; I will accomplish it.

GOSPEL

Mark 4:26-34

Such a large crowd gathered around Jesus that he got into a boat
and began to teach them using many parables.
26 Jesus said, 'The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground,
27 and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow,
he does not know how.
28 The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head.
29 But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come.'
30 Jesus also said, 'With what can we compare the kingdom of God,
or what parable will we use for it?
31 It is like a mustard seed,
which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth;
32 yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs,
and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.'
33 With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it;
34 he did not speak to them except in parables,
but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

REFLECTION *The Reverend Sally Davies; view in our online service*

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin. "Once upon a time there was an ugly duckling. All the other ducklings were fluffy and sweet but his feathers were ugly greyish-brown and all stubby and horrible... 'You're not one of us,' said the ducks. 'Go away.' And 'you're not one of us,' said the hens with their little yellow chicks, 'go away.' No-one wanted the ugly duckling. So off he went into the great wide world, cold and alone."

Well, I expect you know what happens. It's a well-known story. Or is it?... When I told it to my three-year-old nephew many years ago, he looked up at me with piteous eyes and said: "Sounds like a job for Superman." Between one page and the next, *you* try introducing Clark Kent to Hans Christian Andersen. Children keep you on your toes and keep you interested because they don't yet know all the endings to the stories. They are open to anything happening. They can still learn, still use their imaginations, still adjust to twists in the tale - all skills we tend to lose as we get older. All skills we need to recover.

God-story

I say we need to recover those skills because *our* story, this story we tell each Sunday and live out each day, is a story with many twists in the telling. It has a clear beginning and a happy ending but what happens in-between is much more complicated. It is an adventure story full of thrills and spills. It is also a romance with all its ups and downs, break-ups and reconciliations. It can equally be read as a fairy-tale where the hero rescues the situation and good triumphs over evil. It is a story which at times entertains us, at others frightens us. It makes us laugh and brings us to tears. It involves a multitude of characters and scenes and sometimes it seems to be written in black and white and then you turn a page to find yourself deep in the heart of mystery. And amongst the characters, like those interactive computer games, you find yourself, for this is *your* story. And it is supremely *God's* story. The story of God and his creation: his world and his people. A complex story. A story with many layers, operating on different levels and at different times. We need to stay alert, to be open to whatever may happen next.

Unpredictability and predictability

The danger is that some of us think we know the story. We don't even need to listen to it again or to re-read it. We know everything that has happened up till now and we know how it will end. The characters are familiar too and if anything unexpected should happen or if there should be a bit of a mystery, well, we can skim over that chapter. *The twist in the tale is likely to catch us napping: unprepared and ill-equipped to cope.*

Others of us run the opposite risk. We thought we knew the story but somehow it seems to have gone wrong. We no longer recognise the characters. We no longer understand what is going on. The twists in the tale cause us pain and confusion. *And yet it is still our story. We have to live it to its end. How?* How can we live our story with courage and honesty and integrity, so that we can enjoy the happy ending without winding up the villain? For some of us the question will be: how can we live our story without losing sight of the ending and faith in the author?

Living the story

The answer is precisely that - to *live* it. To live your story to the full whatever happens. Don't let your character drop out of the action in chapter 2. Don't be content to be a minor figure and only appear in the crowd scenes. Don't get bored or complacent or disillusioned. Stay alive to your story. Stay alive to all its possibilities for it is not over yet. Cultivate a child-like faith, if you like, which means staying alive to the unexpected, to hope and imagination and curiosity and forgiveness and healing and growth and all the things out of which God writes a new chapter.

You can see it in the stories of those first followers of Jesus. The disciples had, albeit not without a struggle, adjusted their understanding of God and his purposes in the three years they followed Jesus. But then he died! And then rose again! And then promised yet another twist in the tale - the coming of the Spirit. And then left again. Some just could not cope. But others, as we heard recently in the Pentecost readings, were set on fire with new potential. Similarly St. Paul thought he had it all sown up until he met Jesus on the Damascus road and found that a whole new and

very different life was opening up before him. In this morning's gospel yet another disciple, Mark, records one of Jesus' parables where he compares the kingdom of God to the tiny mustard seed which becomes a great shrub with birds nesting in it; well, not like any mustard seed I've ever encountered. Some commentators have tried to explain this by saying that the Biblical mustard was different to ours and did grow into a big bush or even tree but I think they're missing the point. Surely the whole point is that the kingdom of God brings about unexpected and wonderful things from humble materials and small beginnings...

Conclusion

Between 'once upon a time' and 'they all lived happily ever after', a lot can happen. God does not have only one string to his bow. He is not a one-dimensional God. Never think you have got him tabbed, pinned down and labelled. And, as you are made in his image, the same goes for you. The Ugly Duckling turned out to be a swan. Clark Kent is really Superman. St. John wrote in his first letter "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we *will be* has not yet been revealed." (1 Jn 3:2) When I read that I think, gosh, I'd be happy just being one of God's children but God is full of dreams and desires for each of us, chapters yet to be written in our story which we will write with him if we remain open to his endless possibility.

FINAL PRAYER

Faithful Creator,
whose mercy never fails:
deepen our faithfulness to you
and to your living Word,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

BLESSING

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and mind in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
rest upon you this day and remain with you always. Amen.

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