

Bulletin for Sunday 30 January 2022

Good morning, friends. This is the weekend of the RSPB's Big Garden Birdwatch. I'm intending to do a bit of birdwatching around the Manse, and I'm sure some of you will be doing the same. But whether you're counting birds or just watching (and maybe listening) through a window, I hope you can take a moment to marvel at God's creation... and praise God for it in the words of our first hymn:

Hymn: Morning has broken (R&S 45)

Prayer: Loving God, creator of all we see around us,
we come to worship you now,
cheered by sunny mornings and blackbirds' songs,
grateful for supportive friends and communities.
We come for comfort and reassurance....
help us to understand when you challenge us,
and then lead us out, beyond our comfort zones.
We ask your blessing on everything we do,
and on everything we give in your service,
today and every day. In Jesus 'name. Amen

followed by The Lord's Prayer

Reading: Luke 4: 21-30

Reflection: This reading follows straight on from last week's, when Jesus, in the Nazareth Synagogue, read from the prophet Isaiah and announced that he was the one called by God to bring good news to the poor and freedom to the captives... Initially the congregation seemed to be impressed, but then they turned on him with anger. Why?

As Jesus continued speaking, telling them stories about Elijah and Elisha, he pointed out that sometimes it was outsiders - Gentiles - that those prophets had been sent to serve. That, in fact, sometimes God chooses Gentiles over Jews. For us, of course, it's equally true that sometimes God chooses Jews - or Muslims - or all sorts of people who aren't apparently like us... We all have a tendency to like and trust people we think are 'like us' - psychologists call it 'affinity bias'. They may be people who look like us, speak like us, have gone to the same school as us, or share the same religion... but this comes with a shadow side. When we perceive people to be different from us we may find it more difficult to trust or like them, and only a few days ago, on Holocaust Memorial Day, we remembered the shocking and tragic consequences this can have.

This was what angered Jesus' hearers - the suggestion that 'outsiders' might ever be as important as 'insiders'. One of the challenges of following Jesus is accepting that God's love is always bigger and wider than we can even begin to understand...

Hymn: There's a wideness in God's mercy (R&S 353)

Prayer: Compassionate God, we pray for your world,
and as Jesus cared for those far beyond his own home,
we pray both for the parts we know, and those we don't.
We hold before you the people of Tonga, and of Ukraine.
We pray for those subject to discrimination, or worse,
because of their gender, ethnicity, religion or sexuality.
We pray for those we perceive as different in some way...
and also those close to us - those we love, and care for....
for the sick, the anxious, the dying and the bereaved...
In Jesus 'name we ask all our prayers
including the unspoken prayers of our hearts... Amen

Hymn: I cannot tell why he, whom angels worship (R&S 265)

Blessing: May we be challenged by the breadth of God's love...
and may the blessing of God
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with us and with all those we love,
this week, and always. Amen

There will be a ' Sunday at Six 'Zoom at 6pm this Sunday - all welcome.

We all have a part to play in caring for each other in a continuing time of Covid - wearing masks, giving people space and having plenty of ventilation all help. Remember, some people may be much more vulnerable than others, despite vaccinations. Please also let us know if you have a positive Covid test after recently being in church.

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