

Poole Bay Methodist Circuit worship
Sunday, 9th of May 2021
The joy of being wrong - Led by Rev Betto Viana

Welcome

Peace be with you! (I can almost hear you say, *'And also with you'!*)
What a privilege to be here sharing in this worship with you after such a long time.

Thank you so much for your prayers, your cards, and many other ways you have shown care and support for me and my family. Like you, like all of us, I bring the scars but also the hopes and joys to this gathering. Because God welcomes us here as we are. Exactly where we are in our journey.

And thanks to Suzie for reading our prayers and Bible passage today.

Let us pray!

Let us pray

We light a candle, and we pray...

Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.

(from St Patrick's Breastplate)

I am giving you worship with all my life,
I am giving you obedience with all my power,
I am giving you praise with all my strength,
I am giving you honour with all my speech.
I am giving you love with all my heart,
I am giving you affection with all my sense,
I am giving you my being with all my mind,
I am giving you my soul,
O most high and holy God.

Praise to the Father,
Praise to the Son,
Praise to the Spirit,
The Three in One.
Amen

Hymn 446 StF 'I will offer up my life'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWdpgXEWNx4>

I will offer up my life in spirit and truth
Pouring out the oil of love, as my worship to you
In surrender I must give my every part
Lord, receive this sacrifice of a broken heart.

***Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a Friend, to so loving a King?
Saviour, what can be said, what can be sung
As a praise of Your name for the things You have done?
Oh, my words could not tell, not even in part
Of the debt of love that is owed by this thankful heart***

You deserve my every breath, for You've paid the great cost
Giving up your life to death, even death on the cross
You took all my shame away, there defeated my sin
Open up the gates of heaven and have beckoned me in

Setting the Scene

Brothers and sisters in Christ, today we will reflect on Peter's journey of surrender to God's plan and how the Holy Spirit brings transformation. The story in Acts 10 is one of my favourite stories on the New Testament. It is the story of how Cornelius, a Roman Centurion, and his family and friends receive the Gospel and the Holy Spirit. It is also a story about Peter's process of conversion, together with the Jewish Christian Church. It is about how God acts beyond the boundaries in a shocking or scandalous way. It is about surrendering to God's ways, even when we do not agree with it, or understand it, or even when we know that it goes against our nature and convictions. It is about an inner change and a true conversion, allowing God's will to be done

through us. It is about what happens when we stop resisting the Holy Spirit and let it work on us. It is about discovering the joy of being wrong.

Of course, we all know that this is not an easy thing to do. We always experience 'being wrong' as something negative, as defeat. Our Ego doesn't like it. And that is true. It is only when we experience loss of control and feel powerless, that's when we are ready to totally surrender, to let go and depend on God's power and direction. It is not a good feeling. We tend to resist it by grabbing onto anything that can somehow give us back some control, certainty, or reassurance. Let's read our Bible passage now and we will continue our conversation after. If you can, please read the whole of Acts chapter 10 from your Bible. The lectionary for this Sunday starts on verse 23.

Bible Passage: Acts 10:23-38, 44-48

²³The next day Peter started out with them, and some of the believers from Joppa went along. ²⁴The following day he arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵As Peter entered the house, Cornelius met him and fell at his feet in reverence. ²⁶But Peter made him get up. "Stand up," he said, "I am only a man myself."

²⁷While talking with him, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people. ²⁸He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. ²⁹So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection. May I ask why you sent for me?"

³⁰Cornelius answered: "Three days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³²Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now we are all here in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

³⁴Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism ³⁵but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. ³⁶You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of

all.³⁷ You know what has happened throughout the province of Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—³⁸ how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles.⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues^[b] and praising God. Then Peter said,⁴⁷ “Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptized with water. They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

Sermon

If you had the chance to read the beginning of the story, you will remember that Cornelius was praying in his home when an angel appeared to him and said, ‘your prayer has been heard and your act of kindness has been seeing’. We need to remember that Cornelius is not Jewish or Christian, but God hears his prayer. The angel said more, ‘Now send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter’. Peter was also praying while he was waiting for dinner to be served, when he had a vision. It was more like a disturbing experience. He saw heavens opened and something like a large piece of cloth being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” What really disturbed Peter was the fact that those animals were considered impure. It was against his faith, his beliefs and personal convictions to eat them. It was written in the scriptures, God’s law! Peter was very proud that he had never eaten impure animals. So, even though the voice from heaven offered the animals three times and told him again and again saying: “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.”, Peter could not obey God’s call because of his personal convictions. Peter was disturbed and disgusted with all of it! For us, Peter may sound a bit immature, especially when we think that we can eat most things. To understand Peter’s dilemma, we need to think about something that for us is spiritually or morally unacceptable to do or to believe in. So, please stop here and take a moment to think about something that you would never do or support.

It is important to really highlight here that Peter's situation is more common than you can imagine. We have all been there! We hold on too tight to our identities, traditions, theology, costumes, culture, beliefs, the things we must do or accept, and the things we must reject at all costs. All these voices became so loud in our minds and hearts that we cannot hear and respond to God's calling to do or become something new. Neuroscience has proved that our immature minds, or primitive instinctive minds, protect and defend our beliefs at all costs. Our mind takes our traditions, habits and beliefs as essential for survival, and it attacks and resists anything that can shake or threaten it. This defence shot down our ability to think and we react automatically. I have a good example for you. Imagine a rabbit eating grass in a field. Now suddenly a wind blows, and the grass moves. The rabbit believes that it is a fox and runs. The rabbit can't take the risk to reflect or verify if it is a fox or if it is the wind blowing. Because, if it is a fox, the rabbit is dead. So, the rabbit's brain must protect him from any doubt that running is the right thing to do. So, he does it instinctively in an automatic response.

Of course, you and I know that most of the time we are more intelligent than the rabbit. Well... not always! We all tend to live our lives on autopilot. So, in humans this defence mechanism can protect us at the instinctive level. But, at the spiritual level, at a higher level, it can work as a resistance against God's Spirit, against God's work within us. But I tell you, Jesus said that whenever God wants to convert us and use us, we must deny ourselves – in other words, we need to betray our habits, traditions, and most personal beliefs. And that is the inner journey. And this is when we discover the joy of being wrong.

The central passage that we read today is about an extraordinary experience with the Holy Spirit, but it is at the end of Cornelius and Peter's inner journey with God. Without that inner journey and transformation, the action of Holy Spirit wouldn't be visible or even possible. Their personal experience was so deep and so powerful that changed them, changed the people and community around them, and even the future of the Christian church because it created the right condition for the transformative manifestation and action of God's Holy Spirit.

The journey that Cornelius and Peter went through, and the struggle that have changed them, is what being a Christian or to follow Jesus is about. **A transformative journey with God.** That should be mine and yours constant

journey. A journey of conversion. A journey of discovering the joy of being wrong. A journey of discovering the need to change our beliefs and ways to accommodate God's new ways. To recentre our lives in God's will. Without this inner journey with God and our struggle for transformation, our faith becomes an empty religiosity.

So, today's central message is about the need for us to do that inner transformative journey with God. A Journey of a constant realisation of the things we need to convert in us. And I tell you: I have learned that, **the more we realise the things we must change in ourselves, the less we find things we want to change in others.** Just like Peter.

This is the only way to be at the centre of God's will. It is the only way to become what God created us to be. To abandon the old ways and embrace, even with struggle like Peter, God's new ways. It is the only way to have a fulfilling and meaningful life. It is the only way to distinguish God's voice among other inner voices and respond to the true calling that God has for us and for our church. And this is what spirituality looks like.

I will say more, one of things that amazes me is that God is not interested in what we did or what we were, or even what we are right now for that matter! God is interested in what we can be. How we become what he had imagen us to be. This can be hard for us to understand or accept because we do not like change. And we are too proud of who we are. Or, we want what is familiar. Like Peter, we get stuck in our own ways, experiences, and convictions. Even after three years with Jesus, Peter was still attached to conviction and prejudice from his past. God challenged and shocked him with a new way of being, thinking and feeling. And it worked! Peter became a new person. Of course, Peter's journey was different from Cornelius' journey, and every one of us must go through our unique journey as well. And this journey will not be without struggles.

As we slowly come out of this pandemic and hard times of isolation, we are all praying for the Spirit's guidance and vision, right? I can tell you that: Our survival instinct is heightened just like the rabbit's and this can work as a resistance against God's Spirit. We want the new, but our basis for the new can be the old stuff. The unfamiliar can threaten us. And put us in the 'rabbit's survival mode'. And the only way to break this resistance is to intentionally go

through that inner journey, that inner work of transformation. Spend time intentionally with God, building an intimate relationship. We do that by constant checking our feelings, our prejudices, dealing with our contradictions, finding out the things that for us are unchangeable and ask why. Holding them in God's presence. And above all, discerning God's voice within us. By listening, listening and listening, distinguishing God's voice from our own rabbit' survival voices. That is what brings spiritual growth and maturity. That is what prepare us for action of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is blowing... we must stop thinking it's the fox. It's something new. God is asking of us to change the unchangeable and think the unthinkable. And when we do, we will feel that joy of being wrong! Amen

Hymn 452 StF 'Show me the way of the cross'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgdUK0NjAj8>

Show me the way of the cross once again
Denying myself for the love that I've gained
Everything's You now, everything's changed,
It's time You had my whole life;
You can have it all.

(Yes,) I resolve to give it all;
Some things must die,
Some things must live.
Not, "What can I gain,"
But, "What can I give?"
If much is required when much is received,
Then You can have my whole life;
Jesus, have it all.

I've given like a beggar but lived like the rich
And crafted myself a more comfortable cross,
Yet what I am called to is deeper than this,
It's time You had my whole life;
You can have it all.

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Prayers of Intercession

Living and Loving God, we pause now to pray...

We pray for political leaders who think they know what's best for countries facing the horrors of the pandemic, poverty, conflicts and destruction. Whenever your Spirit challenges their assumptions and solutions Help them to change, convert and find the joy of being wrong.

We pray for all people, including us, who can use our vote and our voices to oppose the ugliness of corruption and injustice taking place everywhere. Whenever your Spirit challenges our political alliances and our conformism Help us to change, convert and find the joy of being wrong.

We pray for our churches, here and all over the world, as they strive to be a prophetic voice and work for God's Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Whenever your Spirit challenges our way of doing things and our missional strategies Help us to change, convert and find the joy of being wrong.

We pray for ourselves, who brag about not being racially, socially, gender or religious prejudiced and carry on living our lives in a way that pleases you. Whenever your Spirit challenges our assumptions, our bias and our deep struggles. Help us to change, convert and find the joy of being wrong.

Loving God,
Thank you for leading us into a time where more of reality is being unveiled for us all to see. We pray that you will take away our natural temptation for cynicism, denial, fear and despair. Help us have the courage to awaken to greater truth, greater humility, and greater care for one another.

I invite you now to stop and bring your personal prayers to God.

(...)

Good God, knowing you are hearing us better than we are speaking, we offer all these prayers in all the holy names of God. Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy Name.

Thy Kingdom come.

Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

The power, and the glory,

For ever and ever.

Amen.

Hymn: StF 407 Hear the Call of the Kingdom

Winton Band <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rXkOKIW9nT8>

Hear the call of the kingdom

Lift your eyes to the King

Let His song rise within you

As a fragrant offering

Of how God rich in mercy

Came in Christ to redeem

All who trust in His unfailing grace

Hear the call of the Kingdom

To be children of light

With the mercy of heaven

The humility of Christ

Walking justly before Him

Loving all that is right

That the life of Christ may shine through us

King of Heaven we will answer the call

We will follow bringing hope to the world

Filled with passion, filled with power to proclaim

Salvation in Jesus' name

Hear the call of the Kingdom

To reach out to the lost
With the Father's compassion
In the wonder of the cross
Bringing peace and forgiveness
And a hope yet to come
Let the nations put their trust in Him

Hymn 447 StF 'Jesus be the centre'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pw6rlwmkV6E>

Jesus, be the centre
be my source, be my light, Jesus

Jesus, be the centre
be my hope, be my song, Jesus.

*be the fire in my heart
be the wind in these sails
be the reason that I live
Jesus, Jesus.*

Jesus, be my vision,
be my path, be my guide
Jesus.

The Grace

The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ
The Love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with us all, evermore.
Amen.

Have a blessed week everyone!

Rev Betto