

Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 21st June 2020
2nd Sunday after Trinity

Collect

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

Romans 6:1-11

Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Matthew 10:24-39

‘A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!

‘So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.

‘Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.
‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;
and one's foes will be members of one's own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.

Sermon

Well good morning Church and to all the father's happy Father's Day! I hope you get spoiled and get a chance to do what dad's do with their families!

A couple of weeks ago I got one of those pop-ups in Facebook reminding me of a previous memory that I had posted.

In one of my trips to Africa I was called on at very short notice to go and help set up our operations in response to the civil war that was getting global attention in the Central African Republic. I will never forget these kids and getting them clean water to drink from our water truck!



You may remember the media coverage at the time was of thousands of homeless people camping out in the perimeter of the International Airport in Bangui and clambering all over the planes. Many innocent people were losing their lives at the hand of the local militia and it was one of the most insecure areas in Africa particularly the road between the airport and the centre of town a journey of 3 miles.

As I prepared myself for this trip my mind was all over the place with the thought of what laid ahead of me and how I was going to deal with it. Aid agencies were subject to regular carjacking's and we were not allowed to carry weapons in the vehicles.

I even had a session of counselling before I went to help me cope with it as I had never been sent into a war zone before. To say I was scared was an understatement!

I will never forget leaving home on the day of departure and welling up with tears as my taxi took me off to the airport. The thoughts of “will I ever see my young family again” was big in my mind as the car sped off toward Heathrow.

At this point I was in real pieces and carrying the cross of commitment for this important assignment is something I will never forget. It’s probably something Erica will never forget either!

If we turn our attention back to this morning’s Gospel we have Matthew giving the account from Jesus of what it means and the cost of carrying that cross of commitment. The power of verse 39 is something we have all heard many times.

“Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.”

Our commitment to our Christian way of life and values in putting the needs of others first is the investment that will **unlock hope** and help us find life in its fullness. Life starts looking very different when we look at it through this lens.

I was thinking of Matthew’s church and what it must have been like to hear this message as the early church after Christ’s death was not a safe place to be. Persecution was enormous and associating yourself with the early Christian church was fraught with danger.

People really put their personal safety on the line to associate themselves with the early church and what it meant to turn their back on Judaism and follow Christ. Their cross of commitment was enormous and without that costly and focused commitment the early church could have easily folded and disappeared all together.

If I take us back to my journey, two months in the Central African Republic taught me a lot and at times the cross of commitment to carry out our work in some very challenging security settings is something I will never forget. Curfews and security lockdowns were part of the course and I take my hat off to those aid workers who live in this sort of environment permanently.

Getting essential food supplies that we take for granted to those who owned nothing but the clothes they were wearing helped to **unlock hope** in the most practical way and I will never forget that.

We have all had a tough three months with the challenges of lockdown to deal with COVID-19. It’s been a time when society and all of us have had to put the needs of others first ahead of ourselves.

Many of us have been challenged with working at home and I’ve had to lead and encourage a team of 13 people from my loft on countless hours of Zoom calls! We have had to adapt quickly with unified commitment to make it all work effectively.

Things have had to be done differently and its added a different level of complexity and commitment to keep things running but carrying that cross has helped to **unlock hope** to help us move on and get help to those who need it.

In my lifetime I've never seen people carry the cross of love, kindness and encouragement for others as much as I have in the last 3 months. Just like the early church we have had to morph ourselves into a new way of living and its forced all of us to look at life through a generous and unselfish lens. We have had to put the needs of others first and if we reflect on it I'm sure its taught us all a lot about what is important in life and what gives life.

Life may look very different for a long time to come and in fact it may never return to the way it was.

Our challenge is to encourage ourselves and others to keep living in this zone of intensified commitment carrying that cross of love, kindness and support so we can continue to **unlock the power of hope** and bring life in its fullness for those around us.

In the name of Jesus. **Amen**.