



Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 22 2022

readings: [Acts 16.9-15](#), [Revelation 21.10, 22-22.5](#), [John 14.23-29](#)

One of the things Dean Peter spoke about last week was what it means for us to love one another. Today's Gospel reading picks up that same theme of love and expands on it.

Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'

Today we're going to think a little about what it means for God to come to each one of us and be at home with us.

One of the things we've got used to over the past two years is people working from home and joining work meetings online. Instead of seeing colleagues in shirts, dresses, jackets and basically smart clothes we're seen one another in jeans, leggings and T-shirts. We've had glimpses into one another's homes.

I'm sure you can all think of places where you feel relaxed and at ease and at home and other places where you feel awkward or on ceremony or that you need to be on your best behaviour or that you need to wait to be invited to do something. When you feel at home you know you are loved, accepted, safe and that you truly and deeply belong. That is the kind of relationship God wants to have with us.

God wants our relationship with him to be rooted and grounded in love. That we know we are loved beyond measure by Christ, that we allow our love for Christ to grow and deepen and enlarge our hearts every day and that we become channels of God's love to others. Jesus tells us that as we love him we will keep his word. In order to keep his word we must be familiar with it and know it. And as we commit ourselves to loving God and keeping his word God in turn promises to come to us and dwell with us and within us.

That to me is the definition of prayer – God coming to us and being at home with us. And we're going to consider today how we grow and develop our life of prayer.

Teresa of Avila is a famous mystic who teaches about prayer and drawing closer to union with God by working through different rooms in an interior castle through acts of prayer, meditation and asceticism gradually clearing away all that is not holy and godly creating more internal space that can be filled by God's light, love and presence. She talks about

“the soul as if it were a castle made of a single diamond or of a very clear crystal, in which there are many rooms, just as in Heaven there are many mansions” (1). In the centre of crystal castle is the Sun, or the

King, who gives all the splendour and beauty to the rest of the castle. The closer we approach the centre, the greater the light.”

That is an illustration of what it means for us to love God, keep his word and for God to come to us and make God’s home with us.

Gary Chapman talks about 5 love languages – words of affirmation, acts of service, receiving gifts, quality time and physical touch. How might those ideas inform your prayer life? Do we spend time telling God how wonderful we think he is, offer words and songs of praise and thanksgiving? Do we see the acts of service we do for others as ways of expressing love for God? Do we see our Christian giving as an act of love? Do we spend time in silent meditation or contemplation, intentionally being attentive to God’s presence with us? Do we use all our senses to encounter God?

And as well as loving God and spending time in prayer how good are we at engaging with God’s Word, reading it, studying it, learning it, analysing it, interpreting it, applying it and living it. There are many ways through the centuries that Christians have encountered Christ through the words of Scripture – in meditation, in lectio divina, in musical settings, in daily Bible reading notes or creatively illustrating scripture passages as the monks did with the earliest Bibles.

And the aim of our prayer and Bible reading is that God would come to us and be at home with us.

I wonder how that makes you feel?

I don’t know about you, but I would say there are very few people I ever really allow to get to know me. People I really let in and make a conscious decision not to hide from but to be truly myself with. People who see the good parts of me and the bad parts and maybe we feel a bit like that with God.

But when you are truly and deeply loved it is such a precious gift – to be able to be open, honest, transparent and authentic and to allow other people’s love and the light of Christ flood into the parts of you that are hurting or damaged or broken or that are dirty and sources of guilt and shame. God’s perfect love casts out fear and brings comfort, healing and peace.

After Jesus talks about making his home within us he goes on to talk about peace.

‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.’

Jesus wants us to learn to love, to keep his word and to be at home with us and to know his peace and we do this through prayer. It is prayer that sustains and develops our relationship with God and draws us closer to him.

As part of my role, I am Bishop Libby’s Advisor in Spirituality and I oversee and organise all kinds of prayer and spiritual activities within the diocese and I wanted to invite you today to consider three different ways you might want to explore prayer and deepen your relationship with God.

The first is to come to a morning towards the end of June at the Bishop’s House where we will explore together stories from Luke’s Gospel using poetry, art, music, prayer and liturgy so that together we can dive deep into God’s word and consider how we might keep God’s Word.

The second is to come to a series of three evening workshops I will be hosting here in the cathedral during July where we will learn about and explore different ways of praying such as the Jesus prayer, prayer beads, using icons, centring prayer, lectio divina and various traditional and contemporary spiritual disciplines.

More information about these will be available in the Flag in the coming weeks.

Finally I want to invite you all to consider joining Bishop Libby's 2027 Community of Prayer.

Bishop Libby wants to ensure that the life of the diocese, all we are and all that we do is held and framed in prayer so that everything we do weaves together into something beautiful for God that sits within that framework of prayer. It is called the 2027 Community of Prayer because we are hoping that in the lead up to our centenary in 2027 we might gather 2027 people together in praying for our diocese. The commitment people are asked to make is threefold:

Firstly to pray the Lord's prayer every day.

Secondly to use the Diocesan Cycle of Prayer which has a different thing to pray for every day.

Thirdly to pray the diocesan vision prayer every day.

Those who are members have the option to receive further information about prayer and spirituality events and opportunities such as quiet mornings, prayer workshops, training sessions, online intercessory gatherings or spiritual direction or accompaniment.

There are leaflets available but the best way to join is by registering online and I'd like to ask each and every one of you to consider joining the prayer community so that we can learn how to pray together, and God will come to us and make his home with us.

Gracious God,
In your mercy and for your glory;
Renew us, reshape us, revive us –
With generous faith, courageous hope, and life-giving love –
That, in transformed loves,
Through growing church and building community,
We may see your kingdom come
And be good news to all.
Amen

Revd Nicky Fenton, Bishop's Chaplain, and Residentiary Canon.