

Morning Prayer 8th November 2020

The Third Sunday before Advent

Service with Joan Brüggemeier



Personal preparation before the service begins.
Please take time to remember where you are,
and why you are here.
Give thanks and become still
in the presence of God

Prelude (ACF 8)

Be still, and know that I am God
And there is none beside Me.
Be still, and know that I am God
And there is none beside Me.

CCLI Song # 4549576
Graham Maule | John L. Bell
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Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with us.
This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Song ACF 26 Don't you know

Don't you know the everlasting God
never grows tired or weary.
Those who trust in him for help,
they will find their strength is renewed.

They will rise, they will rise,
they will rise on eagle's wings.

They will run, they will run,
they will run and never tire.

K. Allan, S. Rinaldi. © BFBS

Let us pray with words from Psalm 23

(A psalm of David.)

The Lord is my shepherd; ♦
therefore can I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures ♦
and leads me beside still waters.
He shall refresh my soul ♦
**and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his
name's sake.**
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of
death,
I will fear no evil; ♦
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.
You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me; ♦
you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.
Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life, ♦
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning,
is now and shall be for ever.

The Collect for today, the Third Sunday before Advent

God, our refuge and strength,
bring near the day when wars shall cease
and poverty and pain shall end,
that earth may know the peace of heaven
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

The first reading is taken from 1 Corinthians 3:1-11

Let us prepare ourselves for the word of God
Our hearts and our minds are open

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

This is the word of the Lord.
Thanks be to God.

The reading is taken from John 17:20-26

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John
Glory to you, O Lord

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to you, O Christ.

Homily

Listening to God and learning to fly like eagles

Over the last few months since Christopher left and Tini asked us to pray about our vision for ACF I have found myself asking and praying: what is God going to do with the Anglican Church in Freiburg? Where is He taking the congregation? What role does He want us to play in that future?

And God is full of surprises. At the time I would never have envisaged that I would be standing here preaching to you or that a Bishop from Botswana would have been staying in our house whilst he ministered to you. Once you start praying you never know what might happen next.

So what has God got in store for ACF. I don't know the answer to that, but what I do know is this church is God's church. You can trace His movement amongst this congregation down through the years. Against all odds He called it into being. As most of you know for many many years this congregation only existed as a small group of Anglicans who met in people's houses. Into their lives was sown the seed of the idea of forming a church with its own minister. They received encouragement from the Vicar of Basel Geoff Read and his congregation.

There were never enough people or the finances to justify a full time minister , and yet the commission sent from London to enquire into that came out in favour of a full time minister being called. The group advertised for a gentle pioneer to come and help lay the groundwork for what is now this church. Amazingly funds were found with the help of a missionary society (ICM?) and the Basel congregation and the contribution of the members here. I have been affiliated with this church since 2003. The finances have always been fragile, warnings that the money wouldn't last to cover the following year come up as regularly as clockwork and yet here we are today: the church is still here and the fellowship amongst you is still strong.

Despite all the difficulties this church has faced over the years it is still going strong. Why? This Church is here because Jesus Christ Himself called it into being and is watching over it, guiding and leading it. He called this congregation into life and is sustaining it because He Himself has a purpose for it in Freiburg.

We all know the Bible Reading about the body of Christ and its many parts. John Stott a well known Anglican Priest and christian author suggests that this Bible passage not only refers to the Body of Christ worldwide but to each and every congregation. He suggests Jesus calls together in each congregation those people He needs to fulfill His purpose for that congregation at that time. Together to be His body wherever they are placed. That idea makes perfect sense, don't you think? But it also has consequences.

Think about it for a moment: that would mean that not one of you is here by chance. Each of you has received an inner calling by Jesus Christ Himself to be a member of this congregation in order to help fulfill God's purpose on earth through it. Each and every one of you is an important part of that plan. The question is: how are you going to respond to that calling and is your heart open to listening to what God is asking you now to do?

I have heard many great sermons here. One which particularly sticks in my mind and which has helped me over the years when I have faced difficulties is one which Keith preached about 15 years ago. In it he explained about how eagles teach their young ones how to fly. When they feel the young eagles are ready the parents start by making the nest uncomfortable for their young, preparing them to up and go. Then when they feel the time is right they push and manoeuvre the young over the edge, so that they fall and have to start flying on their own. The older eagles fly below wings outspread, ready to catch and help just in case anything goes wrong. It can not be a pleasant time for the young birds experiencing their parents making life difficult for them, pushing them into the unknown. At times it must seem terrifying and yet it is all necessary to help them reach their potential.

It seems to me that that describes exactly what God has been doing with this congregation. He called people to find a place to build the nest: the first one was with the Methodists in the Katherinenstrasse, He then called Robin and Joan to gently pioneer the creation of a comfortable and safe nest to nurture the congregation and help instill the vision of a community of grace. . Once Jesus thought that His followers here were strong enough to learn to fly themselves He started to push us gently or in some cases not so gently out of the nest. He needed to test whether we were ready to learn our next lessons. Jesus needed to know on whom we were depending . Was He the focus of our faith. Were we ready to follow Him where He would lead us? And so Jesus pulled away another prop

of support and called Joan and Robin to Ireland. Robin had been called to gently pioneer this fledgling congregation and he had done exactly that. He had fulfilled his calling here and Jesus needed Robin and Joan for His purposes in Ireland.

Jesus had something new waiting for the Anglican Church in Freiburg. New lessons to be learnt, new paths to be trodden. The congregation had to learn to focus on Jesus and not on a person. Because no person on earth regardless of how very good they are, as Robin was, can do for us what Jesus can do. We are just body parts. Jesus is the head, mind, soul and spirit which carries and sustains us throughout the ages.

God called interim pastors here, and you were blessed with some very good ones, and then He called Christopher. Christopher and his family were God's answer to much prayer and reflection. There were other candidates but Christopher was the Priest Jesus chose for the next stage of the journey for ACF, or he wouldn't have been allowed to come. Christopher was sent with a purpose to teach and nurture this congregation in preparation for what Jesus wanted and wants to do through you here in Freiburg.

What lessons did you learn from and through the time Christopher pastored here? Christopher and his family, like Robin and his family were God's gift to this congregation for a set time and purpose. Maybe it is worthwhile taking time to reflect what important lessons of faith Jesus wanted to teach you through each of them and all that happened whilst they were ministering amongst you. Maybe you would like to take time in these coming weeks to give thanks for them and their families and also to reflect on what gifts of God you received and how your own faith journey developed during their time here .

I personally was greatly blessed by being part of this congregation. I was helped tremendously on my journey of faith through fellowshiping with so many of you. Two lessons stick out particularly in my mind:

which I would like to mention today: firstly the power of prayer and how joint prayer can support and nurture a congregation. I remember the prayer network we had in place to support every member, just as you still do today.; I remember how we prayed together for the finances and experienced God's encouragement by almost doubling them in one year. At the time we could only raise 20,000 Euro a year ourselves. We prayed that we would reach a target of 40,000 Euro the next year. We raised 38,000 Euro If I remember correctly.

The second and for me faith and lifechanging experience was learning the blessing of listening prayer: allowing God to be part of our prayer conversation by giving Him room to speak to our hearts in the waiting stillness before we started our weekly prayer meetings, so that God could set the agenda and guide and lead us in prayer. A lesson first learnt at a weekend away in Histon 2006/ 7. The speaker Ben King later visited us here and taught us more about it. Geoff Read reenforced that lesson when he introduced the pastoral team and later at a weekend away this congregation to the lectio divina- a way of letting a Bible text speak to your heart rather than just your head. Listening and reflective prayer allows us to catch God's vision for our own lives and for the life of the congregation. I am so grateful and privileged to have been part of this congregation when those lessons were being taught.

Now it must feel as if you have been thrown out of the nest again. The congregation is falling, learning to fly but not sure in which direction to go and the safety net of God's wings not only below but surrounding this congregation and each of us are not always immediately obvious. But rest assured Jesus is here amongst us, for we are gathered in His name. He called this congregation into being, He has sustained it throughout the decades it has existed. Jesus is not about to abandon you. He is leading you onwards, teaching you to rely more on Him than on anyone else, teaching you to fly in faith and to learn the pleasure of being airborne with Him.

But realise that you will not find the way if your focus is on looking back. You can only arrive at where Jesus wants you to be if you are willing to focus on Him and where He is leading you :- away from the past and the present into the future. Just as He called the disciples 2000 years ago, He is calling each of us saying: „Come, follow Me“ And the promise He gave to those first disciples rings out as clearly to us today as when it was first spoken: „And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age“. Amen

Intercessions (by Tini)

I invite you to join me in praying through/speaking out or proclaiming pieces of our readings today. When I say, “Lord, in your mercy,” please respond with “Hear our prayer.”

Let’s pray:

“Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.”

I feel like these words from the Psalm could be written about our current reality in the world. There is so much unrest. There is constant disagreement about the Corona restrictions. People groups are being persecuted and, I must say, I am appalled by the situation in the US. The states seem more divided than united and it is difficult for me to see an end in sight and/or imagine that peace will soon come over the situation. BUT...you, Lord, are almighty. When you lift your voice, the earth melts. Therefore, help me and help us to trust you to intervene with your mighty power and to bring peace into a tumultuous situation.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

“God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.”

Lord, you are the one who is strong! I am reminded of the children’s song lyrics “we are weak, but He is strong.” We ask you to reveal your strength to those who are feeling weak. We pray especially for Margaret

and Brian and those who are fighting off other sicknesses.

We pray too for those who feel anxious or weakened by fear brought on by the Corona virus—whether it is a fear of sickness or a fear connected to financial survival or job security due to the current circumstances.

We bring you medical workers and other staff directly affected by the COVID pandemic. Protect them from sickness and may they draw from your incredible strength in this trying time.

We pray for those who are isolated and/or fighting off loneliness and also those who feel helpless, being so far away from family or loved ones in this season. May all these people experience you as their refuge and their ever-present help in times of trouble.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

Paul describes us as “co-workers in God’s service.” Lord we thank you for all the people who have served us in the church context in official or unofficial roles—our parents, friends, church members. Thank you for the ways that they have labored for you and have taught us about who you are. In the same way, we thank you for the clergy--all the locums that have been here over the past weeks, for Christopher and Bishop Leslie and even for our future pastor. Please fill them with an overflow of your love so that they are equipped and inspired for their ministry.

We pray also for each one of us. Show us where are “working place” is in your Kingdom and equip us, Holy Spirit to serve you wholeheartedly.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

Paul also says that we “are God’s field.” Lord may we be a field where you are constantly growly us and also, where the Holy Spirit is growing and stirring inside us. May we be fields that bear much fruit. We bring you those of us who are going through a desert period, where they feel distant to you and dried out spiritually. Lord, pour out your living water on them and let them

be refreshed. Open their eyes to see the fruit in their lives.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

Jesus prayed, "I pray also for those who will believe in me that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."

We echo Jesus' prayer for unity amongst Christians, starting in our church, in Freiburg, in Germany, Europe and around the world. Let it be true that others will know we are Christians by the way we love one another. Help us to be open to differing opinions while, at the same time, being bound together by the truth of your Gospel.

We pray specifically for unity amongst the congregation of the Anglican Church Basil and the other churches in the Diocese that are also currently without a pastor.

Unify the church and strengthen their fellowship in these unique and uncertain times.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

Jesus also said, "Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

We bring you those in our family, our friends and our neighbourhood that don't yet know you. May they experience your all-encompassing love today. Make us open to the opportunities you give us to share that love with them.

We similarly pray for those around the world who have not yet heard of your love. Reach out to them and meet them wherever they are.

Lord in your mercy,

Hear our prayer

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

In the language of our hearts, let us pray as our Saviour taught us



The Blessing

The Lord bless you and watch over you,
the Lord make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you,
the Lord look kindly on you and give you peace;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
be with you now and always.

Amen.

The Conclusion

The Lord bless us, and preserve us from all evil,
and keep us in eternal life.

Amen.

Let us bless the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Postlude