

Worship 30th May
Aberlour Parish Church
Rev Andrew Kimmitt

Prayer of approach, confession and Lord's Prayer

Almighty and loving God,
we gather together today
as those joined by your Holy Spirit.

We come remembering your ancient promise
to send your Spirit upon all people,
young and old,
male and female,
Jew and Gentile.
Move within us we pray.

We come, this Sunday,
reminded of the constant work of your Spirit,
inspiring,
guiding,
challenging,
refining.
Move within us we pray.

Almighty God, Spirit of truth,
come as you promised
and reveal to us more of the way of Christ.
Come and fill us with deeper faith and greater love.
Give us the gifts we need to work for your kingdom,
inspire us with new vision and purpose,
and breathe your power into our lives.
Move within us we pray.

Almighty and loving God,
open our hearts and minds and souls to your Spirit,
whoever we may be,
and so equip us to live as your people,
not just this but every day,
our lives reflecting your glory
and proclaiming your love.

This we pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
As we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
and the power,
and the glory,
forever.
Amen.

Hymn CH4 687

- 1 Lord of our growing years,
with us from infancy,
laughter and quick-dried tears,
freshness and energy :
*your grace surrounds us all our days —
for all your gifts we bring our praise.*
- 2 Lord of our strongest years,
stretching our youthful powers,
lovers and pioneers
when all the world seems ours :
- 3 Lord of our middle years,
giver of steadfastness,
courage that perseveres
when there is small success :
- 4 Lord of our older years,
steep though the road may be,
rid us of foolish fears,
bring us serenity :
- 5 Lord of our closing years,
always your promise stands ;
hold us, when death appears,
safely within your hands :

David Mowbray (b. 1938)

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Readings –Galatians 5:22-6:18

5²² By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.²⁶ Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

6 ¹My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. ² Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. ³ For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. ⁴ All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbour's work, will become a cause for pride. ⁵ For all must carry their own loads.

⁶ Those who are taught the word must share in all good things with their teacher.

⁷ Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. ⁸ If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. ⁹ So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. ¹⁰ So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

¹¹ See what large letters I make when I am writing in my own hand! ¹² It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised—only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. ¹³ Even the circumcised do not themselves obey the law, but they want you to be circumcised so that they may boast about your flesh. ¹⁴ May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! ¹⁶ As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

¹⁷ From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body.

¹⁸ May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Reflection

Paul began this letter, as he begins several of his letters, addressing a problem. He thought that something was breaking or already broken in amongst the Galatians. We've said before that one of the downsides of eavesdropping on only one end of the conversation is that it's hard to know exactly what is going on, but it appears there is a teacher, or a set of teachings and beliefs that Paul thinks is – in his words – leading them astray, cutting in on their race/journey with Christ, bewitching them into foolishness.

In short, for Paul there is a problem. Something broken in the church in Galatia.

Most of us, when we see something broken, want to fix it. When we see something wrong we want to put it right.

This last year of Covid times, lots has been broken, lots of things we want to fix, lots that we want to get 'back to normal'.

Putting things back to being they way they ought to be – that's what most of us mean by 'fixing'. All of us will have a skill or hobbies, that means there's something we know how to fix something: whether it's patching up a tear in material, smoothing a dent or a scratch on a surface with filler, tinkering with that wire, switch or software setting: the idea is getting things back to how there were before they broke.

So we might expect that Paul would do the same with the broken church in Galatia. Find out what's wrong, patch it up, fix it, get it how it was before.

Except that, I just wonder if Paul doesn't give us an example of doing something a bit more than 'fixing'

Part of that wonder comes from listening to the way Paul talks about Law – in this part of the letter and elsewhere. It was a bit of a surprise to hear in verse 3 Paul talk about fulfilling the ‘law of Christ’. He said that if someone among the church goes astray, they should be restored in a spirit of gentleness. While that seems good wisdom generally, Paul says that in doing that we fulfil the law of Christ.

It’s odd to hear Paul being positive about law.

What’s going on?

I think for Paul the law is about fixing. The law gives rule and guidelines about how to fix things when they have gone wrong – when things have gone wrong between two human parties, but also when they have gone wrong between humans and God. The law tells you how to fix it (and sometimes how to stop it going wrong in the first place). Today lawyers looking at problems still talk in terms of what ‘remedy’ the law offers. The law is designed for fixing and it is still good at fixing.

But Paul hasn’t prescribed a legal remedy for the church in Galatia, he isn’t trying to fix something broken, and restore it back to what it was. In fact, as we’ve heard in previous weeks, he wants the Galatians to stop clinging to the law, and to live by faith and grace.

But if something is broken, and the law is good at fixing things, then why is Paul so down on the law?

I think the answer to that question goes to the heart of what Paul understands has happened in Jesus. And I think it’s about Paul wanting more than fixing, and better than going back to how things were.

The centre of our reading, perhaps the whole letter in summary is in verses 15-16:

For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything! 16 As for those who will follow this rule—peace be upon them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

We know Paul thought there was a problem, and we know that it was around the Law and Jewish identity and the bundle of things Paul means when he says ‘circumcision’. But Paul isn’t interested in fixing that problem, in patching it over, making it as good as new.

It is all about the new creation.

And this goes to the heart of what Jesus is about.

There is a version of Christianity that goes: in the beginning everything was perfect, Adam and Eve, Eden all of that. Then things went bad. Then Jesus came and fixed it, and in heaven everything will be perfect like it was at the beginning again.

Paul wouldn’t like that version of Christianity. I don’t either.

Because Jesus didn’t just ‘fix’ what was broken. For Paul, a whole new creation is inaugurated, a whole new way of being is opened up and made possible: opened up because of what Jesus has done, and what we are called to now in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The new creation is everything.

The new creation isn’t about a heaven of a restored Eden; the new creation is about the here and the now; the new creation is what we pray for each week when we ask that God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven; the new creation is not just a fixing: it’s about flourishing; it’s not about going back to how things were; it’s about receiving God’s spirit anew and discovering anew the significance of God’s love for us, and in response the ways we live and tell and show God’s love now and in the future.

Whenever things have broken, or gone wrong; the truly Christian response isn't to 'fix'. Fixing is right and often necessary, we may often have to do fixing – and we may well have to invest a lot of time and energy in fixing. But never fixing just to go back to... fixing for what comes next

Covid times have been hard, A lot has broken. Including ourselves. We've missed on on much; we've lost muc' we've weathered much, and if we're not in some sense deeply tired, or traumatised, ailing from the effects of long-term anxiety – let alone to say grieving, struggling, at-or-past breaking point; then we're in the minority. There is a lot of fixing to do.

But, might – might we not just take a cue from Paul, whose vision of our calling, whose understanding of following Jesus, is about more than fixing, and working out what the new creation looks like?

Because going back to 'how things were' isn't an option - even if we desperately want it to be.

I realise – I feel it myself – that talk of the new creation and working out a flourishing future sounds daunting. It also sounds exhausting to us who are already tired. I sigh and shrink back every time of the government catchphrases of : 'building back better' – how can we ask that of ourselves when so many have given so much just to survive?

The good news – the literal gospel – for us in the Church is that we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us. It my be our heart and hearts and hands that uncover the future, but they'll do it empowered by God – because that is what God has promised us.

Paul tells us we reap what we sow – and if we sow in the Spirit, as the Spirit enables and empowers us, if we sow for the future open to the Spirit's guidance, and in prayerful discernment and with wisdom, then what we will reap, the fruits we look for in the harvest will be the fruits Paul names. The community we seek to build, the church we have a vision of, is one hallmarked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

By God's grace, might we live out these fruits of God's Spirit.

Amen.

Hymn CH4 231

1 For the fruits of all creation,
thanks be to God;
for these gifts to every nation,
thanks be to God;
for the ploughing, sowing, reaping,
silent growth while we are sleeping,
future needs in earth's safe-keeping,
thanks be to God.

2 In the just reward of labour,
God's will is done;
in the help we give our neighbour,
God's will is done;
in our world-wide task of caring
for the hungry and despairing,
in the harvests we are sharing,
God's will is done.

3 For the harvests of the Spirit,
thanks be to God;

for the good we all inherit,
thanks be to God;
for the wonders that astound us,
for the truths that still confound us,
most of all, that love has found us,
thanks be to God.

Frederick Pratt Green (1903-2000)

Prayers for others and ourselves

God of all promise,
Christ of all hope,
Spirit of all power,
Hear our prayer.

In a world which knows much pain,
in a world which reaps fruits of greed, injustice, hate and evil – because that is what it sows –

We pray for a world which harvests instead the fruits of your Spirit, and receives them abundantly.

May the world know love:

where love is lacking, where love can't take root, not because of hate but because of apathy,
God give the people of the world, give *us*, hearts open to our neighbour: that as you love us, so the greatest commandment upon us is to love you and love our neighbour whoever they are.

May love abound.

May the world know joy:

A joy which goes deeper than happiness and pleasure. A joy which rests and underpins our orientation within the world. For there is much pain, and much grief. Nobody denies this. But the joy of your Spirit does not deny this truth – your is the Spirit who groans wordlessly for those horrors which words cannot express – yet it is the joy which rests and depends on your promise that pain is never the final word.

May joy abound.

May the world know Peace.

For there is much violence in our world. And yet peace is not simply the absence of conflict, but the flourishing of right relationship. Your peace goes beyond our understanding.

may peace abound.

May the world know patience.

In a world that demands what it wants *now* – never mind the consequences for person or planet, may a spirit of patience pave the way for a sustainable future.

May patience abound.

May the world know kindness.

Because a world which celebrates power and possession is impoverished in its understanding of human flourishing.

May kindness abound.

May the world know generosity.

When we hold tight to what is *ours* and when we want always *more* we fail ourselves, and when we all make excuses for greed – everyone loses out.

May generosity abound.

May the world know faithfulness

Jesus said let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no. Where insincerity and hypocrisy reigns, where trust has

been eroded and can only ever be built back with painstaking care,
May faithfulness abound.

May the world know gentleness

Because treading gently doesn't mean going soft. The hardest thing is nursing righteous anger into that
which transforms rather than destroys.

May gentleness abound

May the world know self-control.

In a world where it is easy to be led this way or that, wherever the winds of populism blow, where it is easy
to lose oneself to the agendas of others

May self-control abound.

Spirit who hovered over the waters of chaos before the Word of creation was spoken, bring us, with all that
you love towards the new creation. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Amen.

Hymn CH4 521

- 1 Children of God, reach out to one another !
Where pity dwells, the peace of God is there ;
to worship rightly is to love each other,
each smile a hymn, each kindly deed a prayer.
- 2 For he whom Jesus loved has truly spoken :
the holier worship which God deigns to bless
restores the lost, and binds the spirit broken,
and feeds the widow and the fatherless.
- 3 Follow with reverent steps the great example
of him whose holy work was doing good ;
so shall the wide earth seem our Father's temple,
each loving life a psalm of gratitude.
- 4 Then shall all shackles fall ; the stormy clangour
of wild war-music o'er the earth shall cease ;
love shall tread out the baleful fire of anger,
and in its ashes plant the tree of peace.

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892)(*alt.*)

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Sending and blessing

Empowered by the Holy Spirit

to seek love, joy, peace and all the fruits of what God sows in and through us,

May we go now with the blessing of God,

in hope of Christ,

and the power of the Holy Spirit,

now and always,

Amen.