

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 21st June 2026
The Third Sunday after Trinity

Collect

Almighty God,
you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,
that we and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Jeremiah 20:7-13

O Lord, you have enticed me, and I was enticed; you have overpowered me, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughing-stock all day long; everyone mocks me. For whenever I speak, I must cry out, I must shout, 'Violence and destruction!' For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision all day long. If I say, 'I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name', then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. For I hear many whispering: 'Terror is all around! Denounce him! Let us denounce him!' All my close friends are watching for me to stumble. 'Perhaps he can be enticed, and we can prevail against him, and take our revenge on him.' But the Lord is with me like a dread warrior; therefore my persecutors will stumble, and they will not prevail. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonour will never be forgotten. O Lord of hosts, you test the righteous, you see the heart and the mind; let me see your retribution upon them, for to you I have committed my cause. Sing to the Lord; praise the Lord! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hands of evildoers.

Romans 6:1b-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.

Post Communion

O God, whose beauty is beyond our imagining
and whose power we cannot comprehend:
show us your glory as far as we can grasp it,
and shield us from knowing more than we can bear
until we may look upon you without fear;
through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

Sermon

I am one of three children – the middle one at that. As a youngster it didn't take me long to realise that life was rarely fair. It could sometimes seem as though my sister was able to control by being the eldest; my brother was able to charm by being the youngest; and the blame always landed on me. I suspect I may be being unfair here, but you may be able to recognise the child's perspective.

And of course unfairness didn't stop there. At school, I was quite a timid child – which may be hard to believe now. I was also extremely well behaved and always completed my homework. On one occasion, I forgot to bring my General Note Book to school – it was a book we were given for rough workings. Unfortunately, my homework for one of my classes was in my General Note Book, and I was therefore given a black mark for not completing my homework. I cannot tell you how unjust it felt, because I *had* completed my homework – I just couldn't prove it.

From quite a young age, I became completely convinced that, no matter how unfair things seemed, there was one person who knew the truth; who was aware when I was telling the truth, even if others couldn't see it. And that was God. I took great comfort in the knowledge that, no matter what other people thought, God knew the truth of any situation. For me, the importance of this realisation was connected to the words in this morning's gospel reading, explaining our importance in God's eyes such that: "even the hairs of your head are all counted." I found it then, and still find it now a tremendous reassurance to know that I am fully known by God.

Now, I would be doing a disservice if I focused on the reassuring words of this morning's gospel reading without acknowledging that much of what it says is profoundly challenging. There are some Sundays when I look at the reading and wish that Jesus hadn't said certain things – or at least that it wasn't me who had to preach about them. And there are some aspects of this morning's gospel that fall into that category. I often pray for peace in the world, so it feels decidedly unhelpful when Jesus says that he did not come to bring peace. And the suggestions of discord within families are decidedly painful to hear.

As I have reflected on these words over this past week, what has come to mind most of all are the lives of certain individuals that I have admired over the years. You may have watched the film *Chariots of Fire*, which is now rather dated, and tells the story of Eric Liddell and Harold Abrahams, two athletes who competed in the 1924 Olympic Games in Paris. It was the story of Eric Liddell that I found especially moving because he gave up the chance of a medal in the 100 metres because the heats were to be run on a Sunday, which did not fit with his religious convictions.

What struck me most in the film was that sense of conflict inherent in such a decision. We often say that the gifts that we are given come from God – and Liddell was undoubtedly a gifted athlete. More than that, though, taking part in the Olympic Games is not just about an individual, but also the entire national team. There will undoubtedly have been pressure from those who believed that loyalty to the team should matter more than religious convictions. Liddell also refused to be part of a relay team, also because it would require competing on a Sunday. How much starker that sense of team loyalty would have been in those circumstances.

When I hear the words of Jesus about not coming to bring peace, but to bring a sword, I am reminded of instances like these. When Jesus spoke, he had a message to convey, and he did so in all kinds of manners, not least through hyperbole, exaggerating for effect. I do not believe that it was his desire to bring a sword instead of peace. Rather I think he recognised that it was inevitable, given the nature of his message.

While most of us will not necessarily be faced with conflict as stark as that facing Eric Liddell, each and every day, we make choices about the path that we choose to follow that create all kinds of conflict, internal and external. For some of you, at different times in your lives, there will have been occasions when even the decision to come to church on a Sunday presented potential conflict. There are so many things competing for our time, and when we factor in, for example, reluctant children, and indeed other activities that we or our children might engage in, choosing to attend church is not always an easy decision.

There are also aspects of our faith that potentially bring us into conflict with various values that are held by those we live alongside. Having started a career in the Civil Service, then moved into teaching, my parents did observe that when I was ordained I might be the only person they knew who had consistently chosen jobs that paid less and less. To be fair, it has not been a source of conflict with my parents. But perhaps you, like me, have moments when you look at the path you have taken in life and find yourself evaluating it against certain understandings of success, such as how much we earn; how big our house is; how new our car is; how many holidays we are able to take.

When Jesus said that he came not to bring peace but a sword, I think he may have been pointing to inevitable aspects of our human nature, integral to who we are, and yet challenging to live with. We are innately social beings. We need one another. And indeed we have the capacity to thrive alongside one another. And yet we also possess those tendencies towards comparison, and even competition. They are not wrong in themselves. Sometimes they are what can keep us on the right track. Sometimes, though, they can leave us struggling to find our own path because we are so busy comparing ourselves with others. In decades past it was known as Keeping up with the Joneses. These days it is more about our desire to portray images of perfect individuals and families on Facebook or elsewhere. How hard it can be as disciples of Jesus when we find ourselves drawn in different directions.

I do think, though, that there is great encouragement to be found in our gospel reading. First, that knowledge that we are known, loved and cherished by God. I still marvel at the idea of a God who cares so much about each and every one of us that even the hairs on our head are counted. A God who loves us that much wants to spend time with us; wants to be in relationship with us. The time we spend in prayer with God can help us in the challenges we face. Spending time in the presence of that kind of love shapes and moulds us. It can give us the strength we need when times are hard and nourish us when times are good.

And as we live out that life of relationship with God, daring to go where it leads, there will inevitably be moments when we ask ourselves whether we have made the right decisions. The thing is, though, we all know that those Facebook images of perfect families living perfect lives in perfect houses with perfect children are only so much nonsense. Eric Liddell,

who worked as a missionary following his Olympic success, was once asked whether he ever regretted his decision to give up the fame and glory of athletics. This was his response: "It's natural for a chap to think over all that sometimes, but I'm glad I'm at the work I'm engaged in now. A fellow's life counts for far more at this than the other." Or, put another way in the words of Jesus: "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

Amen