

Collect, Readings and Sermon
Sunday 26th July 2026
The Eighth Sunday after Trinity

Collect

Almighty Lord and everlasting God,
we beseech you to direct,
sanctify and govern us in the ways of your laws
and the works of your commandments;
that through your most mighty protection,
both here and ever, we may be preserved in body and soul;
through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

1 Kings 3:5-12

At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, 'Ask what I should give you.' And Solomon said, 'You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?' It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you.'

Psalms 119

The response to the Psalm is:

Your word gives understanding to the simple.

Romans 8:26-39

The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart,

knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

[Jesus] put before them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.'

He told them another parable: 'The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.'

'The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.'

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.'

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

'Have you understood all this?' They answered, 'Yes.' And he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.'

Post Communion

Strengthen for service, Lord,
the hands that have taken holy things;
may the ears which have heard your word
be deaf to clamour and dispute;
may the tongues which have sung your praise
be free from deceit;
may the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love
shine with the light of hope;
and may the bodies which have been fed with your body
be refreshed with the fullness of your life;
glory to you for ever.

Sermon

Some of you may have come across a short series of programmes on Radio 4 entitled “Church Going” presented by the Reverend Giles Fraser who is well known for his appearances on programmes such as the Moral Maze and is currently Vicar of St. Anne’s Kew. In a nutshell, Fraser is seeking to explore the state of Christianity in the United Kingdom. We all know that church attendance is broadly in decline, and yet there are signs of growth in some places, and signs, too, of an increased interest in Christian spirituality in various ways. As Fraser begins, he is asked by his producer how he feels about visiting churches and seeing how things are going, knowing the potential to become rather disillusioned by signs of decline. In response, this is what he says: “The question about Christianity is not, is it popular, [but] is it true, and, if it's true and it's unpopular, then we just fight on.”

I have been carrying these words throughout this week because they feel profoundly important. Important in part as an antidote to what can feel like a constant focus on church growth. But mainly important as a reminder of what churches are actually here for.

Just to be clear, I am not saying that I don’t want Christianity to be popular, or that I do not want to see more people coming to church and indeed engaging with God. Nothing would give me more joy. However, these words were a reminder to me of what it is that we need to attend to. If we believe that Christianity is true, our focus will be on living faithful Christian lives, not simply on persuading more people to come to church. I am profoundly hopeful that in living faithful Christian lives, others will be drawn into a faith of their own. But our attention should always be on whether what we are doing is faithful and true.

It is with this in mind that I have found this week’s readings to be especially meaningful. Let’s start with the Old Testament reading, that wonderful story of the young Solomon being asked by God what it is that God should give him before he takes over from his father David as ruler of the tribes of Israel. Solomon has the foresight to ask for wisdom, and it is granted. His reign is largely seen positively, with Israel prospering under his rule. Some of you will be familiar with the story that demonstrates Solomon’s wisdom. Two women each lay claim to

being the mother of the same child, and Solomon orders that the child be cut in half so that each woman can have a part. The woman who relinquishes her right to the child is clearly the true mother because she would rather see the child live than have her maternal rights acknowledged.

What I find compelling about so much of the Old Testament – the story of Solomon included – is that it is full of human attempts to live with God. There are stories of faithfulness set alongside stories of unfaithfulness. Often they are stories about the successes and failures of human beings. Always they are stories of God's faithfulness throughout. This morning's reading is in one sense the pinnacle for Solomon. We might all wish that in his circumstances we would ask for something so selfless and important. And yet, while his reign is seen favourably, he continued to be a human being. He continued to make mistakes. If you read on to the eleventh chapter of the first book of Kings, you will discover that the Bible attributes the division of the Kingdom of Israel after his death to mistakes made during his reign.

The story of Solomon is such important context for us as we seek to live according to the truth of our faith. We are guided and inspired by those who have gone before us, and Solomon is such a good example of this, as someone who sought and showed wisdom. And the message for us is likewise to seek to live faithfully. And to know, too, that we won't always get everything right. That we will make mistakes. And to trust that throughout it all, God will remain faithful.

If the Old Testament reminds us of our humanity, St. Paul's words in the reading from his letter to the Romans is really all about the faithfulness of God. They are words with which I am very familiar, since this reading often forms part of funeral services. And we can understand why. That final sentence bears repeating: "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The assurance found in St. Paul's words is perhaps the foundation of our faith. That God loves us – each and every one of us; as we are; in our successes and in our failures; and that there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from that love. For me, this is the truth that lies at the heart of our faith. Of course it can sometimes be hard to believe it. We are so used to human love which can often be conditional. And it can be so hard when we are experiencing pain and anguish to trust in a God who loves us.

The beginning of this passage can help there, too. Paul recognises our weaknesses, and suggests that God's Spirit helps us to pray when we find it hard ourselves. He speaks of the Spirit interceding with sighs too deep for words. There can be times when we simply can't formulate the right words to pray. It is at those times that God's Spirit continues to be right there, sighing deeply within us, and connecting us with God's love.

If the Old Testament reading reminds us of the need for human faithfulness, and yet recognises its limitations; and the New Testament reminds us of God's faithfulness, which has no limits; it is the Gospel reading that tells us something about *why* it is so important to hold on to both of these things.

The Gospel reading is a series of brief parables, describing faith and the Kingdom of God. The images that Jesus uses for the Kingdom of God make it utterly compelling. It is precious; something of great value. In a sense, he is saying that this should be the focus of our lives. It is the truth about Christianity of which Giles Fraser speaks – that the kingdom of God is not like the challenges and trials of our earthly life.

What Jesus says about faith should be so reassuring to us all. He says that we really don't need to have very much of it in order for big transformations to happen. This is what connects our faithfulness with the faithfulness of God. We only need to be a little bit faithful; and because God is very faithful, God will take the small things that we do; our small kindnesses; our small moments of generosity; and they will be transformed. This is the economy of the Kingdom.

It can be so easy to be disheartened by so much that we see happening in the world. And it can also be easy to feel that we are somehow failing if our churches are not full on a Sunday morning. But our readings this morning remind us of something so much more important. That we are called to faithfulness. To following Christ and his teachings, recognising that we will not always get it right. That we are called to trust in God's overwhelming faithfulness and love for us. And that it is God who will bring about great things from our small efforts. So let's attend to our own faithfulness, knowing that we can leave the rest in God's loving hands.

Amen.