**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**July 19th – The 6th Sunday after Trinity**

**“Knowing Me, Knowing You” (Romans 8:12-25)**

*Dear Friends,*

*I hope you’re all doing well.*

*I’ve been struck this weekend by the announcement of the death of American Civil Rights activist, Congressman John Lewis.*

*As we’ve been looking at St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, we have been thinking about the freedom which we enjoy in Christ Jesus, echoing Paul’s words to the Galatians: “It is for freedom that Christ set us free.” Lewis participated in the ‘Freedom Rides’ of 1961, in which he and other protestors put their lives on the line, travelling across the segregated bus networks of the southern USA,* *in order that they be forced to open up to people of colour as well as whites.*

*He continued to stand up publicly for social and racial justice right to the end, secure in his faith and in the rightness of his cause. He famously said – in words that could have come from St. Paul – “Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won.” Heavenly Father, we thank you for those men and women of courage and faith, who stand up for God’s justice, and seek to build your Kingdom here on earth.*

*Go well this week, and God bless,*



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The Lord be with you **And also with you.**

**The Collect for The 6th Sunday after Trinity
(Common Worship)**

Creator God,
you made us all in your image:
may we discern you in all that we see,
and serve you in all that we do;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**There Is a Hope that Burns within My Heart**

**Played by Deb Hubbard**

There is a hope that burns within my heart,
That gives me strength for every passing day;
A glimpse of glory now revealed in meagre part,
Yet drives all doubt away:
I stand in Christ, with sins forgiven;
And Christ in me, the hope of heaven!
My highest calling and my deepest joy,
To make His will my home.

There is a hope that lifts my weary head,
A consolation strong against despair,
That when the world has plunged me in its deepest pit,
I find the Saviour there!
Through present sufferings, future’s fear,
He whispers ‘courage’ in my ear.
For I am safe in everlasting arms,
And they will lead me home.

There is a hope that stands the test of time,
That lifts my eyes beyond the beckoning grave,
To see the matchless beauty of a day divine
When I behold His face!
When sufferings cease and sorrows die,
And every longing satisfied.
Then joy unspeakable will flood my soul,
For I am truly home.

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**Bible Reading: Romans 8:12-25 (New International Version)**

**Read by Amy Taylor**

*12 Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation – but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. 13 For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.*

*14 For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.*

***Present suffering and future glory***

*18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

*22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

**Sermon: “Knowing Me, Knowing You” – Rev. Tim Chambers**

Well, this morning feels a bit like Groundhog Day. We’re continuing our journey through St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, and - just like last week - we start our reading with a “Therefore”.

Once again, we’re part of Paul’s detailed account of the grounds we have for our faith in Jesus Christ; the freedom we can embrace by living life with the Spirit of God alive in us; and the hope we have for this life and the next, through what Christ did for us by dying on the cross, and being resurrected on the third day.

But this morning, St. Paul’s focus shifts. Over the last few weeks, we’ve been operating almost at a cosmic level. Paul has taken us on a journey through battles between sin and death on the one hand, and the Spirit and life on the other; huge themes that dwarf the reality of our everyday lives, if we perhaps think about them too hard.

And then today, suddenly, we zoom right in from this vast sweep in which the God of the Universe fights for the destiny of the Creation he has made, down, down to the precious, intimate relationship between a parent and their child.

I don’t know you all remotely well enough yet to have heard - perhaps especially from those of you who are the real patriarchs and matriarchs of our congregations, if I may call you that! – what your experience of church was like when you were growing up. However, it wouldn’t surprise me in the slightest if the impression you received as a child, of the person of God, was at best that of a distant father-figure; one who was not necessarily unkind, but who certainly expects us to live our lives according to a pretty strict code of do’s, and especially don’ts, with very definite consequences for us if we fail to meet those standards. I certainly think back to when I was growing up, only in the 1970’s, and – whilst it’s not right to project the character of my vicar at that time onto the person of God – I’m sure his rather aloof and austere persona coloured how I understood God to be.

But what St. Paul says to us in our passage this morning is entirely at odds with that characterization of the nature of God. Paul tells us, in verse 14 onwards, that because we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us, each one of is able to draw near to God to such an extent that we can use the most intimate terms imaginable for him: “Abba, Father” –the equivalent in Aramaic, not just of “Father”, but “Dear Father”, even “Daddy” or “Dad”.

This is particularly so, Paul writes, when we come to our Father in need. We cry “Abba, Father”; we cry out in our need; we cry out in times of prayer to the Lord.

A story is told of the great American President, Abraham Lincoln, during the American Civil War. Due to a family tragedy, a soldier had been given permission for a hearing with the President, to request exemption from military service. But when he arrived at the White House, he was refused entry and sent away. He went to a nearby park. And as he was sitting there, a young boy came over to him. Noticing how desperately unhappy the soldier looked, the boy sat down next to him. And before he knew it, the soldier found himself pouring out his heart to this child.

Eventually, the boy said, “Come with me”. So the dejected soldier followed him back to the White House, and they went round to the back of the building. None of the guards seemed to stop them. Even the generals and the high-ranking government officials stood to attention and let them pass through. The soldier was amazed, but just kept following the boy.

Finally, they came to the presidential office. Without knocking, they went into the West Wing. The young boy opened the door of the Oval Office, walked straight in, and there was Abraham Lincoln, standing there in conversation with the Secretary of State. And the moment they walked in, Abraham Lincoln turned to the boy and he said, “Todd, what can I do for you?” And Todd said, “Dad, this soldier needs to talk to you.” The soldier had access, through the son, right to where he needed to be, in the moment of his greatest need.

It’s like this, Paul says, for us. We too, thanks to what Jesus has done for us on the cross, and through the presence of the Holy Spirit living within us, are able to step into the presence of our Heavenly Father, and address him in the most intimate terms possible: “Abba, Father”. God loves us so much, that indeed we are adopted into his sonship or daughtership, taking our place alongside his only son, Jesus Christ, as a child of the God of the Universe. Everything that God gives to Jesus, He makes available also to each one of us.

This God, our God, is the father in Jesus’s parable of Prodigal Son, in Luke, chapter 15. Some of you may have received or given a copy of the no. 1 bestseller this last Christmas, which seemed to capture our need in these times for wisdom and kindness that is so often all-too-lacking: The Boy, The Mole, The Fox and the Horse. Its author and illustrator, Charlie Mackesy, who’s a Christian, has also painted and sculpted multiple versions of the moment at which - despite all that they have done - the Prodigal (both son and also daughter, in Mackesy’s artworks) is reunited at last with his (or her!) father, and is enveloped in his loving arms. This is the extraordinary love that our God, our “Abba, Father”, has for each one of us.

And following on from this is an implicit challenge for us. Because God doesn’t only love us this much. He loves other people this much as well. And within those other people are not only our families, and our friends, and all the others who maybe look like us and act like us. But within these ‘other people’ whom God loves, are many, many indeed who look nothing like us at all. With whom, in fact, we may find we not only apparently have very little humanly in common, but with whom we might actively disagree; whom we might find ‘difficult people’.

Some of you might feel that artist behind the controversial installation in Liverpool Cathedral, Tracey Emin, would absolutely fall into this category for you – that she’s someone with whom you’d consider yourself to have little in common. But the sentiment of the piece is absolutely true: “I felt you and I knew that you loved me.” Emin, sensing the presence of God in that place, knows that she is loved, as we, too, are all loved.

And yet, since God loves ‘others’ just as much as he loves us, we are called into places of significant challenge, even discomfort, as we realize that, as His sons and daughters, we too are called to love, just as our Heavenly Father loves.

So, first, Paul’s message for us is that our Heavenly Father loves us with an intimacy that is almost beyond our comprehension.

Second, as we recognize the extravagance of God’s love not just for us but for others, we realize that we too are called to love unconditionally, in the way He loves us.

And, third, Paul shows us God’s love not only for humanity, but for the whole of creation. It is not only to humankind, but to the whole of the universe, that God extends his arms. As we read in verse 19, “For the creation waits…”; and in verse 22, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning…” In this, we see the echo of perhaps the most famous verse of the entire Bible, John 3:16, “For God so loved the world, that whoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal live.” God so loved not just us, or even people who look like us; not just humanity; but “God so loved the world.”

The hope that we have, as Christians, of eternal life in the power of the Spirit, through Jesus Christ, is therefore not only hope for us, for people. It is the hope of salvation and redemption, restoration and re-creation, for all creation. The hope of all things ultimately being drawn together in Christ; being made new and perfect once more, in him.

We are called to live as followers of Jesus Christ, secure in this eternal hope and in the knowledge of our Saviour’s love, not only for each one of us, but for all; and for all creation.

And it is this security - turning full-circle back again to the “therefore” with which we started this morning - that enables us to live freely in the Spirit, as children of God; those whom He has called to co-labour with him, to bring about his Kingdom here on earth.

It is my prayer for each one of us, that we will so know our Abba Father’s love, that we will live every day in the fullness of that love, for his glory alone.

In Jesus’s name, Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Richard Bullock**

Our loving Lord Jesus, we thank you that amid all the uncertainties and restrictions we are encountering in our daily lives we are able to meet together through the use of innovative and technical resources to worship you; to thank you for the loving kindness you have continued to shower on us since we last met; and to acknowledge, rejoice in, and develop the certain hope we have as heirs of the salvation you bought for us on Calvary.

We pray as we learn more of your Word and sing the words of the inspired Hymns we shall glimpse some new facets of your love to each one of us and understand better what it truly means to be heirs of your salvation and free of the bondage of this world and the doubt and insecurity such bondage would bring to our lives. In particular open our hearts and minds that Tim’s words speak to us individually to open your Word to us in a special way to show us the distinctively personal relationship each of us has with you.

In your mercy,
**Hear our prayers**

We pray that you will give wisdom and strength to the leaders of our churches and communities that they may hold steadfast to the paths of open and transparent truth you came to earth to teach and show to us by your example. May their leadership and decisions show themselves to be infused with your love and judgement

In your mercy,
**Hear our prayers**

We pray for those who are now suffering from Covid-related illnesses that you will be with them with your comforting presence; be also with those seeking to overcome the causes of the virus that they may give us hope and support in the days and months that lie ahead.

Give re-assurance and knowledge of your loving presence to those who face changes in their way of life and the whether or not such changes relate to Covid. We pray that if the fear of changes brings insecurity or uncertainty into their lives they may know the sure and certain knowledge of your comforting presence.

We pray particularly for the children of Year 6 in Orston Primary School and the Archbishop Cranmer Academy who will be leaving during the coming week to change schools in the Autumn, that they may carry forward with themselves the assurance that you are always with them, keep them ever mindful of the lessons they have learned at their schools and in particular that you came to give to each one of them, life in all its fullness.

In your mercy,
**Hear our prayers**

Above all, Lord, we pray that each one of us may live so constantly close to you and in your presence, that you will be a close companion through every aspect of our lives, as we seek to identify and follow your will for each of our lives. May we be sensitive to your calling to each one of us and be prepared to follow that calling wherever it may lead us. May we manifest such clarity of vision and strength of trust in you that we will always be witnesses for you, wherever you may guide us.

We ask all this in the precious name of Him, who is our constant companion and friend on our life’s journey, our Redeemer, Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray to our God as Father…

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Our Father,
which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done,
in earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive them that trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
For thine is the Kingdom,
The power and the glory,
For ever and ever,
Amen.**

**The Collect for The 6th Sunday after Trinity
(Book of Common Prayer)**

O God, who hast prepared for them that love thee such good things as pass man's understanding: Pour into our hearts such love toward thee, that we, loving thee above all things, may obtain thy promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen.**

**Love Divine, All Loves Excelling**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Love divine, all loves excelling,
Joy of Heaven to Earth come down;
Fix in us Thy humble dwelling,
All Thy faithful mercies crown.
Jesu, Thou art all compassion,
Pure, unbounded love Thou art,
Visit us with Thy salvation,
Enter every trembling heart.

Come almighty to deliver,
Let us all Thy life receive;
Suddenly return and never,
Never more Thy temples leave.
Thee we would be always blessing,
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,
Pray, and praise Thee without ceasing,
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish then Thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in Thee.
Changed from glory into glory,
'Til in Heaven we take our place,
'Til we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise.

Charles Wesley

**A Closing Blessing**

God the Holy Trinity make you strong in faith and love,
defend you on every side,
and guide you in truth and peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you always.
**Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
**In the name of Christ, Amen.**