**Cranmer Group Sermon, Worship & Prayers**

**February 7th - The Fifth Sunday of Epiphany**

**(Colossians 1:15-20 and John 14:5-14)**

**“What Does God Look Like?”**

*Dear Friends,*

*I hope this finds you as well as we can in these ongoing tough times.*

*I’m delighted that an old friend of our parishes, Rev’d Peter Watkins, has joined us this morning to preach on our passages from Colossians and John’s Gospel. It’s great to have Peter with us, continuing his kind association with the Group from Café Church.*

*A reminder with Ash Wednesday fast approaching that, should you wish to receive any or all of the following:*

* *devotional prayers;*
* *small quantities of palm cross ash, with which to mark the sign of the cross on your forehead as a sign of penance;*
* *the CofE’s daily devotional for Lent, “God’s Story, Our Story”; and*
* *an olive wood cross to hold in your hands as you pray,*

 *please contact Jade Blaylock, our Administrator, on 07526 603766.. If you can’t get through to her, do please leave Jade a voicemail message, or email her at* *thecranmergroup@gmail.com**.*

*Do stay safe - my very best wishes and prayers are with you all,*



**Rev. Tim Chambers
Vicar, the Cranmer Group
Website: www.cranmergroup.org.uk
E-mail: vicar@cranmergroup.org.uk
Tel: 01949 850523**

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

**The Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Epiphany
(Common Worship)**

Almighty God,
By whose grace alone we are accepted
and called to your service:
strengthen us by your Holy Spirit
and make us worthy of your calling,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
**Amen.**

**Lead Us, Heavenly Father, Lead Us**

**Played by Deborah Davies**

Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but Thee;
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.

Saviour, breathe forgiveness o'er us;
All our weakness Thou dost know;
Thou didst tread this earth before us,
Thou didst feel its keenest woe;
Lone and dreary, faint and weary,
Through the desert Thou didst go.

Spirit of our God, descending,
Fill our hearts with heavenly joy,
Love with every passion blending,
Pleasure that can never cloy;
Thus provided, pardoned, guided,
Nothing can our peace destroy.

**First Reading: Colossians 1:15-20
(New International Version)**

**Read by Joan Needle**

*The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

**Gospel Reading: John 14:5-14
(New International Version)**

**Read by Phil Morris**

*Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’*

*Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.’*

*Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.’*

*Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.*

**Sermon: “What Does God Look Like?” – Rev. Peter Watkins**
Good morning! It's good to be with you this morning. One of the advantages of this lockdown is that I've started to read a little bit more; I’ve had a bit more time. And I recently thought, well, I'll start to revisit some of Charles Dickens his novels. I started with Great Expectations. And right at the beginning, Pip is in the graveyard on the marshes, and he's at his parents’ gravestones, along with his five siblings who are buried there. He's an orphan, taken in by his sister-in-law. And he says this, “As I never saw my father, or mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for it was before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, unreasonably derived from their tombstones.

We've had a reading this morning from Colossians. And the question is, what is Jesus like? What is God like? Who is Jesus? Where do we get our answers from? And it says that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God”. During lockdown, there was a little girl, and she was doing some painting and drawing on the kitchen table. Mother was busy, Father was busy (he was working from home), and they came in and they said, “What are you drawing?” And the little girl said, “I’m drawing God.” And Dad said, “Well, we don't know what God looks like. How can you draw him?” And the little girl quite reasonably said, “Well, when I’ve finished drawing him, you'll know what he looks like, won’t you?

What is God like? What does God look like? What does Jesus look like? Well, let's ask the question, “Who is Jesus?” And in this passage, it tells us various things. First, he is the image of the invisible God. We don't know what Jesus looked like. We could have a picture of a gentle-looking man, with long hair and white gown and sandals, perhaps something derived from the Turin Shroud. But this isn't what that means. It doesn't mean, “What does he look like?” When my wife, Wendy, says, “You're just like your father”, she doesn't mean, I look like him. Although apparently I do. What she means is that I display some of his traits and characteristics, some of them perhaps, good, and some of them perhaps, not so good! That's what she means by that. Jesus is the image of God, because he is God.

The Colossians had a problem. Or rather, some people were giving them a problem. And the problem was that they said that Jesus really wasn't God. Well, there are people today who say much the same. That he's a great teacher. That he's a prophet. That he's just a good man. That he's a miracle worker. But he's none of these things on its own. And some people were telling the Colossians that Jesus just seemed to be God, or a man who became God. And so Paul is writing to the church in Colosse, saying, look, Jesus is God. He's not just a teacher. He's not just a prophet. He's not just a good man. He's not just a miracle worker. He is God Himself. And in verse 15, of this passage, he unpacked some of this, because he explained some of the things that Jesus does. And, first and foremost, he says, Jesus is the Creator, and Sustainer of all life.

Another by-product - a good by-product! - of this last year is that my wife and I have walked many, many muddy footpaths. And, since last spring, we've seen the seasons perhaps in a way that we haven't quite appreciated before. We've seen the birds investigating the nesting box; having their eggs; and then their chicks; and watching the chicks fly away. Walking through woods, and seeing the different shades and the different seasons. Even the snow we had last week had its beauty, didn't it? And perhaps it helps us to say that God is the Creator when we look at the wonderful world that we live in. David Attenborough's new films are just so wonderful, and you think “Wow!” And this passage tells us that Jesus is in God as the Creator and Sustainer of all life.

But more than that - verse 20 tells us that he is the Reconciler. And it's fairly obvious to all of us that something has gone desperately wrong, not just with Creation, but with us as human beings. We are separated from God. And Jesus has come to reconcile us to God; to bring us back together.

Verse 21 tells us that he is the Peacemaker. We need a lot more peace, don't we? As many of you know, a few years ago I came from a bit further down the Fosse Way, in the Coventry diocese. And as you go down the road, you come to a sign, which says “Coventry, The City of Peace and Reconciliation”. I happen to think that that's the wrong way round. I think it should be “The City of Reconciliation and Peace”. Because without reconciliation, there can be no peace. And we are reconciled to God, by Jesus and, through him, we have peace with God.

If we go back a bit, verse 14 tells us that he is the Rescuer. Not like Rambo, charging in and grabbing us from a dire situation, but rescues us from ourselves; from the desperate plight that we find ourselves in. And he also teaches us how to live a godly life. In John 15, it reads, that we should “love one another as I have loved you”. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. And in Matthew chapter 5 in the Beatitudes, or “beautiful attitude”, he gives us some pointers of how we can do that.

So when we say someone is a godly person, what do we mean? Are we saying they're like God? So when we look at the characteristics of Jesus, we do see what God is like. Kids a few years ago used to have wristbands with “WWJD” on them. “What Would Jesus Do?” WWJD: what would Jesus do in a given situation? Do we display his love, his kindness, his compassion, his wisdom, his judgment? And if we look at Jesus, then we know what God is like.

In John chapter 14, Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered, “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I've been with you for such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say ‘Show us the Father?’ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? So when we come to understand that, and when we come to understand Christ is supreme, we have a more accurate view of him. We can better understand just how much he loves us. And therefore, how we can respond to that love.

Paul is telling us that Jesus is who we need, and all that we need. Jesus said, didn’t he, “Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you”? That doesn't mean to say that everything falls into place, and that we're free from any anxiety, or disease, or pain, or grief, or all the hassles of this world. But it is comforting to know that on the cross, Jesus took all that pain, all that grief, all that sorrow, all that anger that the world has ever known. He took it upon himself. One thing that we can't say to God is “You don't understand!” Because, in Jesus, He has shared His life with us.

Jesus is the King. And in him the Kingdom is found in all its fullness. In these difficult times, Jesus gives us hope; everlasting hope. Somebody wrote, “The human experience of weakness is God's blueprint for calling attention to the supremacy of Christ, His Son. When miserably failing people continue to belong to, believe in, and worship Jesus, then God is happy.”

Amen.

**Intercessions**

**Led by Annie Dickinson**

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all the richness of your blessings towards us. For your constant and unfailing provision, and for your complete and constant love for us. Even amidst troubles and trials, you are upholding us, protecting us, and supplying all our needs. Father, we thank and bless you for your unfailing love.

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the cross; that you have loved us so completely that you were prepared to pay the price for all our sins and shortcomings; buy us back from death; and gift to us an eternal inheritance as children of God.

Lord, we can never begin to understand the work you did on the cross, or the depth and breadth of your love for us. But perhaps we can simply accept the promises you made; to believe that you are the complete and perfect image of Our Father in Heaven; one with Him; and a guarantee of our salvation; our freedom from death and sin, brought back once and for all into an intimate and loving relationship with you and with the Father. Lord, we thank you for the work of the cross.

Lord, as we look back to your birth as a vulnerable child, and we look forward to the celebration of your death and resurrection, stir our hearts during the next few weeks to seek you each day - when we pray; as we read your Scripture; as we ponder and meditate on your words. Build in us, day by day, a strong faith, and assurance of the Good News of Jesus Christ, to know that we are beloved by the Father; indwelt by His Spirit; and assured of His peace. Lord, strengthen our faith during these weeks.

And, heavenly Father, as you build us into the image of Christ day by day, may we produce good fruit - to love our neighbours; to care for the poor and the depressed; to offer hope to the hopeless; to comfort and strengthen the ill and the bereaved; and to proclaim your saving love, and the gift of life eternal, in union with God. Lord, may we grow in faith and produce good fruit.

Loving Father, accept our prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ,

**Amen.**

 **The Lord’s Prayer**As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:
**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**
**The Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Epiphany
(The Book of Common Prayer)**

O Lord, we beseech thee to keep thy Church and household continually in thy true religion; that they who do lean only upon the hope of thy heavenly grace may evermore be defended by thy mighty power; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
**Amen**

 **Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah
Played by Deb Hubbard**

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
Pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
Hold me with thy powerful hand:
Bread of heaven, bread of heaven
Feed me till I want no more.
Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain
Whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fiery, cloudy pillar
Lead me all my journey through:
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer
Be thou still my strength and shield.
Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Death of death, and hell's destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan's side:
Songs and praises, songs and praises
I will ever give to thee.
I will ever give to thee.

**A Closing Blessing**

Christ, the Son of God,
perfect in you the image of his glory,
and gladden your hearts with the Good News of his Kingdom;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among you & remain with you, and those you love, always.
**Amen.**

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