

➤ ***O let the power fall on me***

Call to Worship

Gladden the souls of your servants, O God!

To you, O Lord, we lift up our hearts.

The Lord is good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love.

Listen to our cries, O God, and answer.

God is great and does wondrous things,

So, we gather in worship before our God.

Let us glorify God's name together as we join in prayer...

Prayer

Most wonderful God, we come before you because your name is Love – because you are abundant life – because you offer amazing grace. Be with each one of us – brush our souls with your dynamic Spirit – infiltrate our thoughts with the truth which shuns all darkness – uncap those deep springs from which true love overflows into worship.

If we have lived half-heartedly, brooding over life's setbacks and our own inadequacies, forgetting that every moment is alive with you – have mercy upon us.

If we have lived anxiously and fretfully, complaining, and making mountains out of mole hills, forgetting that there is no problem outside your care and grace – forgive us O God.

If we have lived selfishly, like misers hoarding time, compassion, and ability, forgetting that life is found when we give it away – have mercy we pray.

If we have locked ourselves into feelings of guilt and shame, fearing that if we let go and accept forgiveness, we may sin in even worse ways, forgetting that where sin abounds grace much more abounds – forgive us.

Holy God, before we even admit our sin to ourselves, your mercy is waiting for us. Before we confess to you in words, the grace of Christ has prepared a new start for us. Help us to boldly, yet humbly, accept your loving kindness and take up the challenge of each unfolding moment with new faith and vigour.

God of strength and courage, in Jesus Christ you set us free from sin and death and call us to the risk of faith and service. Give us grace to follow where your word leads. Hear our prayers, O Lord, and help us in bringing your answers to a world in need as we pray together in Jesus' name...

***Eternal Spirit,
Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom
sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love,
now and for ever. Amen***

Words of Hope

Our God moves with power and grace in our lives – forgiving and freeing us – loving us always. Thanks, and praise to our gracious God.

➤ ***God of the sparrow, God of the whale*** **307**

Scripture **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 the 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 apart from 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.

Message

Have you ever noticed how often in the Bible we are told not to be afraid? We are told not to fear by God and the prophets and angels and – in our text today – by Jesus who says: *have no fear, do not fear, and do not be afraid* – all within fewer than ten verses. It seems to me that there must be a great deal of danger in following Jesus to necessitate this constant reassurance that we need not fear!

C.S Lewis said that *believers are required to practice justice and honesty, give and take, truth seeking, keeping promises and having "guts"*. If we need guts there must be some risk involved – some danger to be faced, some pain or difficulty to be endured.

Paul's take on this from his letter to the Romans is that since we have already died, we have no need to fear. We are dead to sin – living in and by God's grace. He asserts that we have given up our lives to Christ in our baptism – died with Christ – and we know that we will be raised with Christ – experience resurrection to eternal life – therefore we can't die again and have nothing to fear.

Paul recognizes the life-destroying power of sin. He equally recognizes the saving power of Christ. The Christian journey is a constant dying process. We die to the past – to sin – to old behaviors. We rise to new possibilities and an open future. Dying involves letting go of a way of being that focuses on the self – me and mine – my life, my family, my little corner of the world and what is good for me – so that we can be open to a larger vision of reality – reborn in God's grace. No longer imprisoned by the past – journeying forth with new life.

Paul says we have already died and Jesus says we have no need to fear but in addition to telling us not to be afraid, Jesus says some scary things – some really hard-to-hear things – in today's gospel text...

"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."

"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."

Let's be honest, if these words did not have Jesus' name on them, we would consider them the ridiculous demands of a crazy person – maybe even an evil person. Weapons as an alternative to peace are not comforting – fighting within a family is distressing to us. How are we to have "guts" or remain fearless in the face of these proclamations? How is all this stuff about wielding swords and family feuds supposed to help me as a follower of Jesus?

I think what Jesus is trying to remind his followers then and now is that if you are going to go with Jesus, you have to be ready to go all the way – all in. If you are going to go with Jesus, you have to be prepared to choose the kingdom of God – the grace-filled life God offers – over your neighbors and your family and most especially over yourself.

It is not always an easy choice to make. In both Matthew's gospel and in the letter to the Romans, it is a choice that is compared to death. Matthew says, *"...those who lose their life for my sake will find it,"* and Paul writes, *"(we) were baptized into his death..."* – *"...our old self was crucified with him..."* – *"...we have been united with him in a death like his..."*

Following Jesus is not so much about finding where God is in our life – it is more about finding where we are called to be in God's life – what we are called to do in the kingdom of God – how we can participate in God's love for the world.

In a time of persecution, the author of Matthew reminds the faithful – reminds us – to follow Jesus, embracing the joys and tragedies of life in their totality. As we lose ourselves – stop being so self-absorbed – then we find eternal life. Dying to self – losing our life – takes us beyond the anxieties of the moment to rest safely in God. What dies are the habits of individualism, greed, and self-interest – what Paul calls sin.

Jesus counsels a large and fat soul – a generous and fearless and risk-embracing spirit, to replace the narrowly circumscribed soul characterized by self-interest and individual success. What dies is the sense of threat from others, who are seen as competitors and enemies. What is born is compassion and freedom.

Today's readings ask us to consider what constrains our spirits – are we too polite – too worried about what others may think – too concerned about the consequences of showing up and speaking out? What artificial limits do we place on ourselves and our community of faith? What needs to be reborn to invite divine spaciousness into our lives?

Spiritual dying – losing our life for Jesus' sake – dying with Christ – truly enables us to live with success and failure, health and sickness, initiative and dependence – in ways that are life-giving for ourselves and others. Having transcended the small self, we find our peace in the divine self – God.

Ultimately – the hard, crazy, scary things Jesus has said to us today are still hard, but maybe not so crazy or scary after all.

They are not crazy because they tell us a truth about life – a thing that everyone needs to learn in order to be truly and completely human. That thing is this, "It's not about you." It's not about you and how many people like you – it's not about you and your wonderful family – it's not about you and your successful and prosperous life – it's just not. Paradoxically, the sooner we learn this – the happier we are.

It's about God and God's love for the world – the whole creation. From the hairs on each head and the life of sparrows to the fate of the earth and the future of the human race – it's all about God and God's will – God's desire and God's way – and our place in God's promised tomorrow. We are all called to be part of the new heaven and the new earth God is actively creating now – through and with us.

The things Jesus says in this text are not really so scary because they contain within them the promise of resurrection – the promise that we are all part of the new thing God is doing.

In today's gospel Jesus invites us to *"take up the cross and follow him."* He is not very specific about what that means – he does not provide a detailed contract or a job description. Rather he invites us to give up everything and follow. We know from Paul's message that by our baptism we have already died and have nothing to fear despite the trials we may face. We know that there will be risks involved – that following Jesus will take guts and there will likely be very little glory. We know there is no other way and that our gracious loving God will care for us no matter what – *so do not be afraid – you are of more value than many sparrows.* **Amen**

➤ ***His eye is on the sparrow***

† Prayer

We give you all thanks and praise, O God, for by grace you have justified and redeemed us and become our refuge and strength. In the first of your works you created the universe and everything that moves on the earth. When you sent a flood to purge the earth of corruption, you made a covenant with your servant Noah and saved every family of living creatures.

You sent Jesus among us, to teach us how to live by your words. When he was killed by those who were filled with violence, you raised him from the dead and called everyone to put their faith in him. To all who hear your invitation and act on it you give the gift of abundant life.

Holy One we pray today for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world – may there be justice and peace on the earth.

Give us grace to courageously do your will – that our works may find favour in your sight.

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble – may they be delivered from their distress.

We pray for the life and worship of Trinity and Knox congregations and for those whose needs are known to us...

With our hearts lifted high, we present our concerns and offer thanks and praise through Jesus Christ our Lord, who encourages us always. Amen

➤ ***To show by touch and word***

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Blessing

In the days ahead may the needs of those you meet call you to faithful action and may the deeds of your life be worthy of Christ's name. The grace of the risen Lord, the love of God and the nurturing community of the Holy Spirit embrace us all. Amen

➤ ***May the God of hope go with us every day***

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