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EASTER 6C

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A short act of worship and daily devotions

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Opening Prayers

Lord,
Open my heart to receive your word.
The glory of the Lord is a light.
Open my eyes to see where you are leading me.

Help me to walk by your light.
Help me to shine in dark places.

Use me as a beacon of hope,
A speaker of kindness,
And, a practitioner of justice.

Lord, you left us your peace.
You gave it to us.

Help me draw on your peace when I feel troubled.
Help me to be calm in the midst of chaos.
Help me to mediate in conflict.
Help me to use my hands to build peace for others.

The glory of the Lord is a light.
Shine brightly on me this day, as I seek to praise you.

Amen.¹

Why not listen to this song?

O Lord the clouds are gathering - [YouTube](#)

You may now wish to pray the Lord's prayer in the language or tradition most comfortable to you.

Readings: [Acts 16:9-15](#); [John 14:23-29](#)

Reflections on the reading

'Read the question carefully. Then, before you start planning out your answer, read the question again. And do it carefully!'

Fine words of exam advice from my science teacher before we sat our GCSEs. The emphasis of his words always gave me the feeling that it was advice born out of a great deal of frustration. I can image him sitting, marking the exercise books of various students over the years and tearing his hair out as he applied his all too familiar comment in red ink, 'Answer the actual question!'

¹ Opening prayers written by Sheila Matthews

So, perhaps, rather than starting with the answer contained within our reading today we would do well to go back a verse and read the question. Carefully!

'Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "but Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not the world?"

John immediately identifies the poser of the question, making sure that his readers understand which Judas he is talking about. Or rather, which Judas he is not talking about. Elsewhere in his Gospel, John is very clear about his feelings towards Judas Iscariot and his suspicion of his every intention. We might assume then, that by distancing Judas from the asking of this question, John wants to avoid his reader attaching any negativity to the question asker or the question itself. It seems that John feels this a perfectly valid inquiry. Perhaps it's a question that he himself has been pondering and, as I'm sure we've all experienced in a meeting at some point, is relieved someone else has been brave enough to ask. I certainly share that sense of relief as it's a question that I have often pondered.

So what is the question? It's important to remember that we are dealing with Greek words which can have a variety of translations, meanings and nuances. For instance the phrase 'show yourself' is based on the translation of *emphanizein*: manifest *seauton*: of yourself. This makes it clear that the question is about much more than Jesus simply being physically present amongst his disciples. Judas is asking why Jesus is willing to reveal his divine nature to them and not to what John calls the *Kosmos*. Again *Kosmos* is a word which can be used in a variety of ways including to denote a decoration or adornment, the inhabitants of the earth or a harmonious arrangement. It depends on the context of the use of the word. However, of all the authors who put this word to use, John is by far the most prolific. In his Gospel John uses the word *Kosmos* 57 times making it his favoured term for the world or the 'whole created order.' The way John repeatedly uses this term allows us a sense of timelessness. This question, and indeed John's Gospel as a whole, can then be framed not as something important only to the earth as it stands at the time of his writing but as indispensable to all the created order that has gone before and will come after.

So now that we have established and re-enforced the importance of the question (read it carefully!) let's turn our focus to the answer.

Such an important question deserves a full and considered answer. Jesus certainly wouldn't have had to worry about another of my teacher's favourite phrases, which I often found scrawled on my work, 'Expand on this!'

Jesus understands well the context within which this question is being asked. He has spoken to disciples several times now about his coming death. The disciples are understandably scared and some of the motivation for this question is surely born out of their fear of what is yet to come. After all, for all of us, would it not be a great deal more simple for Jesus to unquestionably reveal his nature to the whole world? How often have you wished or prayed for the clouds to part and booming voice to declare to everyone that all you have believed is true? Maybe God could throw in a

big sign and some flashing lights too! Jesus doesn't immediately address that fear but rather reminds his disciples of the requirements of faith and love, and of the covenant nature of the disciples response. Jesus is also clear to remind the disciples that his message is endorsed by God the father, re-enforcing his place as Immanuel, God incarnate.

After this challenge, Jesus does offer incredible words of comfort to those who are fearful. He begins with a reminder that he doesn't expect all who follow him to remember or understand all that he asking them to do. Indeed, he doesn't expect anyone to do anything for him, relying only on their own strength. He says that to those who have journeyed with him, who have seen his miracles and shared daily in his teaching. If they weren't expected to know or remember everything, perhaps we can feel a little better about our own perceived failings (which is a good job for me because I was never very good at revising either!) We might also hear the foreshadowing of the risen Jesus's encounter with 'doubting' Thomas. 'Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'

Not only does Jesus talk about the gift of the Holy Spirit he also gives his disciples the gift of peace. It's not an invitation to peace, it is forcefully and abundantly given. 'Peace I give to you' a definitive statement of fact. It is because of this peace that the disciples can truly be released of their fear. It's not a peace that finds its place in anything of this world, that word *Kosmos* again, but is to be found only in the God who is beyond any definition of the created order.

This part of Jesus's answer is often used at funerals. It is used not because those of us charged with leading those services are looking for a simple, flippant phrase to appease or comfort those who are in mourning. Rather, these words allow us to occupy a dual position of understanding and facing the pain this world can cause, while simultaneously saying that there is one who can offer a peace that lies beyond even the worst that this world can employ against us.

Jesus knows, all too well, the pain that separation through death will cause. He knows it must be faced by his disciples at his leaving to join the father and he knows that he too will experience that pain in his moment of sacrifice. And yet he knows, and we have, the joy of experiencing the power of the resurrection. Ultimately, we can have peace through the love of God for the world he has created.

The last phrase used by Jesus speaks straight to the heart of his answer. 'I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe.' Believing is the beginning of faith. Without faith we cannot hope to claim the gifts offered by God. Faith then leads on into the transformation of our actions, our taking of our place in the covenant relationship of God and his people, sealed by the sacrifice of Christ.

The great German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, in his book 'The Cost Of Discipleship', of the differences he saw between what he termed 'Cheap Grace' and 'Costly Grace.' 'Cheap Grace', he said, 'is grace without discipleship, grace without

the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.’ That would be the simple answer, that I feel we all as Christ’s disciples, are sometimes guilty of seeking. It is, I believe the kind of grace Judas’s question is trying to find. In contrast, Bonhoeffer said of Costly Grace ‘it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: “Ye were bought at a price,” and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us... Costly Grace is the Incarnation of God.’ This is the grace of which Jesus’s answer speaks. An answer which is far from simple, is full of compassion and calls us deeper into discipleship.

I am reminded of Frodo’s conversation with Gandalf in Tolkien’s ‘Lord of the Rings’, about the mission he has been given to complete.

Frodo: ‘I wish the ring had never come to me. I wish none of this had happened.’
Gandalf: ‘So do all who live to see such times, but that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us.’

The disciples who first hear Jesus answer Judas’s question are left then with a choice in their response, as are we. We can either decide that the burden of faith and the fear of separation is too difficult, that we don’t want to engage the help of the Holy Spirit, nor embrace the Peace given to us. Or we can lean into the promises that Jesus has made to us, love him and follow his commands.²

Blessing

I shall go out with joy and set forth with peace,
Heading out into my community and the wider world,
To seek to play my part in building a Kingdom of justice and joy,
By the power of your Spirit, O God.
Amen.³

² Reflection written by Graeme Dutton

³ Additional prayers by Tim Baker

Prayers and Prayer Pointers for the Week

Monday 23rd May

- 'All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us'. Graeme Dutton quotes Gandalf from Lord of the Rings in this week's reflection. Today, use any spare time you have for prayer to pray about how you are using your time.
- Are you listening for God's call on your life? Are you following the promptings of the Holy Spirit? Are you doing 'what you are meant to be doing'?
- Are there rhythms and practices you could introduce to your life to help you be more attentive to the mysterious Spirit of God and what She might be saying to you today?
- Pray into those questions today, and throughout this week. And leave space for stillness, too.

Tuesday 24th May

- Find a comfortable position to sit or lie down in. Take a deep breath in through your nose, and let it out through your mouth. When you are ready, say out loud or in your head: 'Lord, I come into your presence'.
- Breathe in...breathe out. 'I come just as I am'
- Repeat the breathing, and the mantra, for as long as you can. And hold the space of holiness.

Wednesday 25th May

- This day, your prayers could be for our planet and the world we live in. This day, may you say sorry for all the ways you hurt and pollute the Earth.
- This day, you could use your times of prayer to reconnect with nature and to commit again to climate action, climate campaigning and climate justice.
- For resources and ideas to support your prayers - visit allwecan.org.uk/ climate or the Joint Public Issues website.

Thursday 26th May

- Today, use your prayer time to check in on where your journey with God is going. Perhaps the easiest way to do that is to see where you've been. It might be helpful to draw out a timeline from your life and reflect on some of the 'big events' and some of the 'little miracles'.
- Make some time to think about where you'd like to grow more in your knowledge and love of God. About how you could enrich your discipleship.
- Come Lord Jesus, show me more of your plans for me. Show me the next steps I must take. Amen.

Friday 27th May

- In this moment, you are here, O God. In this moment, I am here. You made all time and space, and yet this moment is the only one that really matters. Help me to be present. Show me how to be here. Amen.

Saturday 28th May

- Good leadership is hard to define, isn't it?
And it's even harder to do.
- We know many of our leaders - national, local, community and church leaders, have made mistakes. Perhaps many of them have struggled to adapt to the changing world and the impact of life in a pandemic.
- Today, take a moment to name and pray for your leaders. Those in the news, and those more local to you.
Pray for courage, for grace, for wisdom.

Amen.