

## Sermon 22 August 2021 Sarah Thomas

### Ephesians 6:10-20 and John 6:56-69

How many of you listened to the words of the prayer that Kandis has just prayed before the readings? We call it 'the collect' and it's different every week. I confess that, whilst I do listen to it, it usually gets swallowed up in the readings that follow it, and I lose touch with it.

Today, the twelfth Sunday after Trinity, the collect says that God is always ready to **hear** more than we are to pray; to **give** more than we either desire or deserve and it asks for us to be given an abundance of God's mercy. It says that God forgives us those things of which our conscience is afraid and gives us good things which we are not worthy to ask for and does so through the merits and mediation of Jesus.

I thought the collect was worth repeating. For I think it links into the painting that is printed onto the weekly sheet

Now, I didn't plan to show the painting because of the collect.

Last Sunday as I listened to Kandis preach on Mary and her response to the Angel Gabriel, and how it contrasted with that of Zechariah; something popped into my head. I felt clearly directed to use this painting this week, even though it doesn't illustrate the readings at all. I only made the connection with the collect yesterday afternoon. And once I had made that connection, then the link between the painting and the gospel reading became more clear.

Hopefully the painting is now on the screen as well.

The painting is entitled: Given for You.

Set against a background of shades of blue and scattered stars, in the centre is a gold chalice. The chalice is being held out to us. The hands holding the chalice, emerge from the background and despite their vibrant colouring of yellow, pinks and purples, seem both gentle and firm.

These hands are offering us a chalice that contains emblems of the life that Jesus offers us. We can see vine leaves, grapes, ears of corn, references to Jesus' sayings – I am the Bread of Life, I am the Vine.

If we look a bit more closely we can see some thorns, references to Jesus' arrest, the point in his life when he was completely powerless and mocked with a crown of thorns.

There is also a cross, and a splash of red coming over the rim of the chalice, and three nails, a reference to Jesus' death.

And running through the middle, above, around and below we can see what looks like a ribbon of pale blue – or is it a river – the water of life? And there are three drops of water - maybe a reference to baptism?

And above it we can see a dove – a reference to the Holy Spirit.

And maybe the grapes, the ears of corn refer to the bread and wine, and the cross and the splash of red, to the body and blood of Jesus.

You may see yet more things.

This painting feels to me as if it is full of movement, full of life. Not just of the chalice being offered to us, but also in the way the items **in** the chalice are bursting out, pointing in all directions, and the way the pale blue ribbon weaves its way across the surface.

There is an abundance in what is being offered. The collect speaks of an abundance of mercy being poured down upon us, forgiving us those things of which our conscience is afraid. And that mercy comes to us through the merits and mediation of Jesus.

Maybe the blue ribbon depicts that outpouring of mercy.

Mark spoke a few weeks ago of the bitter cup that Jesus had to swallow, knowing that the things he had been doing and speaking of would lead him into confrontation with both the religious authorities and the Roman rulers. That confrontation would result in his arrest, being tortured and put to death.

In our gospel reading Jesus uses the image of eating his flesh and drinking his blood. It comes at the end of a chapter that starts with the feeding of the five thousand using five barley loaves and two fishes and moves on to a discussion about bread, the manna eaten by the Israelites in the wilderness and Jesus' statement that he is the bread of life.

At the supper before his arrest, he breaks bread and offers a cup of wine to his disciples. He says that the bread is his body and the wine his blood. This was the beginning of what has become our communion service. These words of eating his body and drinking his blood are outrageous, the food laws that he and his companions kept prohibited eating or drinking the blood of animals. We too, if we stop to think about it, may be repelled by the notion. Maybe what Jesus wants from us is to remember all that he taught and that eating bread and drinking wine in a ceremonial way, will be a sign that we acknowledge the merits of Jesus.

The painting merges the bread and the wine, the body and the blood and offers it to us in a chalice.

But you know even if we accept the offer, we will find that at times, we will struggle. We will find that, like Jesus, we will be powerless. We will do what we think is the best thing, and then find it was not. We will grieve. We will long for forgiveness.

The reading from Ephesians recognises that in those times we can simply stand in the strength of the power of the Lord. It goes on to tell us about peace, salvation, truth and righteousness. But there will be times when all we can do is stand, when we can't fight or go forwards.

And I think the collect for today recognises that, reminding us that through the merits and mediation of Jesus, we can be forgiven those things of which our conscience is afraid and allow ourselves to receive the abundance of God's mercy.

So while this painting, so brightly coloured, looks at first glance to be simply a jolly thing, I think it does more, it conveys the hope of healing, the hope of forgiveness and the hope that we may receive and give love.

And when you receive communion today, I would invite you to hold the wafer in your hand and to look at it before eating it, and to see there the God who creates, sustains and saves the world. To see food for the hungry, strength for the weak and power for the powerless. To see the abundance of mercy, in the bread, the body of Christ.

I'd like to finish with another prayer. It is next to the painting on the weekly sheet:

Come, Lord, come to us.

Enter our darkness with your light,

Fill our emptiness with your presence,

Come refresh, restore, renew us.

In our sadness, come as joy,

In our troubles, come as peace,

In our fearfulness, come as hope,

In our darkness, come as light,

In our frailty, come as strength,

In our loneliness come as love.

Come refresh, restore, renew us.

Amen