

Sibyls Evening Service 10th December 2020

A Liturgy of Friendship: (Crophorne liturgy 2)

Leader:

Introduction to *Doing December Differently: an alternative Christmas Handbook* ed. Nicolas Slee & Rosie Miles (Wild Goose 2006) & Crophorne liturgy 2

Background:

Reader A:

‘For many of us who gathered at Crophorne for Christmas, friends constitute our primary community. We were mostly single and/or lesbian and gay, for whom conventional nuclear family ties were sometimes problematic and for whom friends are particularly important in offering the support and community which we may not receive from partners, children or family.’

Reader B:

‘Whilst friendship has an ongoing significance for us all year round it takes on a particular resonance at Christmas, when we are in touch with many people who have been important to us at some stage in our lives via cards, letters and emails. We were also friends together during our residential week. Some of us knew several others in the group; others knew only one or two. There were many overlapping friendship ties which constituted the group before we began and others were created as the week progressed. This liturgy, then, was created out of the living friendship of members of the gathered group, and offered a space to explore an aspect of our lives which is of deep and central importance.’

Leader:

This liturgy of friendship focuses on the story of Mary going to visit her cousin Elizabeth after her encounter with the angel (the Visitation). The meeting between the two women is seen as a paradigm of friendship. Around this central story we reflected on our own experiences of friendship and named the friends who are important to us.

The liturgy has five sections, after a brief introduction setting the theme: Mary’s journey to Elizabeth; the meeting between the two women; a more general reflection on friendship; a naming and affirming of friends [including Mother Mary]; a closing meditation on interdependence.

Gathering Song: ‘The angel Gabriel from heaven came’

Introduction:

Leader:

We have gathered together tonight from many different settings and concerns. We have greeted (or will greet) one another and some of us will make new friends tonight. In this liturgy we take time to journey towards a deeper understanding of friendship and a celebration of its significance in our lives.

Mary's journey

Reader A:

'Many women in biblical stories appear in domestic settings. Sarah is in her tent, baking cakes. Rachel is drawing water at the well. Bathsheba is taking a bath. Martha is fussing around in the kitchen. The woman who lost a coin is sweeping the house. But with Mary, there is no evidence of any domestic work on her part. We never find her cooking, cleaning, washing up. The evidence offered us is her love of adventure. What we find her doing, over and over, is traveling, in journeys that involve risks and an element of danger.' Nancy Rockwell, 'No more lying about Mary' <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/biteintheapple/no-more-lying-about-mary>

Reader B:

'In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country ...'
Mary journeys alone to her cousin Elizabeth.
Mary journeys with a mysterious, terrifying secret in her soul.
How does Mary journey? In fear? In terror? In awe? In confusion?

Reader A:

Our journeys may be

- lonely and shared;
- fearful and joyful;
- confusing and comforting;

Leader:

We take a short time now, two or three minutes, to journey on our own – we can step away from the screen if we want do, or put up our screen saver to do this: I'll play some music when it's time to return. In this short space of time we can reflect on our own life journey, and where we are this year in the Advent/Christmas journey. After that we regather to greet one another.

Time for reflection on where we are on our journey.

Music: 'Where are you bound, Mary'

Mary & Elizabeth meet

Leader:

Were we in the same space, we would be able to greet one another, and then join hands for a simple dance. Let's take a moment to look at the screen, and to greet with a hand our friends or those who we don't yet know. We can't physically dance together tonight, but we can dance where we are – as John the Baptist danced in Elizabeth's womb when Jesus was nearby in Mary's womb. Our hearts and spirits can dance for joy for Christ is near us and loves us.

Music for dancing: 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day'

A Reflection on friendship

Leader:

Mary and Elizabeth can offer us an image of mutual, supportive friendship. They are two women who, in a time of great crisis and transition, supported each other, welcomed each other, understood each other. They reached out across age and difference to connect in loving embrace. They recognised within each other the embryonic new life which had not yet come to term, but was incipient within them. In a time of uncertainty and unknowing they were present to and for each other.

Images of the Visitation are shared, and people are invited to comment

‘Friends’ by Nicola Slee:

Reader B:

Friends are those with whom we can be ourselves, let our hair down, weep, laugh, rage and lament without fear of rejection. We can try out new ideas on them, say what we really believe, dare to think aloud. Friends are those who accept us as we are, yet also recognise what we can be and, by their belief in us, help to bring new life to birth in us. The image of the two pregnant women meeting and celebrating the unborn life in each other can be a powerful symbol to us all, men and women, of this work of friendship which celebrates and supports new life into being in the other.

Reader A:

Friends come in many different shapes and sizes. As in the case of Mary and Elizabeth, there may be a large age gap. Friendship can also extend across differences of race, culture, gender, class and lifestyle. Perhaps more than any other human bond, friendship is a free and inclusive love. We do not choose our families, we are born into them. We may choose our partners, yet often there is a sense of compulsion about falling in love that makes us feel we do not choose! Our friends are those we love simply because of who they are. And, unlike romantic or sexual partnerships, friendship can be a truly inclusive bond. In principle, there is no limit to the number of friends we can have, though in practice we may have limited energy and time to commit. Though friends can undergo conflict, misunderstanding and change, friendships which survive these challenges are cemented into strong and lasting bonds.

Friendship by Elizabeth Jennings

Reader B:

Such love I cannot analyse;
It does not rest in lips or eyes,
Neither in kisses nor caress.
Partly, I know, it's gentleness

And understanding in one word
Or in brief letters. It's preserved

By trust and by respect and awe.
These are the words I'm feeling for.

Two people, yes, two lasting friends.
The giving comes, the taking ends.
There is no measure for such things.
For this all Nature slows and sings.

A naming and celebrating of our friends

Leader: We give thanks for Mary's intimacy with Elizabeth;
the intimacy of being recognised and known;
the intimacy of being held and embraced;
the intimacy of being encouraged and affirmed.

We take time to give thanks for the intimacy we experience in
friendship.

We are invited to name people, quietly in our hearts, or out loud.

The friendship of Mother Mary

Music: Holy Mary, by God's decree

Closing Affirmation

Invited in turn by the leader, a different individual says each stanza.

I do not stand alone
but with others to support me
I will stand my ground.

I do not see the way
But with others to walk it with me
I can make a path.

I do not possess the truth
but with others to witness to what they know
I will be able to discern what is right.

I cannot master all skills
but with others who will lend their accomplishments
I can do enough.

I cannot carry every burden
but with others to share it
I may bear my own load.

I cannot meet all needs
but with others to nourish and replenish me
I will be able to give enough.

I do not have limitless free choice
but with others to consult
I will make my own choices gladly.

I will not always be consistent
but with others to laugh at me
I will regain my equanimity.

I am not invincible
but with others to reach out a hand
I may learn from my mistakes and start again.

I cannot be perfect
but with others to make up the shortfall of my imperfections
I can be content to be good enough.

Nicola Slee

Poem: Friendship by Elizabeth Jennings read by Alison Steadman:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XRCOvRj5So>

Final song: 'With a little help from my friends' The Beatles.

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