

Pershore Abbey Iona Service - 5pm on Sunday 26th May 2024

Joy of Diversity – My Story

Welcome:

Gathering Song: 🎵 (in Common Ground 4, verses 1,2 and 5)

Introduction: Is 'being inclusive' about welcoming those other than ourselves, into our space? Is it about seeing ourselves and others as God's children – created unique and utterly loved? Are we prepared to listen with our hearts open, to the stories of others, and risk being changed?

Opening Responses:

Leader: The world belongs to God,

All: **the earth and all its people.**

Leader: How good it is, how wonderful

All: **to live together in unity.**

Leader: Love and faith come together;

All: **justice and peace join hands.**

Leader: If Christ's disciples keep silent,

All: **these stones would shout aloud.**

Leader: Open our lips, O God,

All: **and our mouths shall proclaim your praise. Amen**

Prayer:

Reader: All are welcome here in this sacred space, embraced by love and grace.
No matter who you are, or where you've been, you belong, you're seen.
Trans, queer, and allies dear, all identities cherished here.
Broken hearts find solace near; in God's love, there's no fear.
We live with light within, guided by love, free from sin.
For in God's heart we're all kin,
forever welcomed, let us begin.

Song: 🎵 (from 'One Is The Body' 74)

- 1. O God, you made us all unique; one pattern for each life you found.
Where falling short of your design,
you see us, free us, till by love we're bound.**
- 2. O Christ, you summon into life, our timid faith, our hidden skill.
Where trust or talent are untried,
there tend us. Send us, grace to know your will.**

3. O Holy Spirit, breath of life, our noblest visions you inspire.

**Where hearts are cold or minds are dull,
there shake us. Make us, flames of heaven's fire.**

4. To God, in whom we live and move, we vow our love and loyalty;

**and here ascribe all honour, power,
and glory, glory, now and endlessly.**

Bible Reading:

Reader: Listen to the word of God. (*Acts 8 v32 - 39*)

Philip and the Ethiopian

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means 'queen of the Ethiopians'). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.'

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked.

³¹ 'How can I,' he said, 'unless someone explains it to me?' So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

'He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.'

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, 'Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?' ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptised?' ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptised him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

For the word of God in scripture, for the word of God among us, for the word of
God within us,

All: Thanks be to God.

Sharing our Stories

Marie shares her story

Reflections/Questions:

What is stirring in you at this time?

What are you wondering about? - are there points of clarification?

What actions might you take in light of what has been shared today?

What is next?

Affirmation:

Everyone is invited to say together:

All: We affirm the Divine presence, embracing a God of power and compassion. In our belief, we honour the Creator, creating beauty beyond our wildest dreams.

*God's might dismantles oppression, breaking down barriers and walls,
In the tenderness of the Divine's care, every soul finds refuge here.*

We affirm Jesus, born in obscurity in a world under occupation, a vulnerable soul, familiar with hunger, thirst, persecution, and the weight of human grief.

*He grasped the potency of love, confronted the forces of darkness,
spoke truth with courage and clarity, forgave even those who sought his harm.*

In living, dying, and rising again,

He revealed a love powerful enough to redeem the world.

*We affirm the Holy Spirit, unveiling scriptures, opening our minds,
and casting light upon the shadows of the earth,*

and helping us to embrace the diversity of God's creation. Amen

Prayers:

Leader: Forgiving God, we confess to turning away from God

All: in the ways we wound our lives, the lives of others and the life of the world.

Leader: We bring to you, Lord, stories of conflict, abuse and injustice, whether personal, in our communities or globally.

PAUSE

Leader: God, breathe new life.

All: God, breathe new life.

Leader: Loving God, we are made in your image, befriended by Christ, empowered by the Spirit.

All: We feel your goodness at the heart of humanity, planted more deeply than all that is wrong.

Leader: We bring to you, Lord, stories of questioning, self-discovery, and empowerment.

PAUSE

Leader: God, breathe new life.

All: **God, breathe new life.**

Leader: Creator God, we celebrate the miracle and diversity of life,

All: **your unfolding purposes for ever at work in ourselves and the world.**

Leader: We bring to you, Lord, ourselves, and our communities, to be open to listening, change and loving acceptance.

PAUSE

Leader: God, breathe new life.

All: **God, breathe new life. Amen**

Song: 🎵 *(Well Begun in Common Ground 140 v 1, 3, 4 and 5)*

Closing responses:

Leader: Loving Creator, you dwell within every soul, intimately connected,

All: **Through our unique identities, we embody your divine presence.**

Leader: Lead us, O Divine Love, beyond the confines of traditional holiness,

All: **Into the realm where diversity flourishes,
where love knows no boundaries and acceptance abounds.**

Leader: Guide us to places where society's rigid norms yield to understanding,

All: **and where the richness of our identities is celebrated.**

Leader: In the midst of societal discord and at the crossroads of acceptance,

All: **may we be beacons of your precious love.**

Leader: Empower us to challenge prejudice and embrace the beautiful tapestry of humanity.

All: **We seek this transformation for the sake of your love
and the inherent worth of every soul. Amen.**

The Grace: *Please join in The Grace in any version that you are comfortable with.*

ALL: **May the grace of Jesus Christ, the love of God
and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us all,
this night and always. Amen**