

Reading: Matthew 11:25-27

“And no one knows the Father except the Son”

The true story is told of a soldier in the civil war in America who had fallen on hard times. A well to do gentleman was visiting the hospital and the soldier started complaining about the way he had been treated, how he felt abandoned, and how he wished he could tell the President just how he felt about the way he had been tossed to one side after serving the army. Come with me the man said and I will get you the opportunity you seek. Slightly bemused the soldier followed the unknown man. First they arrived at the gates of the White House, and the soldier was surprised to find no one challenged the man. Then they arrived at the door of the White House. The soldiers on guard just gave them a nod and let them in. Then, they went through the rooms unchallenged by any servants or any of the many government officials that sat and talked and moved about the house. Finally, the man led the soldier all the way into a War Cabinet meeting, right in the middle of the deliberations of the cabinet. Still, no one questioned their right to be there. Finally the man walked right up to Abraham Lincoln himself and then he said, “Dad, I have brought someone to see you.” The stranger was the famous president's son and he had total and unbridled access to his father.

Today in Matthew's Gospel Jesus is thanking God his Father for the relationship of total access and trust he has. Much as in the high priestly prayer of John's Gospel, Matthew is outlining the inner workings of the Trinity. We call the glue that holds the Trinity together by a special theological name, that name is Love. In fact, we see in the love that the members of the Trinity have for each other, what perfect love looks like. The love that they have Father, Son and Holy Spirit is so strong and so dynamic that the universe and life itself has its source in the Trinity. Through Jesus, the Son, we have what John Lincoln had with the president: we have unbridled access to the Father, to God himself. Christian prayers are traditionally made in the name of, or through, Jesus Christ. What a massive privilege to know that through Jesus we can come right to the heart of God the Father and that nothing stands in our way.

Often times, the religions of the ancients put barriers up between God and us. The Jews called God by all sorts of distant names like the Architect of the Universe. For them, to say God's name or to see God was to surely die. But Jesus brought about a massive revolution. No longer did we need a temple or a complex law or a hereditary priesthood. Jesus called God 'abba' or 'daddy'. He was on intimate speaking terms with God and he taught us to say, “Our Father in heaven”. I cannot overemphasise how big this change was, or how

important it is. When we pray, at any time of the day or night, at any place, we can come to the throne of God.

But something even more radical is at work here. It is something that the prophets foresaw but others could only reach out to grasp. Jesus told stories of a loving God who reaches out to us. In the story of The Prodigal Son, the son as done everything possible to turn his back on the father, but, while he is still a long way off, the father runs to gather him in his arms. This is our God, who runs to meet us when we are still far off: far off from being holy, far off from being perfect, far off from being the sort of people God has made us to be. (In fact, as they say in Thomas the Tank Engine, far off from being a really useful engine.) In spite of all our weakness and self-servingness, God runs to meet us. Patriarchal fathers of the Middle East didn't run anywhere. They sat and others came to them, but our God runs.

As if this wasn't enough, Jesus went further. He spoke of a God, whose love for us is so great we can approach him at any time. He comes lovingly to greet us, but more even than this - his kingdom of love can be found within us. It is as if our hearts can become the temple of the living God. When we pray, we are no longer reaching out to an unseen God that is far away in the clouds but we are reaching out to One who comes and makes a home in our hearts.

Are we worthy of this visitation? I can't speak for you but I'm far from worthy. But come God does. He comes into our lives, into our community and into the very core of our being. Joy Cowley, the New Zealand poet, puts this mystery better than I can:

*Beautiful Presence, how can we name You?
Words are too small for the One who is all.
How can we speak of Your gentleness in us,
the warmth of our hearts in response to Your call?*

*Beautiful Presence, ocean of love,
strong as forever, soft as a dove.
Words often fail us but this we know true,
You live within us as we live in You.*

*There have been times of spiritual blindness,
when error and pain have distorted our sight.
Beautiful Presence, You were there with us
to show us how darkness can turn into light.*

*Beautiful Presence, ocean of love,
strong as forever, soft as a dove.*

*Words often fail us but this we know true,
You live within us as we live in You.*

*Nothing that happens to us will be wasted,
all of our living is grounded in grace.
Gently You take down the walls of division,
leading us on to a larger place.*

*Beautiful Presence, ocean of love,
strong as forever, soft as a dove.
Words often fail us but this we know true,
You live within us as we live in You.¹*

And Jesus concluded..."I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants; for such was your gracious will."

¹ Joy Cowley in 'Come and See', Pleroma Press, 2008