

5th Sunday of Easter - 10th May 2020

A short act of worship for use in people's homes, provided by Mrs Rosie Greenhalgh.

Call to worship

Alleluia! Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Love the Lord, all his faithful people!

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord. *(Psalm 31: 23a + 24)*

Hymn - Singing the Faith 418, omitting verse 5 [Join in here](#)

1. We have a gospel to proclaim,
good news for all throughout the earth;
the gospel of a Saviour's name:
we sing his glory, tell his worth.
2. Tell of his birth at Bethlehem -
not in a royal house or hall
but in a stable dark and dim,
the Word made flesh, a light for all.
3. Tell of his death at Calvary:
hated by those He came to save,
in lonely suffering on the cross,
for all he loved his life he gave.
4. Tell of that glorious Easter morn:
empty the tomb, for he was free.
He broke the power of death and hell
that we might share his victory.
6. Now we rejoice to name him King:
Jesus is Lord of all the earth.
This gospel-message we proclaim:
we sing His glory, tell his worth.

Edward Joseph Burns (b 1938) ¹

Prayer of Adoration *partly based on Psalm 31*

Almighty God, I come to praise you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I thank you for the glorious gospel of Christ, which lights up the darkness of these days.

I will be glad and rejoice in your love, for you see my affliction and know the anguish of my soul.

I rejoice that you are my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me; my times are in your hands.

I praise you for your righteousness, faithfulness, mercy and unfailing love.

Father, I praise you for the power which raised Jesus from the dead,
making all things new in him and giving your people the hope of eternal life.
Lord Jesus Christ, I rejoice today that you overcame the power of sin and death
and opened the kingdom of heaven to all who trust in you.
Holy Spirit, I praise you for the way you transform my life and make me more like Christ.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, I praise you this morning as I rejoice in the risen Jesus,
Lord of all the earth and King of the Universe.
Into your hands I commit my spirit. Let your face shine on your servant. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

The disciples are sharing the Last Supper with Jesus. Judas Iscariot has left and Jesus tells them: "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come." (John 13 v 33)

Reading John 14: 1-14 [Listen here - end at 2:09](#)

14 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.'

⁵ Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?'

⁶ Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.'

⁸ Philip said, 'Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'

⁹ Jesus answered: 'Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?''

¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.

¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

Reflection

'Do not let your hearts be troubled.' Jesus is about to leave his friends, and they are clearly concerned about it; they don't understand what he is trying to tell them. Jesus knows why he is about to lay down his life – he sees the big picture, the glory and salvation in his death and resurrection - but the disciples are full of questions. 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.' Peace of mind is all about trusting in God.

As we have lived through this time of coronavirus, perhaps we too have felt disturbed, unable to understand why these unprecedented times have come upon us. Yet we know that God is with us in this crisis, bringing good. There are signs of hope because of lockdown: cleaner air; less damage to the environment; greater dignity for the bin men and sewage workers, the shelf-stackers and cleaners, the lorry drivers and NHS auxiliaries, as the country realises our dependence on them; the sense of the whole world pulling together against the common enemy of Covid-19. So 'Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.' 'Do not let your hearts be troubled.' Our God is faithful and we can rely on him; he is our rock and our fortress.

We are used to hearing Jesus' words at the beginning of this reading at funerals, and so we tend to associate them only with what happens to us after death. It is natural for us to fear death, and to fear the pain it brings to those left behind, especially in this crisis when so many have been unable to say Goodbye to loved ones. It is very comforting to know that when we die there is a place prepared for us in God's house and that we shall be with Jesus. But these words of Jesus are not only about what happens after death; they are a promise to the disciples that they will be united with Christ in this life too, that they will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Just as the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son, so each believer will live in Christ, and Christ in them. Just as the Father has been working through Jesus during his ministry, so the work of God will be done through Christ's followers; they will do even greater works than Jesus did on earth. When Jesus says: 'I will come back and take you to be with me', he is telling his friends that they will not be abandoned, and describing how their relationship with God will be stronger than ever as they serve Christ on earth after his death and resurrection.

Last week Peter Bennett spoke of Jesus the Good Shepherd, and Jesus the Gate of the sheepfold; our only hope of heaven. In today's reading, Jesus tells us: 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' Jesus himself is the Way his followers must travel to find the Truth which will set them free and to gain the abundant Life offered in Christ. He has left us a wonderful example to follow.

Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus becomes the link between heaven and earth, the ladder set up from earth to heaven which he promised Nathaniel would see. *John 1 v 51* Heaven may be the place to which we go when we die, but it is surely also the place we look to see on earth when we pray: Thy kingdom come. Eternal life begins in the here and now.

And Jesus encourages his followers to come to him in prayer. He promises: *I will do whatever you ask in my name*. These are difficult words if you feel that your prayers have sometimes gone unanswered, particularly in the last few weeks. They must have been difficult words for the first disciples when persecution came and Christian leaders like Stephen and James the son of Zebedee lost their lives. Yet the New Testament bears witness to the miracles done by Peter, John and Paul in the name of Jesus; and the way the gospel spread across the Roman Empire. And prayers are still answered today as people work with God to see his kingdom come.

Jesus made this promise as he was about to die for us; he knew that even death cannot separate us from God. We may feel isolated today, but we are not alone, for Jesus is with us and he wants us to bring our concerns and requests to him. When we enter our Father's house in prayer, we come to God through the one who is the way, the truth and the life. Let's come to him now as we confess our sins.

Prayer of Confession

Forgive me, loving Lord, that I have often strayed from your Way.
Forgive me for the times I have not allowed my life to be shaped by your Truth.
Forgive me for denying your Life in myself and others, by the way I have lived.
In the name of Jesus, the Way and the Truth and the Life, I pray. Amen.

Hymn - Songs of Fellowship 1158 [Join in here](#)

1. All my days I will sing this song of gladness,
Give my praise to the Fountain of delights;
For in my helplessness You heard my cry,
And waves of mercy poured down on my life.
2. I will trust in the cross of my Redeemer,
I will sing of the blood that never fails;
Of sins forgiven, of conscience cleansed,
Of death defeated and life without end.

*Beautiful Saviour, Wonderful Counsellor,
Clothed in majesty, Lord of history,
You're the Way, the Truth, the Life.
Star of the Morning, glorious in holiness,
You're the Risen One, heaven's Champion
And You reign, You reign over all.*

3. I long to be where the praise is never-ending,
Yearn to dwell where the glory never fades;
Where countless worshippers will share one song,
And cries of 'worthy' will honour the Lamb!
Beautiful Saviour...

Stuart Townend (b 1963) ²

Christian Aid Week

Today marks the beginning of Christian Aid Week. One of Christian Aid's best known slogans is: *We believe in life before death.* Life which the kingdom of heaven brings; that abundant life which Jesus promised to those who believe in him. Just as the disciples were full of questions at the Last Supper, our response to coronavirus sets up questions in our own minds, such as:

- Why do we accept the deaths every day of 7,500 children under 5 across the world, from diseases which we know how to prevent and treat?
- Why do we accept the lack of basic sanitation and water for so many in our world?
- Is there a new way we can pull together to ensure abundant life for everyone on earth?

Charities like Christian Aid seek to continue Christ's work and see the kingdom of heaven come in this life. Poor communities are hit hardest by coronavirus. It's affecting families living in overcrowded refugee camps, and many vulnerable people who have no water to clean their hands. With our support, Christian Aid can limit the impact of the virus, with life-saving soap and water. Please don't forget Christian Aid this year, when donations are more important than ever, but the usual ways of raising money are closed to charities. You can donate here [Christian Aid Donations](#) or via your local Christian Aid Committee. There are more details in this week's newsletter.

Prayer of Thanksgiving & Intercession

Lord, I come to pray for friends and neighbours under lockdown....

Thank you for the signs of hope that restrictions may be able to be eased before long.

I pray for all suffering from coronavirus, at home and in hospital...

Thank you for the community spirit of love shown by so many who care for the sick and who strive to ensure there is food on our tables, post on our mat and power in our homes.

I pray your blessing on all who are bereaved...

Thank you for the assurance that in our Father's house are many rooms.

Be with the charity workers in poor countries across the world, who strive to help those with so little. I pray particularly today for the work of Christian Aid at the beginning of Christian Aid Week, asking that you will inspire people to freely give so that others may freely live.

God of heaven and earth, in these times of isolation when I am apart from loved ones, distant from friends and away from neighbours, I thank you that there is nothing in all of creation, not even coronavirus, that is able to separate me from your love. Amen.

Hymn - Singing the Faith 639 [Join in here](#)

1. Through the love of God our Saviour
all will be well.
Free and changeless is His favour;
all, all is well.
Precious is the blood that healed us,
perfect is the grace that sealed us,
strong the hand stretched forth to shield us;
all must be well.

2. Though we pass through tribulation,
all will be well.
Christ has purchased full salvation,
all, all is well.
Happy still in God confiding,
fruitful, if in Christ abiding,
holy, through the Spirit's guiding;
all must be well.

3. We expect a bright tomorrow;
all will be well.
Faith can sing through days of sorrow
all, all is well.
On our Father's love relying,
Jesus every need supplying,
then in living or in dying,
all must be well.

Mary Peters (1813-1856)

Blessing

Loving and eternal God, through the resurrection of your Son, help us to face the future with courage and assurance, knowing that nothing in life or death can ever part us from your love for us in Jesus Christ our Saviour. And the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with us always. Amen.

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