



Service for Private or Personal Use – Sunday 10th May

Read Psalm 31 verses 1-5 and 15, 16. You will recognize verse 5 as one of the “Words from the Cross” that we spent time with on Good Friday.

Verse 16 can be our prayer as we begin today’s worship, with its clear echo of an older blessing – one that we use at every baptism (please remember, there’s no such thing as a ‘Christening’!): “The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord look upon you with kindness, and give you peace (*Shalom*)” (Numbers 6 verses 24-26). And in these difficult times let us say with the writer of this Psalm, “**My** times are in **your** hands.” It’s the best place to leave them.

Hymn *Jesus is Lord!* (H&P 260, StF353, MP 367) or a favourite hymn of praise

Prayer

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;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.
Amen.

Heavenly Father, we make it our deliberate choice in this moment to turn to you. We often hear the words, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Let that stillness descend upon us, laying aside our anxieties and responsibilities. The God who spoke worlds into being, who brought order out of chaos, who raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, is the same God who is with us now, who whispers to us, “I am God.” In that holy presence, we will be still.

Into your hand we commit ourselves, day by day. Our times are in your hands, because you have a plan and a purpose for us. Forgive us the distrust that questions whether you care about us. Forgive us the distrust that asks if our life is significant. Forgive us if we have thought of ourselves as only background scenery to a bigger drama.

In the gift of your Son to be our Saviour we see the great worth you have set upon every life. In his death we find the forgiveness for which we pray. In his resurrection we find the renewal of our own life, with a call to service and a power to serve.

May your grace prove sufficient for us. May your love be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. May our lives bear fruit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. And in this way may Christ’s likeness be formed in us, and his life shown to the world.

We ask this in his name, and for your glory.

Amen.

Reading 1st Peter chapter 2 verses 2 to 10

In these verses Peter reminds Christian readers to feast upon the “pure spiritual milk” with the same eagerness as new-born babes. He demonstrates his point by quotations from the Old Testament (for example: Psalm 34 v8 in v3, Isaiah 28 v16 in v6, Psalm 118 v22 in v7, Exodus 19 v6 in v9 and Hosea 2 v23 in v10). There is rich material to reflect on here, about our privileges as believers, our calling as disciples and our acceptance by a holy and faithful God. *Do so, before continuing.*

Hymn *All praise to our redeeming Lord* (H&P 753, StF 608, MP 19)
or another favourite

Reading John 14 verses 1 to 14

The scene is the Upper Room. It's the Last Supper, though only Jesus seems to be aware of this. He alone knows that Judas left the room with the intention of betraying Jesus, and that would lead directly to the crucifixion.

On so many news bulletins recently we have heard the distressing stories of families unable to share a last 'Goodbye' with a loved one, or only snatching a moment, waving to an ambulance or offering a kiss through a hospital window. Those last times are so precious, and it feels so cruel when they are denied. Here Jesus shares his parting words, his 'famous last words,' with those who had been his close companions.

We know – and they never suspected – that there would be further meetings after his crucifixion, because resurrection would follow; that he would have more to tell them. This is the time when he must prepare them for what lay immediately before him. He tells them words of hope, of promise and of reassurance. We hear them at every funeral, because they are intended for the comfort of every believer.

They do not deny the pain of parting – Jesus himself wept at the grave of Lazarus; he shared the sisters' grief at sin's consequences in God's good creation. There is no invitation to pretend that we are not hurting and churned up inside. There is no point saying, “Let not your hearts be troubled,” if they aren't going to be deeply troubled. The healing matches the hurting.

It is to troubled hearts that he speaks. A wise preacher told students that if they preached to breaking hearts they would seldom miss the mark. Jesus reminds the disciples to trust him in the same way that they trust in God. They (and we) need him just as much as we need God, for the two are inseparable. He is the ultimate in faithfulness.

It can be a nuisance, or worse, to stop over in a strange place, and as you enquire about accommodation you find that – like a famous couple 2000 years ago – there is “no room.” Even worse is to *think* that you have made the reservation, only to find that it has been double-booked, and you are too late. Jesus tells us that in his Father's house there is a place kept for each believer, for each one who trusts in him. He has gone before us to make sure that it is ready, and that we are expected when we 'book in.' It has been reserved for you, in your name.

We can sympathise with Thomas and with Philip for the questions that they raise. If we don't know where you are going, how can we know the way? Yes, Thomas; that's

a perfectly reasonable question. And all this talk about “the Father”: please show him to us. Good point, Philip. You have put into words what we wanted too.

How much poorer we should have been if Jesus hadn’t needed to answer them! Even then, the only answers that can be given by Jesus seem more like riddles. What does it mean to say that Jesus is “the way”? It can hardly be a road to travel on, nor an example to imitate, no matter how much truth lies in those suggestions. If we can only come to the Father by him – what a staggering claim to have made, unless it is absolutely true – it is because we meet God as we meet Jesus. He is our introduction. I am sure that when Kate Middleton first met the Queen she didn’t just knock at the Palace gates and barge in. She must have been welcomed by Prince William, and escorted in. He was the way, for her. And the Prince of Glory is the way for you and me.

Lots of people tell us that they wish they knew what God is like. There’s more honesty there, and more to respect, than those people whose idolatry tells us what they *think* God is like, and it usually bears little resemblance to anything the Bible says. Jesus gave Philip the simple answer, and the only one we can grasp. God is like Jesus; he is – as St Paul wrote – “the image (literally, the icon) of the invisible God.” He is the only reliable representation of God that the world has ever seen. Not the physical form, but the character and the values and the compassion and the tenderness and the caring; not the facial features, but the love that shines from those eyes and the gracious words that fall from those lips; not the hands with nail-scars, but the touch that heals and the help that lifts and the strength that carries. If you want to know what God is like, gaze at Jesus until the sight sets your heart on fire with faith and love.

Greater works? They may not be like his in terms of the miraculous, though sometimes that happens. But deeds of compassion, acts of generous kindness, works of justice, witness for holiness – these certainly are displays on a greater scale than one life (even the life of the Son of God in human flesh) could achieve. If they are done in prayerful reliance on the grace of God, and if they are done for the glory of Jesus, they will be a blessing.

The resurrected Jesus will go to the Father. He lives for ever, and he prays constantly for you and me. That is the reason to trust him. That is enough.

He lives, to bless me with his love;
He lives to plead for me above....

He lives, my mansion to prepare;
He lives to lead me safely there...

What joy the blessed assurance gives, I know that my Redeemer lives!

Prayer

“If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.”

Lord, may my prayers be worthy of your name. May I ask only what you would gladly give.

Rather than provide a prayer, some pointers are suggested to help you make your own prayers. They don’t need to be dressed in fancy language, and they don’t need to be long. Imagine that Jesus is sat in the chair opposite you, wanting to hear what is on your mind. Then tell him.

You may want to pray for friends from church – some have particular needs that you know of.

News headlines alert us to some of the needs of the Health Service, the Hospitals, the medical staff.

Pray for the families who have been bereaved – you may know some. Pray for families who are anxious about a member ill in hospital. Pray for those who are isolated, whether by distance or confined in homes.

Pray for those who are struggling: some are struggling financially, and others who can't get food. Some are struggling as tensions blow up at home, sometimes violently.

Pray for the people who make the important decisions day by day; about the scale of the lock-down; about the supply of PPE and drugs; about the right course of treatment for any individual.

And your own needs matter too: bring them to God in humble confidence.

Eternal God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life;
grant us to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn I know that my Redeemer lives (H&P 196, StF 303, MP 278)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all evermore. Amen.

Next week's Bible readings

John 14 verses 15 to 21

Acts 17 verses 22 to 31

Psalm 68 verses 8 to 20

1st Peter 3 verses 13 to 22