

Sunday 10th May – 5th Sunday of Easter

As we commemorate the 75th anniversary of VE day we will finish today's service with an Act of Commitment

Opening hymn – Praise my soul the King of heaven

1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;
to his feet your tribute bring.
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
evermore his praises sing.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise the everlasting King!

2 Fatherlike he tends and spares us;
well our feeble frame he knows.
In his hand he gently bears us,
rescues us from all our foes.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Widely yet his mercy flows!

3 Angels, help us to adore him;
you behold him face to face.
Sun and moon, bow down before him,
dwellers all in time and space.
Alleluia, alleluia!
Praise with us the God of grace!

Easter greeting:

Alleluia, Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Praise – Psalm 31 : 1-5, 15-16

- 1 In you, O Lord, have I taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.
- 2 Incline your ear to me;
make haste to deliver me.

- 3 Be my strong rock, a fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my stronghold;
guide me, and lead me for your name's sake.
- 4 Take me out of the net
that they have laid secretly for me,
for you are my strength.
- 5 Into your hands I commend my spirit,
for you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.
- 15 'My times are in your hand;
deliver me from the hand of my enemies,
and from those who persecute me.
- 16 'Make your face to shine upon your servant,
and save me for your mercy's sake.'

**All Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Collect for 5th Sunday of Easter

Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world
and the wonder of your risen life:
give us compassion and courage
to risk ourselves for those we serve,
to the glory of God the Father.
Amen

Readings

Acts 7:55-end

But filled with the Holy Spirit, he gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died.

John 14:1-14

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.’ Thomas said to him, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.’

Philip said to him, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, “Show us the Father”? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.

Sermon – Rev Wendy Carter

What are you finding most difficult about the lockdown I wonder?

There are frustrations we all share –staying close to home; missing the chance to hug family and friends; simple face to face contact. Getting your hair cut!

We’re missing the sporting highlights of the year

Quite apart from the financial strain for millions, the worry for those who are ill, the strain on health and care staff.

For us there is the loss of gathering in our church buildings to worship God as communities and to mark the passage of our Christian year. We thank Revd Paul for his expertise in bringing us together with internet services.

Last Friday was the 75th Anniversary of VE day the end of the second world war. I hope you had a chance to join in the events on TV or the internet, giving thanks for those who sacrificed lives and health for our freedom and

democracy. If we had been able there would have been local events in celebration and special services in thanksgiving.

Christian Aid week begins today and many of us are usually involved with fund raising to help the poorest, the money will be desperately missed this year.

For us as Christians there is real sorrow for not being able to 'do' the acts of service and kindness which give our Christian lives meaning, volunteering at the foodbank, toddler group, dementia support and other things. Some are able to sew for the NHS, shop for isolated, collect prescriptions but It's very frustrating for some over 70s to be limited to prayer, charity giving and phone calls. We must protect the most vulnerable and each other and be content to 'let go and let God'. To give what has to be left undone to our heavenly Father in trust.

The thought echoed in our psalm today [31:5,15.]

'Into your hands I commend my Spirit.

My times are in your hand;'

Words called out to God by Stephen in our reading from Acts today.

Since Easter we have been reading the Acts of the Apostles – getting a flavour of the amazing growth of the early church. We have listened to Simon Peter giving his account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus with such conviction and passion that 3000 people are baptised in Jerusalem on one single day.

As the numbers grow the Apostles need to be teaching, preaching and praying to instruct and encourage newcomers to faith.

The new believers were Jews - like the twelve, for them obedience to God required practical charity - gifts of goods and money to be regularly distributed to folk in need.

The twelve have to delegate, and seven Spirit filled men were chosen to help with the practical distribution of aid – Stephen was one of them. [Acts 6:1-7] Kate Day will be talking more about Stephen on Thursday evening in her reflection.

Enough today to know he was full of grace and the power of the Holy Spirit [Acts 6: 8] - but he is accused of blasphemy and taken to trial before the Sanhedrin. His time as helper or deacon for the community was short lived but his witness and loyalty to Christ is far reaching.

There is no fair trial - instead it becomes a lynching and Stephen is stoned by the mob.

He dies with his eyes fixed on the transcendent glory of God with Jesus at his right hand in heaven.

Stephen, like his Lord asks forgiveness for those guilty of his death and trustingly gives his spirit into Jesus hands.

He witnessed to Christ then he 'let go and let God.'

God's saving power for Stephen does not come as physical healing but in redeeming love and eternal life.

At this time we know of people who have been robbed of life by the corona virus. Some have been close to us, friends or relatives. All the 30,000 are important to someone and are sorely missed.

We prayed for physical healing for them - but they received wholeness and eternal life in the presence of God, they are free of anguish and pain; though bereft, we thank God for their freedom in His love.

Sometimes terminal illness is an effective witness to faith and moves people towards God. We have an example in Graham Smith, in the April magazine he told us of ways God has used his quiet trust to affect those around him. He has 'let go and let God' as he lives the last chapter.

His faith is noticed and reflected upon.

Some of the crowd watching Stephen's death must have been affected by his courage, trust and conviction.

Watching and supporting the stoning was Saul, a pharisee committed to keeping Judaism uncorrupted by the teachings of the Nazarene Jesus.

This murder affects him greatly.

The incident sparks persecution of Christians, Saul is involved in the arrests.

Believers flee, but carry the good news of Jesus with them.

God will redeem the situation by converting Saul on the road to Damascus and using him as St. Paul to convert many through the years, to the way of Christ.

In the Gospel we hear Jesus comforting his friends before his death.

The first 6 Verses are often used as a funeral reading – it tells us that we are each known by and expected by God.

In the presence of the Father, in His heavenly home we will at last find what we need, wholeness and peace.

For the disciples on this first Maundy Thursday, there is nothing more they can do in the situation. Indeed, all they can do is 'let go and let God'.

Judas has gone.

Soldiers will come.

Jesus will be arrested and crucified.

Like us six weeks ago, thinking we knew what dealing with corona virus would be like - they have no way of imagining the enormity of what will happen; or foreseeing the chaos and fear of the coming days.

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God believe also in me.' Jesus says.

He is going back to the Father; Abba He says we are to call him.

Trust Him as a two year old trusts her parents to love her.

Jesus says he is the way to God.

Nobody knows the route to heaven except someone who has travelled the way before and knows the twists and turns.

Walking with a experienced companion is a fool proof way to arrive – Walk with him - He is the way.

He is the truth.

The truth about God is beyond our imagining, it cannot be grasped completely, encoded or en-creeded.

But Jesus is the word and wisdom of God and can lead us deeper into the truth in our prayer, Bible reading, conversations

'Jesus says I am the life.'

In His presence is life in all its fullness, dynamic and fruitful in the here and now. Eternally in heaven.

He is 'the way, the truth and the life,' because he is a picture of God we can understand.

Jesus does as God does, in a human context on a smaller scale. Forgiving, accepting, giving new life, healing, blessing, stilling the storm, feeding 5000, giving wine, sharing our sadness, celebrating our joys.

If we can continue and deepen our prayer life now in the lockdown, when we have more time to grow close to His heart and know something of His intention, we pray with confidence 'Thy will be done', knowing he listens and hears.

So we bring him our locked down circles of community and service,
remembering faces and needs.

We continue our charity donations to Christian Aid, Mothers Union, Children's
society, Food bank and other charities whose funds are drying up while the
work increases.

We do what we are able to do – for the rest - We let go and let God.

Amen

Introduction to the Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers:
they shall be called children of God.

We meet in the name of Christ and share his peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

All And also with you

Act of Commitment

Let us pledge ourselves anew to the service of God and our fellow men and
women: that we may help, encourage and comfort others, and support those
working for the relief of the needy and for the peace and welfare of the nations.

All Lord God our Father,

**we pledge ourselves to serve you and all humankind, in the cause of peace,
for the relief of want and suffering,
and for the praise of your name.**

Guide us by your Spirit;

give us wisdom; give us courage; give us hope;

and keep us faithful now and always. Amen.

O Lord our God,

as we remember, teach us the ways of peace.

As we treasure memories, teach us to hope.

As we give thanks for the sacrifices of the past,

help us to make your future in this world, until your kingdom come.

All Amen.

Almighty God,
from whom all thoughts of truth and peace proceed: kindle in the hearts of all
people the true love of peace; and guide with your pure and peaceable wisdom
those who take counsel for the nations of the earth; that in tranquillity your
kingdom may go forward,
till the earth is filled with the knowledge of thy love; through Jesus Christ our
Lord.

All Amen.

Blessing

God grant to the living, grace;
to the departed, rest;
to the Church, the Queen, the Commonwealth, and all people, peace and
concord;
and to us and all his servants, life everlasting;
and the blessing of God almighty,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
come down upon you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

Final hymn – Lord for the years

1 Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided:
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

2 Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us:
Lord of the word, receive Your people's praise.

3 Lord, for our world when we disown and doubt him,
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain,
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him:
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

4 Lord for ourselves; in living power remake us -
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne,
past put behind us, for the future take us:
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.