



Service for the Fifth Sunday of Easter, 10th May 2020

A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today.

CALL TO WORSHIP

My trust is in You, Lord; You are my God and I am always in Your care. (Psalm 31).

PRAYER

Jesus our Lord, the Way, the Truth and the Life, we give You glory and praise and thank You for all that You are and for all You have done for us. We pray that You will strengthen our trust and confirm our faith, that we may face each day with untroubled hearts, until that time when we enter the place You have prepared for us.

Forgive us, we pray, those times when our footsteps have faltered and faith has seemed difficult. Reassure us with the promise of Your presence and the love that will never let us go.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

HYMN: How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

If you would like to sing this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.

1 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!
It soothes our sorrows, heals our wounds,
and drives away our fear.

2 It makes the wounded spirit whole
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary, rest.

3 Dear Name! the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding place.
My never-failing treasury, filled
with boundless stores of grace.

4 Jesus, my Shepherd and my Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

5 Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought.

6 Till then I would Thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of Thy name
refresh my soul in death.

John Newton

SCRIPTURE READING: St John 14: 1-14 & 27

“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.

²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

ADDRESS

At one of the darkest moments of His life, facing betrayal, arrest, trial and death, Jesus brought this word of comfort and reassurance to His friends. “Do not be afraid: there is a fuller life to look forward to after my death. I am going to prepare the way for you.”

This passage is often read at a funeral service to bring comfort and hope to those who mourn the loss of a loved one. However, it seems very appropriate that we should hear these words of Jesus at this time, when people are having to face the possibility of death: that of a friend, a family member or even their own. The coronavirus changes our perspective on how we cope with life in the present. We all have to think about our own mortality and we are being encouraged to share our feelings with our families or friends.

If we find this difficult, we can imagine how hard it must have been for the disciples. Thomas expressed their reaction very well when he said “We do not know where You are going, so how can we know the way?”. Jesus replied “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life: no-one goes to the Father except by me”. This brought the comment from Philip, “Lord, show us the Father; that is all we need.” He did not understand that Jesus came to show us what God is like and how much He loves us.

Jesus could do no more to help them at that time. Before any understanding or enlightenment would come, both the sad event of His death and the joyful events of His resurrection lay ahead of them. Even after the resurrection, they needed the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable them to share their faith with the world. It was their conviction that Jesus was alive, and present with them, which began the formation of the church. As members of the church today, we share their conviction and we experience His presence in our lives and in the world.

Having enjoyed several holidays on cruises at sea, I am reminded of the need for a pilot to come on board to guide us both in and out of harbour. It is always reassuring to hear the Captain say "The pilot is on board and we will soon be on our way." We need our pilot on board at this time and throughout our lives. Jesus tells us that He is going to prepare a place for us in the heavenly kingdom, but we do not make the journey alone. The Way that Jesus offers us is not just a way of life, following the rules, but a way of living with Him as our companion and friend. Travelling with Him, we learn more about the Truth and discover for ourselves the Life that begins here and now – and continues through eternity.

Speaking of eternity reminds us that Jesus began this discourse by describing that life beyond the grave: "In my Father's house there are many dwelling places, I am going to prepare a place for you." Jesus gave to His disciples – and to us today – a vision of the life of heaven and removed all fear of death. There is room for all and a welcome for all.

So the story I would like to leave with you comes from another of the lectionary readings for today. From Acts chapter 7 verse 55, we read of the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr: perhaps you might look it up after this service? In her reflections on this passage, Jane Williams writes "Stephen dies as though death is irrelevant, with his eyes fixed on the heavenly vision". She adds "As Stephen dies, gazing at the glory of God, the figure he sees is undoubtedly a human one."

I am reminded of the lovely poem "Saul" by Robert Browning. The young boy David tries to give encouragement to the sick King Saul and ends with these words...

"..... O Saul, it shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever; a Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of a new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"

He will be there to welcome us home. Jesus blesses each one of us with His peace.

May that peace be ours today and always.

Amen.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Loving God, You know the needs of all Your people; hold in Your care today all the families of the world. Give guidance to all who are in positions of authority, especially when it is difficult to make wise decisions.

We pray for all who do research into healing and for all doctors and nurses who care for those who are suffering at this time.

Gracious God, we commend to Your care all who are ill, the dying and the bereaved. May they know the comfort of Your love and peace.

We pray for our own families and friends and for all whom we love. We give thanks for the support we all receive: for the kindness of neighbours and strangers.

Lord Christ, as You have gone before us and prepared a place for us, lead us until we come fully into Your kingdom and walk before You in the life that is eternal.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus and we pray together now in the words He taught us...

Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name;
Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven:
Give us this day our daily bread;
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us;
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil:
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.

HYMN: How good is the God we adore

If you would like to sing this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment

1 How good is the God we adore!
Our faithful, unchangeable friend:
his love is as great as his pow'r
and neither knows measure nor end.

2 For Christ is the first and the last;
his Spirit will guide us safe home;
we'll praise him for all that is past
and trust him for all that's to come.

Joseph Hart

BLESSING

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of His Son, Jesus Christ.

And may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit rest upon us and abide with us and with those whom we love, this day and for evermore. Amen.



NOTICE

The funeral of Dennis Evans takes place on 13th May. You are invited to join in a special prayer to be found on the website's News Page at <https://urcwalsall.uk/news-1.html> .