

A Service for the Sixth Sunday of Easter 17th May 2020 (Rogation Sunday)

WELCOME

For the service you will need a bible and you may wish to light a candle to help you focus.

“Blessed be God, for he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me”

Psalm 66 verse 20

An invitation to confession

Our sin affects all around us, let us therefore confess in penitence and faith.

Consider the birds of the air;
They do not sow or gather into barns,
Yet our heavenly Father feeds them.
Lord have mercy, **Lord, have mercy.**

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow;
They do not toil or spin,
Yet even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.
Christ have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

How little faith we have,
Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.
Lord have mercy, **Lord, have mercy.**

Matthew 6.26,28-30,33

Collect

Risen Christ, by the lakeside you renewed your call to your disciples;
Help your Church to obey your command
And draw the nations to the fire of your love,
To the glory of God the Father.
Amen.

Bible Reading: Acts 17 verses 22-31

Gospel Reading: John 14 verses 15-21

A Reflection by the Reverend Jane Williams

Here in Acts we find Paul preaching at the Areopagus, a famous evangelical speech, to the Athenians that he'd met whilst he was waiting for Timothy and Silas to join him. Some of them were devout, religious people and others stoic philosophers who he'd been debating with in recent days.

Paul had been doing his preparation well, he was following a basic rule of preaching, to directly speak into the context. It left me wondering what Paul would be saying in our context, here in the Bride Valley in 2020, in fact as I read through these bible passages I think some of these words of Paul speak straight into our current situation.

And here's what I mean; some of our religious leaders these days have been debating in a very similar way. In this week's Church Times, a well-known priest has been lamenting the fact that the Church of England has closed its doors. In her words: "churches are locked and silent."

This seems to suggest that when we locked the church doors, we locked away everything that was precious to us and our faith, some have even suggested that we locked Jesus inside and left him in there. My experience is the complete opposite of that. Don't get me wrong, I was just as upset as everyone else when the restrictions came into being and it was no longer possible to gather together in our church buildings. I miss being in our churches, those full of prayer; sacred spaces, I miss our acts of worship together, the hymn singing and the care and concern of the people. However, it certainly hasn't been the case that the Church of God has closed down throughout the Bride Valley.

Listen to Paul: "The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands." verse 24

Paul was demolishing their idea of religion, taking away their religious props and bringing them to know Jesus. The good news of Jesus which is surely the gospel we see proclaimed across our nation right now.

Earlier this week I liked what Stephen Cottrell wrote in the Telegraph: "We learned ages ago that the best way to proclaim the gospel is to live it out. Those who see it are those who have eyes to see it. As usual, this is most likely to be the poor, the sick, the isolated and the vulnerable. They are well aware of the Church's presence with them at the moment. Ask the woman whose only contact with the outside world is a telephone call from the vicar. Or the family who are kept afloat by YouTube posts. Or those whose only food this week comes from the foodbank run by the local church. Or the bereaved whose loved one's funeral is being taken this week. Or the two million listeners to Radio 4, the 600,000 people online, who listened to the Archbishop of Canterbury on Easter morning. All these people recognise Jesus in what they receive. What they are hearing and receiving is a prophetic message about how we can become a better, fairer nation, and the practical expression of that vision through the care of God's Church."

In today's gospel reading from John 14 Jesus promises that by God's Holy Spirit, he abides with us and lives through us, that means wherever we are God is with us, be that in the confines of our own home, lying in a hospital bed, serving our community as best we can or in our church buildings when it is safe for us all to go back.

And when that happens, when we are eventually allowed back in our church buildings, I very much doubt things will ever be the same as before. We will have moved on in our faith, begun to find a new normal and I want to invite you all to think hard and pray with me over the next few weeks, about what God is saying directly to us through all of this. We are the Church of God here in the Valley and we can do this, we can do it together. As the gospel ends with Jesus saying: "Rise, let us be on our way." **Amen.**

We say together in faith

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty,

Who was, and is, and is to come.

We believe in God the Father, who created all things:

For by his will they were created and have their being.

We believe in God the Son, who was slain;

For with his blood, he purchased us for God,

From every tribe and language, from every people and nation.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit:

The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come!'

Even so come, Lord Jesus!

Amen

Revelation 4.8, 11;5.9;22.17,20

Prayers of Thanksgiving

(Based on the Church of England's prayers for rogation-tide which seem particularly appropriate at this time)

Let us give thanks to God,
For the colour and forms of creation
And our place within it,
We bring our thanks, good Lord:
Your mercy endures for ever.

For our daily food,
And for those whose work and skill
bring your good gifts to us,
we bring our thanks, good lord:
Your mercy endures for ever.

For the gifts and graces inspired in human minds and hearts;
For insight and imagination,
For the skills of research
Which bring healing and fulfilment to the lives of many;
we bring our thanks, good lord:
Your mercy endures for ever.

For the light and shades of the changing seasons,
And their variety and dependability;
For new life and growth out of barrenness and decay;
we bring our thanks, good lord:
Your mercy endures for ever.

For new hope and strength in our communities,
Especially in your Church and among all you call to serve you,
we bring our thanks, good lord:
Your mercy endures for ever.

For all in whose lives we see
Goodness, kindness, gentleness, patience and humility,
And all the fruit of the Spirit,
we bring our thanks, good lord:
Your mercy endures for ever.

For the life we have been given,
And for all those whom you have given us to share it,
we bring our thanks, good lord:
Your mercy endures for ever.

God of grace,
As you are ever at work in your creation,
So fulfil your wise and loving purpose in us
And in all for whom we pray
That with them and in all that you have made,
Your glory may be revealed
And the whole earth give praise to you,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Blessing and Dismissal

God be gracious to us and bless us:

And make his face to shine upon us.

Let the people praise you, O God:

God be gracious to us and bless us.

Judge the people righteously and govern the nations upon the earth.

God be gracious to us and bless us.

Let the earth bring forth her increase:

God be gracious to us and bless us.

God be gracious to us and bless us:

And make his face to shine upon us.

Amen.

For this week two questions to think about: Is there anything we have lost in the last two months that needs to remain lost? What have we gained during lockdown that we need to retain?