

**THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:
A Service of the Word for Sunday 19th July 2020**

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett with prayers written by Sue Taylor. The service is also available to listen to on **01308 293062**.

The Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you
and also with you

Psalm 139: 1,2

O Lord, you have searched me out and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You mark out my journeys and my resting place and are acquainted with all my ways.

Invitation to Confession

Jesus said:
Before you offer your gift,
go and be reconciled.
As brothers and sisters in God's family,
we come together to ask our Father for forgiveness.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart.
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love bring *us* back to himself, forgive *us* our sins, and assure *us* of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

The Collect

Creator God,
you made us all in your image:
may we discern you in all that we see,
and serve you in all that we do;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Old Testament Reading

Genesis 28:10-19a

Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And the LORD stood beside him and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place-- and I did not know it!" And he was afraid, and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and

set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. He called that place Bethel.

The Gospel Reading

Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

Jesus put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'" Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Reflection

God of surprises

'Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!'

The Old Testament passage set for today offers us a wonderful glimpse into the sacredness of the earthly – in Jacob's dream, earth and heaven are connected by a ladder. We see too the surprising nature of God's relationship with the world and the humans that inhabit it.

The first surprise in this story is the main human protagonist, Jacob. If you know his full story, you will be aware that he is a rogue from a dysfunctional family – he cheats his way (with his mother's help) to his older brother's birthright and later he steals the best livestock from his father-in-law. Not the most promising of material we might think and yet, Jacob is the one who is given this vision of heaven and earth meeting one another and moreover, he is the recipient of God's promise that 'all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring'.

God works with and through the most unexpected people. The Church Army, established as a lay mission society in the Church of England in the 1880s and still operating today, was set up by a young man called Wilson Carlile, who was originally a successful banker. When his business collapsed, he had a breakdown and in the midst of everything falling apart, he sensed a calling from God, and eventually set up an organization whose purpose was to reach those places and people that the church largely missed or just ignored. Another surprising person was Nora, a woman who received a call to ordained ministry whilst she was washing socks in the sink at home – this was years before the church took the decision that women could be ordained, so her call could not even be tested at the time. She had to trust that God was in it all somehow and wait a long time – her eventual ordination was much treasured. These examples can encourage us to widen our expectations about our own relationship with God – if God calls such seemingly unlikely people to live and work for God, why not me... and you?

The story of Jacob and his dream of the ladder reaching between heaven and earth also suggests something to us about the holiness of the ordinary place. This is perhaps the second surprise. All that is known about the place where Jacob settled down to sleep is that it was out of doors and it was where he felt tired enough on his journey to call it a day. There was nothing special about this place that he was aware of, but this very ordinary piece of earth was where Jacob encountered God and received the promise of being a blessing. For Nora, too, her call from God came to her in the mundane act of washing the family socks in her kitchen sink. This was not a special place or a 'holier-than-the-rest' part of the house. This can encourage us to reflect on where we might expect to encounter God. Our churches are reopening and that is a cause for real rejoicing, especially after all this time when we have been unable to enter and worship together. However, don't let's restrict our expectations by thinking God can only properly be met within our church walls. God has created the whole of creation and God can be encountered anywhere within our world. This was the experience of the Psalmist – we heard some words from Ps139 earlier in the service and he goes on to reflect that even if he wanted to, he could not escape from God's presence, not in the darkness, not across the sea, nowhere would be out of God's presence.

So, on this day when we rejoice that we worship a God of surprises, let us pray that our eyes will be opened to God's presence outside and inside church and that our ears will be opened to God's call to each and every one of us.

'Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!'

Amen.

Prayers

Let us remember that we are in the presence of God; in our homes, at our work, in our lives and in our hearts.

God our Father grant grace to us all here in the Bride Valley as we face new challenges and priorities with the easing of lockdown. We give thanks for the wisdom and guidance of all our clergy during these difficult and uncertain times.

The Lord is here

His Spirit is with us.

Father of all, bless and protect all those people in the world who are suffering as a result of conflict, religious intolerance or racial hatred.

We ask a blessing on the homeless, the asylum seekers and for refugees; especially in Syria, southern Sudan, Palestine.

The Lord is here

His Spirit is with us.

Father Almighty, we pray for all who are in positions of leadership throughout the world. Grant them integrity and honesty; that they may be aware of their duties and responsibilities.

The Lord is here

His Spirit is with us.

Father of compassion, give courage to all who are sick in body or anguish of mind. Enfold them in your love, and be with them in their need.

The Lord is here

His Spirit is with us.

We commend to Gods care and keeping all those who have died; both those who have confessed the faith and those whose faith is known to God alone.

The Lord is here

His Spirit is with us.

Rejoicing in the fellowship of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints and Angels, we commend ourselves and all

people to Gods unfailing love. **Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**Our Father, who 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 those who 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**

Final Prayer

**God of our pilgrimage,
You lead us to the living water:
Refresh and sustain us
As we go forward on our journey,
In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.**

Blessing

May the Father from whom every family
in earth and heaven receives its name
strengthen *you* with his Spirit in your inner being,
so that Christ may dwell in *your* hearts by faith;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be among *you* and remain with *you* always.
Amen.

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