

Our Sunday Service Together

Easter 5 May 10th 2020



Today, as we enter into our Easter Season Worship, together yet apart, we will 'make a Spiritual Communion' and Christ, through the Spirit with us, will mediate the grace of God to us in fullness.

An Acclamation for the Season of Easter

All: It is our duty and our joy, always and everywhere to give you thanks, almighty and eternal Father, and especially in these days of Easter to celebrate with joyful hearts the memory of your wonderful works.

For by the mystery of his passion Jesus Christ, your risen Son, has conquered the powers of death and hell and restored in men and women the image of your glory.
He has placed them once more in paradise and opened to them the gate of life eternal.
And so earth and heaven resound with gladness, while angels and archangels and the powers of all creation sing for ever the hymn of your glory.

Hymn Christ is made the sure foundation

Preparation

All: This is the day that the Lord has made.
Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Through the brokenness of Christ, we become one body
as one body we now gather in the name of Christ to offer our praise and thanksgiving, to receive God's holy word, to pray for the needs of the world,
and to seek the forgiveness of our sins, that by the power of the Holy Spirit
we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Our Confession

In baptism we died with Christ, so that as Christ was raised from the dead, we might walk in newness of life. Let us receive new life in him as we confess our sins in penitence and faith.

All: Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord, we come to you in sorrow for our sins, and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

Be still for a moment in confession and in receiving God's Grace in Christ

All: May Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to God's truth, strengthen us to do God's will and give us the joy of his kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Risen Lord.

Amen.

The opening prayer

All: The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you;
now and for ever. Amen.

The Word of God

Psalmody Psalm 31.1-5 and 15,16 *We say the psalm aloud*

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.'

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Scripture Reading Acts 7.55 to end

⁵⁵ 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. ⁵⁶ 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' ⁵⁷ But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. ⁵⁸ 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. ⁵⁹ While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' ⁶⁰ 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.

At the end of the reading we say:

All: This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Gloria

All: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The Gospel John 14.1-14

Alleluia, alleluia. Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' Alleluia.

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ² 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? ³ 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. ⁴ And you know the way to the place where I am going.' ⁵ Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶ Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.'

⁸ Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' ⁹ 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"? ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'

Alleluia, alleluia. Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.' Alleluia.

A Reflection for the day

I wonder what your big ask of God would be, given the chance to ask, and I wonder how others would react. Philip asks a big question, probably the biggest for any Jew 'show us the Father'. It may not seem a big ask to you or I, but remember through the Old testament texts we are told seeing God will result in instant death; and Philip says he will be satisfied.

Maybe it is Jesus words, 'whoever has seen me, has seen the Father' which are familiar to us that shape our reactions. When John wrote down what Jesus said, and people heard what was written, there would have been a gasp; did he really ask that, did Jesus really respond like that – for not only is Philip really out there with the question but Jesus is really overstepping the mark in saying 'if you are looking for God, look no further', I am the way, the truth, the life; well it's outright blasphemy!

And blasphemy can only result in death, Stephen knows this but doesn't back down. He steps right out there and openly declares Jesus is the Messiah. And the way of the Messiah, the Christ, is one about forgiveness and restoration. Stephen, caught in a vision of his master, sees that and enters into 'the way of Christ' – he becomes the first Christian, the first Christ like one. Whilst we are not privy to exactly what Stephen's vision of Christ was we are privy to the glorious impact upon his face of the heart essence of God – forgiveness, acceptance and restoration in Christ Jesus.

This is the glory of God that Jesus has revealed to the disciples through his many 'works'. Works like those of forgiveness, of accepting 'sinners and tax collectors', foreigners and the outcasts that society shunned, and of restoring people to God and to each other. The disciples truly have seen the Father in seeing Jesus's way of life. And Stephen steps into that same way and in so doing gifts to us a signpost, a vision of the way, the truth, the life we are called to live as Christ-like ones, as Christians.

Life, and the life of faith, is filled with questions; many of which we will not find answers to, but that is OK! Thomas again in this reading shows us it is OK to both question and not have a clue about all the answers. Having a neat set of answers would arguably just be plain religion. Jesus offers to us much more, he offers faith, he offers us a way, he offers to us the ability to seek and find, to ask and receive, to knock and find an opening. Ultimately, I wonder if faith is something of a life-long condition, which, rather than something with neat and easy solutions, we are called to learn to live with.

And indeed might forgiveness be at the heart of that condition, be what we are called to learn to live with. It is after all revealed in the actions of the Son to be the heart purposes of the Father (John 3.16). In the prayer Jesus taught it says 'forgive us our sins, as we forgive others theirs also'. Forgiveness begins at home, and brings a restoration of life which leads to the forgiveness of others. It is not a self-indulgence, but a reality we have to accept and live with. We are forgiven by God and we need to learn to live within that new reality; the self-indulgence of faith is to keep trying to remember and hold onto what God has forgotten! This is the way Jesus proclaimed, brought into reality, the reality that Stephen caught sight of and then stepped into himself – forgiving others just as he was forgiven.

This is the way of Christ, it is the condition we are called to learn to live with, that in Christ Jesus all of our sins are forgiven. I wonder if we can follow that way, accept we are forgiven, stop looking for what God sees no longer, and step into his way of forgiving and restoring the world to life in all its fullness; a forgiven and restored world, that's truly a glorious vision!

The Creed

All: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers *We make our intercessions*

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ let us pray to the Father.

Lord, as you call us to walk in your ways, guide us that we may do what you would have us do, that we, your church, may do greater things for the Father's glory.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

We pray for in positions of authority, for all making difficult decisions this week as the nation looks to a way out of the present 'lock down'. May they balance the health of the nation and the wealth of the economy, but in so doing not forget the needs of all life on the planet. May we see the way to both prosper and live as human beings and to guard and bless the ecology of the world.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

We give you thanks for those who have enriched our lives, built and sustained our communities, those who give vision of a good future and a safe path on which to journey. We pray for our families and friends, for homes, hospitals, and all therein.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

We pray at this time for all who are confused about the truth, or about life, those known to us whose minds are disturbed, those who have lost their way. We pray for those who have no peace, and for those unwell in body, mind or spirit, especially

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

Lord Christ, 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 that life which is eternal.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

Open our ears O Lord to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills that we may serve you today and always. Amen.

A Prayer during the Covid-19 Pandemic

All: Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Amen.

The Collect

All: Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen

Gathering our prayers and praises into one, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

All: 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.

The Conclusion

All: Christ, as a light illumine and guide me this day.
Christ, as a shield overshadow me.
Christ under me, Christ over me;
beside me on my left and my right.
be within and without me.
Amen.

Christ
This day