

12th May 2024 – Morning Service

Rev Peter Bradley

Call to Worship – Psalm 1:1a & 2a

Happy are those who reject the advice of evil people. Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the Lord.

StF 87 – Praise to the living God

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| 1) Praise to the living God!
All praised be his name,
Who was, and is, and is to be,
For e'er the same!
The one eternal God
Ere aught that now appears:
The First, the Last, beyond all thought
His timeless years! | 3) His Spirit flowing free,
High surging where it will:
In prophet's word he spoke of old,
Is speaking still.
Established is his law,
And changeless it shall stand,
Deep writ upon the human heart,
On sea, on land. |
| 2) Formless, all lovely forms
Declare his loveliness;
Holy, no holiness of earth
Can his express.
Lo, he is Lord of all!
Creation speaks his praise,
And everywhere, above, below, His will obeys. | 4) Eternal life has he
Implanted in the soul;
His love shall be our strength and stay,
While ages roll.
Praise to the living God!
All praised be his name,
Who was, and is, and is to be, for e'er the same. |

Mediaeval Jewish Doxology translated by Max Landsberg & Newton Mann

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

God, most high over all the earth, to you be all praise for ever! God, who gave us eternal life in your Son, to you be all praise for ever! God, who called us to eternal glory in Christ, to you be all praise for ever! God of power and truth and grace, to you be all praise for ever; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Holy God, your Son our Saviour prayed for his disciples that they might be one, as you and he are one. We confess our divisions and dissensions and the disunity we have created within the Body of Christ. We have not loved one another as Christ has loved us. We have not put past wrongs behind us or sought reconciliation and healing. Forgive our sinful thoughts and actions; help us to start anew; and sanctify us in the truth of your Word our Saviour, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

StF 80 – My God I am thine

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| 1) My God, I am thine; what a comfort divine,
What a blessing to know that my Jesus is mine!
In the heavenly Lamb thrice happy I am,
And my heart it doth dance at the
sound of his name. | 3) Yet onward I haste to the heavenly feast:
That, that is the fullness; but this is the taste;
And this I shall prove, till with joy I remove
To the heaven of heavens in Jesus's love. |
| 2) True pleasures abound in the rapturous sound;
And whoever hath found it hath paradise found.
My Jesus to know, as rejoicing I go
To my life everlasting, 'tis heaven below. | |

Charles Wesley

Reading: Acts 1: 15-17, 21-26

In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) and said, "Brothers, the scripture had to be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus – he was one of our number and shared in this ministry. Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection."

So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they drew lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

StF 660 – Called by Christ to be disciples

- 1) Called by Christ to be disciples
Every day in every place,
We are not to hide as hermits
But to spread the way of grace;
Citizens of heaven's kingdom,
Though this world is where we live,
As we serve a faithful Master,
Faithful service may we give.
- 2) Richly varied are our pathways,
Many callings we pursue:
May we use our gifts and talents
Always, Lord, to honour you;
So in government or commerce,
College, hospice, farm or home,
Whether volunteers or earning,
May we see your kingdom come.
- 3) Hard decisions may confront us,
Urging us to compromise;
Still obedience is our watchword -
Make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
Made a precious offering,
As our daily lives are fashioned
In submission to our King.

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Reading: John 17:6-19

'I have revealed you to those you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them and kept them safe by that name you gave me. None has been lost except the one doomed to destruction so that scripture would be fulfilled.

I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.'

Sermon

“Mind the gap!”

If you have ever been on the London Underground, you will have heard those words – warning you to take care as you leave or board the train. On our local trains they are much more polite: a lady with a very mellifluous voice announces, “Please mind the gap between the platform and the train.”

But “Mind the gap” will do – it gets our attention and says what needs to be said. And today, on the Sunday after Ascension Day we’re being asked again to “Mind the gap”. We gather on a Sunday that falls between the celebration of Christ’s ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit. It’s an in-between Sunday – a kind of liturgical gap between the Easter season and Pentecost.

According to Luke’s telling of the story in Acts, there is a sense of both absence and anticipation among the disciples as they wait in the city for power from on high. The Easter presence of their risen Lord has withdrawn from them – returning to heaven. But the Spirit the Lord promised is yet to descend on them. And today, on this in-between Sunday, we identify with the disciples in their waiting. So what kept them from slipping down into the gap – the void of Christ’s absence and their own powerlessness?

First of all, **Prayer**. According to Luke, the disciples gathered together and prayed. The women of the group shared in this praying, including Mary the mother of Jesus. The prayer was not anxiety filled, but thankful and hopeful, looking back to all that God had done in the life of Jesus and looking forward to the new things that God would do in and through his followers. Despite the confusions and failures that they had experienced together, now they found a new unity, joy and hope. Their experience echoed the happiness of Psalm 1. The Psalmist said *“they find joy in obeying the law of the Lord, and they study it day and night.”* And he goes on: *“They are like trees that grow beside a stream, and that bear fruit at the right time, and whose leaves do not dry up.”*

In his Gospel, John pictures Jesus praying for his friends on the night before his death. He prays for their unity and their protection. He prays that they will be remade and renewed by the truth he has given them. He prays that they will have his joy, made complete in themselves. That sense of being in God’s presence, upheld by God’s grace and protected by the love of Christ, sustained the disciples in the waiting time between Easter and Pentecost. Can we renew that sense of the presence of God, the protection of Christ – sustaining us like water feeds a tree, giving it leaves and fruit?

Then they experienced **Purpose**. Prayer leads them into action. Peter and the others appoint a new apostle to take the place of their fallen friend Judas. Justus and Matthias are equally qualified and so the group end up choosing randomly by drawing lots. Matthias is the winner, although nothing more is ever said about him. What was important about him was that he had been part of the group that walked with Jesus in his lifetime and witnessed his Easter victory over death. And thus chosen he became, with the others, a witness to Christ’s resurrection. That, Luke makes clear, is what the Church is about - a witness to Christ’s resurrection, in its words and actions and life together. Can we renew that sense of purpose within the Church today – to be witnesses together to a risen Saviour in a death-filled world?

Then they recognised a **Promise**. That Easter message carries such hope and promise for the future. It was that sense of God’s promise that upheld the disciples in their waiting time. Kept them from falling into the gap of despair. Jesus had promised the Spirit and they knew absolutely that Jesus was to be trusted. Many years before, in Israel’s darkest hour, the prophet Ezekiel had given God’s promise of new hope and life. (This is what he had to say – Ch. 36: 24-28). And Jesus’ followers reapplied those words in their own times, seeing them illuminated vividly in the words and life of Jesus. Can we renew our sense of God’s promises for his world today? For our lives, for our church with all its challenges and weaknesses?

And finally, they understood Jesus’ promise of **Power** to come. Today, we wait upon the Spirit to come and renew our praying, our sense of purpose, our joy in God’s promises.

We wait for Ezekiel's vision to be fulfilled once more in our lives – that hearts of stone may become new hearts of flesh, open to God's gracious touch. We live in the light of Easter and Pentecost – they are permanent realities for our lives, our church and our world. Yet there are gaps that emerge in our lives – times when the risen Lord seems distant, when the Spirit seems absent, when God seems to sleep. We wait and hope, we persist in faith. And our readings on this in-between Sunday invite us to draw on the riches of God, to rediscover prayer as joyful meditation, to know God has purpose for each one of us, to carry with us the great promises that have been passed on to us, and to open ourselves to that gracious power which is God's love, poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer, purpose, promise, and power to come – all leading us to Pentecost. Mind the gap! Come Holy Spirit, fill our lives – change our hearts. Amen.

StF 530 – To be in your presence

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| 1) To be in Your presence,
To sit at Your feet,
Where Your love surrounds me,
And makes me complete. | 2) To rest in Your presence,
Not rushing away,
To cherish each moment,
Here I would stay. |
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*Ch) This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.
This is my desire, O Lord,
This is my desire.*

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Prayers of Intercession

Father God, we give thanks and praise for all teachers of the faith, for those who have proclaimed your word and taught of your glory. We pray for all who are struggling with their faith, for all who are in doubt about their vocation.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

Strengthen, O Lord, all who work to meet the needs of the world. We pray that talents may not be lost through neglect or discouragement. We remember all who work in commerce or in industry. We pray for farmers and agricultural workers, for fishermen and all who work upon the sea.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

O Lord, guide the communities to which we belong into peace; that there may be peace in our streets, peace in our homes, peace in all our dealings; that our loved ones may live and abide in peace.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

For all who are waiting for clinical results or tests, those who await a doctor's diagnosis or an operation. Support all who wait by an ailing loved one, all near to the hour of death.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

We give thanks for your renewing powers, and we pray for our loved ones departed, that in you they may know newness of life.

Spirit of God, we wait upon you. **Strengthen us and restore us.**

We ask these things in the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who taught us, when we pray, to say:

The Lord's Prayer

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.**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

StF 365 – Jesu the joy of loving hearts

- 1) Jesu, the joy of loving hearts,
The fount of life, and light of all,
From the best bliss that earth imparts
We turn unfilled to heed your call.
- 2) Your truth unchanged has ever stood;
You save all those who on you call;
To them that seek you, you are good,
To them that find you, all in all.
- 3) We taste of you, the living bread,
And long to feast upon you still;
We drink of you, the fountain head,
Our thirsty souls from you will fill.
- 4) Our restless spirits long to be,
With you, where'er our lot is cast,
Glad when your gracious smile we see,
Blest when our faith can hold you fast.
- 5) O Jesus, ever with us stay;
Make all our moments calm and bright;
Chase the dark night of sin away;
Shed on the world your holy light.

Ray Palmer

Blessing

The Holy and Mighty God protect you from all evil, Christ the King deliver you from all darkness, the Holy Spirit guide you into ways of peace; and the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with you and remain with you always. **Amen.**