

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES: A Service for the fifth Sunday of Easter 10th May 2020

The service for today has been prepared by the Reverend Liz Howlett with prayers written by Mrs Sue Taylor, a Churchwarden at Holy Trinity Swyre. The service is also available to listen to on **01308 293062**.

Please also join us for coffee (bring your own) and an online chat on Sundays at 10am. See the notice sheet for this week for the Zoom link.

WELCOME EVERYONE

VERSES FROM PSALM 42: as arranged by Colin Hodgetts for use in the Othona Community's chapels.*

As the deer craves a running stream I desire you, my God.

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My soul thirsts for the living source, will we meet face to face?

Day and night I survive on tears for they ask, 'Where's your God?'

As I pour out my soul's distress I remember these things:
how I marched in a mighty crowd claiming justice and truth
amid chanting and shouts of praise and the crowd wild with joy.

I am sunk in such deep despair I will call you to mind,
so I walk by the storm-rent shore and consider this might;
in the water's roar deep calls deep and on me your waves break.

So your love will wash over me both by day and by night.
On my lips is a prayer of praise to the source of my life.
As the deer craves a running stream I desire you, my God.

COLLECT: Risen Christ, your wounds declare your love for the world and the wonder of your risen life: give us compassion and courage to risk ourselves for those we serve, to the glory of God the Father. Amen

BIBLE READING: JOHN 14: 1 – 14

14 Jesus said, "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.

REFLECTION:

If the coronavirus had not interrupted our lives, I would have been taking services today at Littlebredy and Burton Bradstock. As it turns out, we will need to wait a while until we can be together face to face, but in the meantime it is a great privilege to share in worship with many more of you in this way. For the reflection today, I am drawing on both the psalm and the gospel reading.

'As the deer craves a running stream, I desire you, my God.'

The writer of this psalm puts into words the deep longing he has for God. He yearns for God's presence in a time of real difficulty and struggle, remembering happier days when he was part of the crowd celebrating their God and everything was going well. Now he seems to be alone, with enemies taunting him and in his despair he goes for a walk beside the rough water. There he has a strong sense that even in his current state, God's love will wash over him, like the waves of the stormy sea.

The psalmist has discovered a truth which the disciples in our gospel reading have yet to grasp. They are committed to following Jesus and they yearn for God, but cannot understand what Jesus is saying to them. Both Thomas and Philip ask for more from Jesus – they don't realise that they already have everything they need. So what do they have already? They have a deep connection, instant access, to God through Jesus. In addition, they belong to a heavenly, spiritual realm, as well as this earthly one and Jesus is the way to it - he will be with them every step of the way. They don't need more – what they need is for their eyes to be opened so that they can see the overflowing abundance of what they already have been given.

I am reminded of a short story I once heard: one person, longing for God, goes into a cave and sees the words written on the wall, 'God is nowhere'. Another person, also yearning for God, goes into the same cave and sees exactly the same letters, but reads, 'God is now here'. I found these words so helpful at a difficult time in life, when I was tempted to look back to the past, or dream about the future. The one time when we can experience the presence of God is now, however 'now' looks or feels.

In lockdown, we might find ourselves, like the psalmist, thinking back to happier times when we could congregate with our friends and families and worship together in our churches. We may find ourselves keeping our lives on hold until we can 'get back to normal', whatever 'normal' might be. We may feel despair at times – life may be a real struggle for us and we may feel very alone. I pray that we might all find some reassurance in our bible passages today, that however difficult life is, God is there with us. If we feel the storms of life breaking over us, may we sense God's love washing over us in the storm.

It will be so good to meet up once again, to see one another face to face in the flesh, to have our churches open in welcome to all, but today is when we can enter God's presence, now is the time we can walk on the way with Jesus by our side.

'As the deer craves a running stream, I desire you, my God.'

PRAYERS:

In these strange times when we are isolated from those we love,
We lift our hearts to God in prayer

Father of all, you have built up your church through the love and dedication of all those who have committed their lives to you;
Bless our Bishops, Nicholas and Karen, our Archdeacon Penny, our Rector Jane and our Ministry Team here in the Bride Valley. Grant that they may all continue strong and steadfast in their God given ministries.

As the deer craves the running stream
So we desire you, our God.

We pray for the victims of coronavirus here and throughout the world. For the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the parent, the child, the colleague, and the friend. For those who have died unexpectedly, in the midst of life, and for those in old age and infirmity. Grant that they may all rest in peace and rise in glory.

As the deer craves the running stream
So we desire you, our God.

We ask a blessing on all the many staff working in hospitals, care homes and in the community. Those who have put themselves at risk in caring for the sick and dying. We thank God for their commitment, integrity and courage.

As the deer craves the running stream
So we desire you, our God.

Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for the beauty of our surroundings here in the Bride valley. For the fields and hills, the valleys and streams, the changing sea and the wide horizons. Heaven and Earth are full of Thy glory, glory be to Thee O Lord.

As the deer craves the running stream
So we desire you, our God.

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

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

As we say the following prayer for blessing, let us pray for God's blessing on each other

BLESSING:

May Christ, who out of defeat brings new hope and a new future, fill us with his new life; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be among us and remain with us always. Amen.

**(The Othona Psalms were composed by Colin Hodgetts for use in the Othona Community's chapels at its two centres in Burton Bradstock, Dorset, and Bradwell-on Sea, Essex. Print copies are available from Amazon.co.uk)*