

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 9 May 2021 – 6th Sunday of Easter

The service for today has been prepared by Liz Howlett, with prayers by Heather Goffee and can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley churches for the 6th Sunday of Easter.

Alleluia, Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed, alleluia!**

Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvellous things. He has remembered his mercy and faithfulness towards the house of Israel, and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. *Psalm 98: 1,4*

*Hymn: In our darkness light has shone
sung by St Martin's Voices*

In our darkness light has shone, Alleluia
still today the light shines on, Alleluia;
Word made flesh in human birth, Alleluia
Light and Life of all the earth, Alleluia!

3. All who now in him believe, Alleluia ,
everlasting life receive, Alleluia ;
born of God and in his care, Alleluia ,
we his Name and nature share, Alleluia !

2. Christ the Son incarnate see, Alleluia ,
by whom all things came to be, Alleluia ;
through the world his splendours shine,
Alleluia
full of grace and truth divine, Alleluia!

4. Christ a child on earth appears, Alleluia
crown of all creation's years, Alleluia ;
God's eternal Word has come, Alleluia ,
he shall lead his people home, Alleluia !

Invitation to Confession

Christ died to sin once for all, and now he lives to God. Let us renew our resolve to have done with all that is evil and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Prayers of Penitence

Lord Jesus, you raise us to new life.
Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Lord Jesus, you feed us with the living
bread.

Lord Jesus, you forgive us our sins.
Christ, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

Christ, have mercy.

Absolution

May the God of love and power forgive us and free us from our sins, heal and strengthen us by his Spirit, and raise us to new life in Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The 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.**

First Reading

Acts 10: 44 – end

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, “Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Gospel Reading

John 15: 9 – 17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Reflection

I wonder if you have had one or more of those experiences that changes your perspective on a situation or requires you completely to rethink your evaluation of another person, or perhaps a whole nation of people. It seems to be a powerful facet of human behaviour that we tend to focus on evidence that reinforces what we already think about a person or situation and so it

can require something with a really big impact on us for us to change our minds and behaviour.

Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles is the climax of one of the most significant passages in that book. The apostle Peter, a Jewish man, has, for the first time ever in his life, stepped into the home of a Gentile, Cornelius the Centurion. He needed a great deal of persuasion to do such a thing, as we shall see in a moment, so counter was it to his deep formation in his faith, quite contrary to the understanding he had of how he should live his life and relate to those outside of that faith. It wasn't a moral question – it wasn't a case of, 'I will not associate with you because I am better than you' – rather, Peter was living out of the deep sense that the Jews were the beloved children of God – they had been chosen by God and set apart. This had been the background in which Jesus and all the first disciples and followers had been formed.

This is such an exciting moment to witness and such a crucial event in the outworkings of God's good news! If Peter had not stepped over that threshold, we would not be here today, worshipping God and living our lives for God as we seek to do.

It really is worth reading the whole episode for yourselves – it is a great read! - but here is a recap for now, as we reflect on the meaning of this passage. This event takes place after Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Peter and the others gathered together in Jerusalem. Acts tells us that following on from this, Peter was one of those travelling about the wider area, preaching and teaching and healing in the name of Christ. We are also told that Cornelius the centurion, a God-fearing Gentile based in Caesarea, the Roman headquarters in Judaea, received a vision from God telling him to make contact with Peter and have him brought to him so that they could meet. The next day, as Cornelius' slaves were approaching the city where Peter was staying, Peter himself was praying on the flat roof of the house – perhaps because it was the quietest place he could find. As he prayed, Peter felt hungry and he too experienced a vision – for him the vision consisted of animals and birds that would have been considered unclean and yet in the vision, he hears a voice telling him to get up and kill and eat them. He objects strongly, saying that he has never eaten anything unclean. The voice responds, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane'. This same vision is repeated twice more and then the men sent by Cornelius are at the gate of the house, asking for Peter.

Peter travels with Cornelius' men to Caesarea and on their arrival Cornelius

greet him and for the first time in his life, Peter steps over the threshold into a Gentile home. This is what he says to those who have gathered there, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection'.

And it is on hearing Peter talk about the life, death and resurrection of Christ that Cornelius and those assembled with him receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, just like the apostles had on the day of Pentecost. Having seen this, Peter says 'Can anyone withhold the water for baptising these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?' And so they were baptised and Peter stayed with them for a number of days.

This is such a powerful example of how someone's whole way of viewing the world and themselves within it is fundamentally changed – what we might call a paradigm shift, perhaps. Peter had grown up with a deep sense of the chosen nature of his people, the Jews and the love received by them from God – not because they were good, but because they were chosen. In this event, we can see Peter's understanding shifting – he can see now that it is possible for these Gentile people, whom he would ordinarily have viewed as 'outside', to be also on the receiving end of God's love and bounty in just the same way – in other words, to be on the 'inside' with him. The hard boundaries between those formerly on the inside and outside are dissolved, so that thresholds that once had 'No Entry' signs on them, now have invitations to enter.

Let us pray... that we may be ready to have our own understandings of God, ourselves and others widened and deepened... that we may have the courage to cross the thresholds that separate us from those we see as being on the 'outside'...

Prayers by Heather Goffee

Loving Father of us all, your being is love and your desire is for us to grow in relationship with you. Bless us on our journey, that as we glorify you in praise and seek you in stillness, we may come to know you as the end of all our striving and come to experience you as our faithful companion on the way.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for our community, that you may strengthen all that is good within it. Renew our commitment to one another that in our everyday lives we may bear one another's burdens and rejoice to share in one another's joys.

Lord in your mercy **Hear our prayer.**

We pray for all today who are unwell. Touch with your healing balm those who are in need of restoration. Soothe their pain and bring them wholeness of body, mind and spirit through your power and through the work of all who may care for them.

Lord, in your mercy **Hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, you have delivered us from the power of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of your Son: grant that, as his death has recalled us to life, so his continual presence in us may raise us to eternal joy, through Christ our Lord. **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**

The Blessing

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

The Peace

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, 'Peace be with you'. Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.

The peace of the risen Lord be always with you
and also with you.

*Hymn: Name of all majesty
sung by St Martin's Voices*

1. Name of all majesty,
fathomless mystery,
King of the ages
by angels adored;
power and authority,
splendour and dignity,
bow to his mastery,
Jesus is Lord!

2. Child of our destiny,
God from eternity,
love of the Father
on sinners outpoured;
see now what God has done
sending his only Son,
Christ the beloved One,
Jesus is Lord!

3. Saviour of Calvary,
costliest victory,
darkness defeated
and Eden restored;
born as a man to die,
nailed to a cross on high,
cold in the grave to lie,
Jesus is Lord!

4. Source of all sovereignty,
light, immortality,
life everlasting
and heaven assured;
so with the ransomed, we
praise him eternally,
Christ in his majesty,
Jesus is Lord!

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