

BRIDE VALLEY TELEPHONE SERVICE FOR SUNDAY 2nd MAY 2021
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

We say together the words in bold

The Greeting

Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**
Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
He has given us new life and hope. He has raised Jesus from the dead.
Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

Opening Prayer

**Faithful one, whose word is life: come with saving power
To free our praise, inspire our prayer and shape our lives,
For the kingdom of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Prayers of Penitence

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. **Lord 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. **Lord hear us and help us.**

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.

In your mercy, forgive us. **Lord hear us and help us.**

Absolution

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

The 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

Acts 8:26-40

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

*'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.*

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

1 John 4.7-end

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning

sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Hymn: O Jesus I have promised

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end;
Be thou for ever near me,
My Master and my friend:
I shall not fear the battle
If thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

2. O let me hear thee speaking,
In accents clear and still,
Above the storms of passion,
The murmurs of self-will;
O speak to reassure me,
To hasten or control;
O speak and make me listen,
Thou guardian of my soul.

3. O Jesus, thou hast promised
To all who follow thee,
That where thou art in glory
There shall thy servant be;
And, Jesus, I have promised
To serve thee to the end:
O give me grace to follow,
My Master and my friend.

4. O let me see thy footmarks,
And in them plant mine own;
My hope to follow duly
Is in thy strength alone:
O guide me, call me, draw me,
Uphold me to the end;
And then in heaven receive me,
My Saviour and my friend.

*John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)
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Gospel Reading

John 15.1-8

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes* to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Sermon

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” 1 John 4.7

At the beginning of lockdown last year it didn't seem difficult to believe that love was the answer, we were out clapping for the NHS and everyone seemed to be looking out for one another, genuinely concerned for each other's welfare. That was at the beginning of a pandemic which has been going on for well over a year now. The cartoonist, Dave Walker has suggested some medals which we might have deserved this year: For grappling with technology, for coping without the people we love, for meeting outdoors even though it's chilly, or for just keeping going!

Thankfully, in this country at least, there are signs of hope and our scientists have been at the forefront of worldwide vaccination pioneering. Let's keep this going across the world. We have a responsibility to love one another and to want what's best for one another, surely.

But which comes first, love of God or love of our neighbour? Which is more important, being or doing? Instinctively we come down on one side or another. Some people hear the message as: good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom for the oppressed. Surely, this has to be the heart of the message of the gospel, improving life for society, they say. Yet others recognise that all of Jesus' activity arises out of his times of silence and prayer.

Today's readings, particularly the gospel and epistle, do not allow for it to be either/or. Instead they argue for it always being both.

The nature of God, which we contemplate with awe, but which he also draws us into. Being and doing are not separate when it comes to God, he is love and acts lovingly. For us humans, that is not always the case because unlike God we are not yet complete.

In contrast from this time last year we see the focus for our society has already shifted, just looking at the news each day we are back to being 'out to get' as opposed to supporting each other – it seems we are more interested in Meghan Markle and ... Boris Johnson's taste in décor than the fact that people in India are literally dying from lack of oxygen! And of course, there is also the renewed interest in racism. It's always there, the threat of loving someone different to ourselves.

If the story of Philip and the Ethiopian is true, if the post resurrection world really is a world where all are welcome, then we are going to have to change. A lot. Change is hard, it makes demands on our hearts, minds, on our lifestyles and liturgies that we might rather avoid. But that is the work of conversion. The Ethiopian was already reading Isaiah, he had the Bible in his hand, he wanted God and he had his questions ready for Philip. This is a stunning post Easter story, where Philip must have been changed as much, if not more than the Ethiopian by seeing the work of God's Holy Spirit unfold. Often when we are willing to come alongside our brothers and sisters, we learn far more from them than we would have realised.

The question for us today therefore as we look back on a year in which change has been inevitable, has nothing to do with the wideness of God's love or God's capacity to lead people to himself through baptism. The question has to be: Are you sure of God's love? Are you yourself ready and able to participate in the joyful post-Easter, post-resurrection, even post-pandemic work of God or not? Here is water, what is preventing you from stepping into it? **Amen.**

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christ has died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; he was buried; he was raised to life on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures; afterwards he appeared to his followers, and to all the apostles: this we have received, and this we believe. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Let us pray to the Lord God Almighty, in whom we live and move and have our being.

Father, we want to produce good fruit in abundance; nurture us as branches of the true vine, train and prune us where necessary, and may our spiritual harvest *make rich wine, wine of your kingdom.*

Silence

Your kingdom, let it come! **Your will, let it be done!**

Father, clearly we see around the world the tragic and expensive consequences of branches cut off from the true vine. We pray for a seeking after truth and a desire to act rightly and justly in all areas of human society.

Silence

Your kingdom, let it come! **Your will, let it be done!**

Father, we pray for those to whom we are linked by family, friendships or work; especially we pray for those separated from their loved ones or their home.

Silence

Your kingdom, let it come! **Your will, let it be done!**

Father, we long for healing and wholeness in all who suffer and in all dysfunctional communities; guide us to understand how we might be part of the healing.

Silence

Your kingdom, let it come! **Your will, let it be done!**

Father, we know that death cannot separate us from your love; in that knowledge we commend to your keeping those who have died and all who miss them.

Silence

Your kingdom, let it come! **Your will, let it be done!**

Father, we thank you that we can live in the joyful freedom of your love, as we dedicate ourselves to serving others.

Merciful Father, **accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.**

Gathering our prayers and praise into one, let us pray as our Saviour taught us:

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. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Gloria in Excelsis

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.

I, the Lord of sea and sky.,
I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand
will save.

I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

2. I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them

Hymn: I, the Lord of sea and sky

They turn away.

I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love along.
I will speak my word to them.

Whom shall I send? *Here I am, Lord ...*

3. I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.

I will set a feast for them.

My hand will save.

Finest bread I will provide
Till their hearts be satisfied.

I will give my life to them.

Whom shall I send? *Here I am, Lord ...*

Dan Schutte CCLI Licence No 2370586

Praise

Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He has given us new life and hope. He has raised Jesus from the dead.

God has claimed us as his own.

He has brought us out of darkness. He has made us light to the world.

Alleluia. Christ is risen. **He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

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 Lord be always with you **and also with you.**

Sources: New Patterns for Worship. Copyright @ The Archbishops' Council 2002. Intercessions adapted from Susan Sayers: Prayers of Intercession, 1999.