

The Bride Valley United Service for Sunday 29th May 2022

The Seventh Sunday of Easter/The Sunday after Ascension Day

Opening Sentences: The Lord is king! Let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!

(Psalm 97 verse 1)

Hymn: O Worship the King

1 O worship the King all glorious above;
O gratefully sing his power and his love;
our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,
pavilioned in splendour and girded with praise.

2 O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,
whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder clouds form,
and dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

3 Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
it streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
and sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

4 Frail children of dust and feeble as frail,
in thee do we trust, nor find thee to fail;
thy mercies how tender, how firm to the end!
our maker, defender, redeemer, and friend.

5 O measureless might, ineffable love,
while angels delight to hymn thee above,
thy humbler creation, though feeble their lays,
with true adoration shall sing to thy praise

William Kethe (fl.1559-1594), Robert Grant (1779-1838) (Public Domain)

Invitation to Confession

By the mercies of God, let us confess our sins and present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to him, which is our spiritual worship.

Prayers of Penitence

You raise the dead to life in the Spirit: Lord, have mercy. **Lord, have mercy.**

You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart: Christ, have mercy. **Christ, have mercy.**

You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided: Lord, have mercy. **Lord, 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.

Collect

O God the King of glory, you have exalted your only Son Jesus Christ with great triumph to your kingdom in heaven: we beseech you, leave us not comfortless, but send your Holy Spirit to strengthen us and exalt us to the place where our Saviour Christ is gone before, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Reading: Acts 16.16-34

One day, as we were going to the place of prayer, we met a slave girl who had a spirit of divination and brought her owners a great deal of money by fortune-telling. While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out, "These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation." She kept doing this for many days. But Paul, very much annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her owners saw that

their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace before the authorities. When they had brought them before the magistrates, they said, "These men are disturbing our city; they are Jews and are advocating customs that are not lawful for us as Romans to adopt or observe." The crowd joined in attacking them and the magistrates had them stripped of their clothing and ordered them to be beaten with rods. After they had given them a severe flogging, they threw them into prison and ordered the jailer to keep them securely. Following these instructions, he put them in the innermost cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was an earthquake, so violent that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's chains were unfastened. When the jailer woke up and saw the prison doors wide open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself, since he supposed that the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted in a loud voice, "Do not harm yourself, for we are all here." The jailer called for lights, and rushing in, he fell down trembling before Paul and Silas. Then he brought them outside and said, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They answered, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." They spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. At the same hour of the night he took them and washed their wounds; then he and his entire family were baptized without delay. He brought them up into the house and set food before them; and he and his entire household rejoiced that he had become a believer in God.

Gospel Reading: John 17. 20-end

'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

Reflection:

The Sunday after Ascension Day. The Sunday before Pentecost. Behind us is the life of Jesus, his death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension. In front of us is the unknown, the very new thing that God will do among his people.

How do the disciples feel in this sort of no-man's land in time?

They don't know how long they're going to be there. All they know is that in his physical form Jesus seems to have finally left them – taken up in the brilliance of the light of heaven – and that he has told them to wait in Jerusalem where God will come to them in a new way. I wonder how they're feeling?

Just think: three or four years ago they were living perfectly ordinary lives, like we do, with families, friends, village or neighbourhood communities and day to day routines that they followed almost without thinking just as we do.

Then this man, Jesus, told them to follow him and they did – they just did. They followed and saw and heard and experienced things they sometimes can still hardly believe.

And they loved him, they still do. All of them at some point or another they all said they'd be willing to die for him yet all of them failed him, some more spectacularly than others.

They lived through the tension, the mounting danger and the terrible execution that ended the life of their Lord in Jerusalem. They've lived with that terrible sense of loss and grief when life had no meaning or purpose, and their hearts were heavy, dreading the bleak future ahead of them.

Then the light of resurrection exploded around them. Jesus was alive again, talking with them, eating with them, teaching them. His appearances were unpredictable and sometimes very brief but after the initial shock none of them doubted the reality of his resurrection.

Now he's left them again and they're living with a renewed sense of loss. Not as sharp and bitter as the first but hard to bear all the same.

They don't know what's about to happen. They don't know about the great WHOOSH of mighty wind which will knock them off their feet. They don't know about the orange and red crackling flames of fire that will fill them with courage and conviction.

They've not yet experienced the Holy Spirit who is going to breathe new life into them, transforming them into the fullest being of themselves, alive with God's life and filled with his awesome, mighty Spirit.

For now they are in a "no-man's land" of time.

We've probably all experienced similar times – times that can be filled with uncertainty and anxiety.

Times when we've lost someone or left something behind but aren't yet ready or able to move on into the unknown.

Times between school or college and the world of work and careers.

Times of waiting ... for a birth ... or a death or a medical diagnosis; life-changing times and unplanned breaks in our way of life.

Perhaps we're in one of those times now and don't know where God is going to lead us next.

Experience tells me that very often we cannot move forward until we have put down the past and made a decision to move on. Just as the wind and fire of Pentecost descended only when the disciples knew that Jesus' time on earth really was over, so God can only lead us forward when we've stopped trying to hang on in an unhealthy way to the past.

I believe that if we give ourselves fully to "now" and "here", whatever that means for us, on the day of Pentecost, whenever that day is for us, we'll be ready to go forward again, ready to say yes to God's plan for us. And we don't need to be afraid of saying yes to God. God cares for us and protects us. He will not ask us to do anything he knows we are not yet ready and able to do with his help and guidance.

And God knows about our need for time: time to grieve; time to summon up courage; time to make big decisions. And he will allow us that time.

But sometimes he knows we need a bit of a push or a bit of a wake-up call to nudge us into action and he'll do that for us in ways we might least expect!

He may speak in the whoosh of a mighty wind, in the roar of tongues of flame or in the still small voice in the depths of our being. But he will speak, of that I have become certain, and when he does it will always be for the fulfilment of his loving purpose for each one of us and it will always lead us deeper into his eternal life.

Thanks be to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession

Gathered together in the love and fellowship of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit; let us pray for the church and for the world and let us thank God for his goodness.

Father of all, we, your church, give thanks and praise for all those, especially here in the Bride Valley who walk with us on our journey of faith. May we grow in grace that we shine as a light in the world. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

In the world we ask a blessing on the people who are suffering the effects of war. We ask that there may be an end to conflict between different races and religions. We pray for politicians throughout the world, that they may grow in wisdom and integrity.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for all churches throughout the world, that they may be places of inspiration, peace and consolation to those who enter. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**
Loving Lord; we know your presence with us always; in times of sadness and in times of joy. In times of health and in times of illness. We bring before you today all those who are sick in body or anguish of mind. In a moment of quiet we remember anyone known to us personally who needs our prayers today.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

We pray for all those among our families and friends who have died; those we love but see no longer. May they all rest in peace and rise in glory. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Rejoicing in the fellowship of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints and Angels, we commend ourselves and all people to God's unfailing love.

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

And now we join our prayers together in the words of the Lord's Prayer:

**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 the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Hymn: Crown him with many crowns

1 Crown him with many crowns,
the Lamb upon his throne;
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns
all music but its own:
Awake, my soul, and sing
of him who died for thee,
and hail him as thy matchless King
through all eternity.

2 Crown him the Lord of Love!
Behold his hands and side,
those wounds yet visible above
in beauty glorified:
no angel in the sky
can fully bear that sight,
but downward bends his burning eye
at mysteries so bright.

3 Crown him the Lord of peace,
whose power a sceptre sways
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,
and all be prayer and praise:
his reign shall know no end,
and round his piercèd feet
fair flowers of Paradise extend
their fragrance ever sweet.

4 Crown him the Lord of years,
the Potentate of time,
Creator of the rolling spheres,
ineffably sublime.
all hail, Redeemer, hail!
for thou hast died for me;
thy praise shall never, never fail
throughout eternity.

Matthew Bridges (1800-94)(Public Domain)

The Peace

God has made us one in Christ. He has set his seal upon us and, as a pledge of what is to come, He has given us the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. *(2 Corinthians 1.22)*

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

Today's service was prepared by the Reverend Jane Williams: Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is included in this service is copyright of The Archbishop's Council (2000)