

**Hello, and welcome to the Bride Valley Telephone service for Sunday 26 March 2023.**

**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent**

My name is Paul Cheater, and for those of you who don't know me, I'm one of the three Lay Worship Leaders in the Benefice. You may be interested to know that through the internet, I'm also a member of the Worship Ministry team at a church in Florida, and I'm sure friends from over there will be joining us. So whether you live in the Bride Valley, or Florida, or any other part of the world, you are most welcome and it's good to be able to share this service with you.

Before we begin our service, let's have a few moments of silence, so that we can prepare ourselves for worship.

***Silence.***

God of our days and years,  
we set this time apart for you.  
Form us in the likeness of Christ  
so that our lives may glorify you.

So we sing our first hymn, Praise my soul, the King of heaven.

***Hymn***

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|---|--|
| 1 Praise, my soul, the King of heaven;<br>to his feet thy tribute bring;<br>ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,<br>who like me his praise should sing?<br>Alleluia, alleluia,<br>praise the everlasting King. | 3 Father-like he tends and spares us;<br>well our feeble frame he knows;<br>in his hands he gently bears us,<br>rescues us from all our foes:<br>Alleluia, alleluia,<br>widely as his mercy flows. |
| 2 Praise him for his grace and favour<br>to our fathers in distress;<br>praise him still the same for ever,<br>slow to chide, and swift to bless:<br>Alleluia, alleluia,<br>glorious in his faithfulness.       | 4 Angels, help us to adore him,<br>ye behold him face to face;<br>sun and moon, bow down before him,<br>dwellers all in time and space:<br>Alleluia, alleluia,<br>praise with us the God of grace. |

*Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)*  
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Our first reading today comes from  
**THE EPISTLE**

*Galatians 4.21-end*

Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar— for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children— but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written: “Rejoice, O barren, You who do not bear! Break forth and shout, You who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children Than she who has a husband.” Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.” So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

And so let’s sing our second hymn, which is ‘For the beauty of the earth’. There are two tunes to this hymn, and I’ve chosen the one called England’s Lane, as to me its rather jaunty rhythm suggests that spring has arrived and the countryside is waking up!

**Hymn**

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| 1 For the beauty of the earth,<br>for the beauty of the skies,<br>for the love which from our birth<br>over and around us lies:<br><i>Lord of all, to thee we raise<br/>this our sacrifice of praise.</i>          | 3 For the joy of human love,<br>brother, sister, parent, child,<br>friends on earth, and friends above,<br>for all gentle thoughts and mild:<br><i>Lord of all, to thee we raise<br/>this our sacrifice of praise.</i> |
| 2 For the beauty of each hour<br>of the day and of the night,<br>hill and vale, and tree and flower,<br>sun and moon and stars of light:<br><i>Lord of all, to thee we raise<br/>this our sacrifice of praise.</i> | 4 For each perfect gift of thine<br>to our race so freely given,<br>graces human and divine,<br>flowers of earth and buds of heaven:<br><i>Lord of all, to thee we raise<br/>this our sacrifice of praise.</i>         |

*Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835-1917)*

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**t. John 6.1-14**

JESUS went over the sea of Galilee, which is the sea of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the Passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh. When Jesus then lift up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? (And this he said to prove him; for he himself knew what he would do.) Philip answered him, Two hundred penny-worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley-loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes, as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley-loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, now for ever. Amen

If you were listening to Gardeners' Question Time on Friday afternoon, you will have heard the programme's presenter and former weather-forecaster, Peter Gibbs, quote from Anne Bronte's lovely poem 'The Bluebell'

There is a silent eloquence  
In every wild bluebell  
That fills my softened heart with bliss  
That words could never tell.

Those of you who know me will probably be aware that my horticultural prowess is not, perhaps, one of the stronger suits of my skill-set, although I do cut a decent lawn. However, I do get great pleasure and joy from our garden, and often follow Monty Don's advice, which is simply to sit in it and take in all that is around us.

For the past three years, the news has been pretty awful and alarming. First the pandemic struck, and we all had to adapt to a curious new world. All that we had taken for granted suddenly changed, not least as far as church attendance was concerned, when we found that our much-loved places of worship were closed. When they re-opened, we found

ourselves wearing masks, sanitising our hands, and social-distancing as we struggled to rediscover, in some form, things that had been taken from us. Thank the Lord those days are now behind us.

Now, with the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, and we hear a continual stream of distressing news of the awfulness and the distress all that is happening in a part of the world that is uncomfortably close to our own. The scenes of ruined villages, towns and cities, and grieving families mourning the loss of their loved ones and their homes is sometimes too much to bear.

It all seems a very long way from Anne Brontë's words about the silent eloquence of the bluebell, and as I sit among the wonderful flowers and plants of our garden I wonder what right I have to be so comfortable as others suffer tragedies beyond words. It seems very hard to try and find anything good or positive. Where is the so-called 'Good News'?

But as I sit and consider it all, I realise that there are positive signs all around me. The whole garden is beginning to come to life: buds and signs of colour are appearing; blossom is on the apple trees and the grass is growing again. To me, it's all a metaphor for that most under-valued virtue: hope.

Can there be any hope as we return from our gardens and turn on the television news? Well, perhaps we should not lose sight of that other theological virtue: faith. And with faith and hope in mind, let's think a little more deeply.

History shows us that it is often in the most crushing darkness that God shines the most radiant light. In the heart of horror, God often responds by shining a ray of love.

as the young Canadian theologian, Julian Paparella, writes:

'The *modus operandi* of God is not simply to observe the suffering of the world as an indifferent bystander. God makes Himself close. He Himself tells us: "Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you". His faithfulness is not extinguished by the darkness of the world: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." God opens a way even where there is none. The life that God gives us conquers even death itself.'

And now that we're out of it, what have we learnt about the pandemic? Has any good come out of that? Well, yes. Here are just five things: First, leaders have learnt to trust employees; secondly, technology has been embraced in new ways, especially by the

church; we have learned who and what matter to us most; and finally, we've thought more about others rather than ourselves.

So as we watch the news and hope and pray for peace and a more settled world, perhaps we can remember that the Creator of the universe was born as a persecuted baby under a ruthless regime of oppression. The Holy Family was forced to flee their homeland, threatened by the bloodthirsty King Herod. Christ was put to death under the flag of the Roman empire. Jesus declared the persecuted as "blessed", and the victory of the resurrection opens a path of life, even in the grip of death. So, when we are in our gardens, seeing the new life all around us, let's remember faith - and hope – and love.

Let me give the final word to Anne Bronte, as I read the first stanza of her poem in full:

A fine and subtle spirit dwells  
In every little flower,  
Each one its own sweet feeling breathes  
With more or less of power.  
There is a silent eloquence  
In every wild bluebell  
That fills my softened heart with bliss  
That words could never tell.

Amen

And so to our prayers. Let's pray.

Lord, you have generously blessed us with an abundance of gifts. Help us to share in that generosity by living in a way that ensures that your gifts will continue to be available for future generations. Lord in your mercy – hear our prayer.

Creator God, we rejoice that, as human beings, we have been created in your image and likeness. But we also recognise that humanity alone cannot adequately reflect you. The whole diversity of the earth is needed to give us even a glimpse of your wonder and greatness. Help us to live in a way that enables this remarkable diversity to be respected. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer.

O Lord God, we live in a world where some throw out food while others go to bed hungry; where some have modern amenities of life at their disposal and other struggle to find drinking water. May we learn to share with one another and, in this way, come to share in your generosity to all. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

Heavenly Father, living where we do, and especially at this time, we are very aware that the sun, the wind and the waves are your gift for the flourishing of the whole community

of life on earth. May we use those gifts wisely, at all times. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

Especially in this part of the world, Lord, we ask for your blessing on our farmers and those who work with them in order to feed the nation. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

Lord, through scientists, engineers and scholars, new knowledge comes to light; may new developments in the production of sustainable energy protect our fragile planet and promote the well-being of all peoples and all creatures on their journey to wholeness. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer.

We pray for our King, and for all heads of state and international leaders, that they may be guided by your Spirit to make wise decisions. We continue to pray especially for the people of Ukraine, and the people of Afghanistan, as we do for all your people who are suffering the horrors of war. O God, give us your love for the whole of Creation – and in your mercy – Hear our prayer.

Creator God, You have blessed humankind with understanding, imagination and memory. We pray that you may show us how to learn from past mistakes and plan for the future creatively and responsibly. Lord in your mercy – Hear our prayer

We pray, Lord, for our schools, colleges and universities. Be with the students and their teachers as they pursue their studies, and whether they rejoice in their successes or find things challenging. May they know that You are with them at all times.

Closer to home, we pray for all who are privileged to live in this beautiful part of the world, adults and children alike. Help us never to take our region for granted, and to do all we can to look after it as we should.

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

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 final hymn is Glorious things of Thee are spoken, and I've chosen the tune Abbots Leigh, because it was composed by the Rev Cyril Taylor, former vicar of Cerne Abbas, and no doubt when he did so he had the Dorset countryside in mind.

## **Hymn**

1 Glorious things of thee are spoken,  
Zion, city of our God;  
He whose word cannot be broken,  
formed thee for his own abode.  
On the Rock of Ages founded,  
what can shake thy sure repose?  
With salvation's walls surrounded,  
thou may'st smile at all thy foes.

2 See, the streams of living waters,  
springing from eternal love.  
well supply thy sons and daughters,  
and all fear of want remove.  
Who can faint while such a river,  
ever flows their thirst to assuage?  
Grace which, like the Lord, the giver,  
never fails from age to age.

3 Saviour, if of Zion's city  
I, through grace, a member am.  
Let the world deride or pity,  
I will glory in thy name.  
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
boasted pomp and empty show.  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
none but Zion's children know.

*John Newton (1725 -1807)*

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, now and forever. Amen. [¶](#)