

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 23rd April 2023 – 3rd Sunday of Easter

The service can be accessed by phone on Sunday morning on **01308 293062**.

Welcome to this act of worship for the Bride Valley Benefice for the 3rd Sunday of Easter, which has been put together by Liz Howlett, and includes liturgy from the Iona Community.

In the beginning, before time, before people, before the world began, **God was.**

Here and now, among us and beside us, clearer than air, closer than breathing, **God is.**

In all that is to come, when we have turned to dust and human knowledge has been completed, **God will be.**

Not despairing of earth, but delighting in it, not condemning the world, but redeeming it through Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, **God was, God is, God will be.**

Hymn: Now the Green Blade Riseth

1 Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;
love lives again, that with the dead has been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

2 In the grave they laid him, Love whom men had slain,
thinking that he never would awake again,
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

3 Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,
he that for the three days in the grave had lain,
back from the dead my risen Lord is seen:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

4 When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,
then your touch can call us back to life again,
fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

John Macleod Campbell Crum (1872-1958) © Oxford University Press

Prayer

In the beauty of the earth, in the silence of our hearts, in the community of your church, in all acts of grace and kindness, in forgiving from the heart and in worship from the soul, your Spirit confirms the truth in which we seek to live.

If knowing this, we have failed to love you, our Maker, been hesitant to follow your Son, and suspected the power of your Spirit, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

If we have desired comfort more than devotion and if we have satisfied our wants more than we have served your will, Christ have mercy. **Christ have mercy.**

If we have limited our company to those like us and if we have restricted our conversation to matters of no consequence, Lord have mercy. **Lord have mercy.**

May the God of love bring us back to himself, forgive us our sins, and assure us of his eternal love in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The Collect

Risen Christ, you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope: strengthen us to proclaim

your risen life and fill us with your peace, to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

First Reading: Acts 2: 14, 36-41

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah."

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

Gospel Reading: Luke 24: 13 – 35

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"

"What things?" he asked. "About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.

They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"

They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.

Reflection: Three Mile an Hour God, or, Nothing can be Loved at Speed

If you have ever been in the company of small children, you will have experienced that slowing down which is required as they walk along the pavement. For them, the journey is just as fascinating and filled with wonder as the destination – perhaps more so for them, depending upon where you are going! You may have walked this same pavement hundreds of times before, with your mind on other things. But walking with small people means you have to slow down, you have to walk at their pace

and this can be very slow at times, as they discover for the first time the wonders all around them. The flowers growing in next door's garden, the moss on the wall, the shiny piece of paper on the ground, which you can barely see, the planes up above, which are named each one as they fly over, leaving the white trail in the sky. Don't get me wrong – I like what cars and trains offer in terms of getting to and fro, but slowing down to walk at the pace of another, to experience the world as they do, to pay attention to the small things – that is really important too. I wonder if any of you are familiar with the prayers of Michael Leunig. He is an Australian who writes prayers and creates little drawings to accompany them. This is one of his prayers:

Dear God, we pray for another way of being: another way of knowing. Across the difficult terrain of our existence, we have attempted to build a highway and in so doing have lost our footpath. God, lead us to our footpath: lead there where in simplicity we may move at the speed of natural creatures and feel the earth's love beneath our feet. Lead us where step-by-step we may feel the movement of creation in our hearts. And lead us there where side-by-side we may feel the embrace of the common soul. Nothing can be loved at speed. God, lead us to the slow path; to the joyous insights of the pilgrim; another way of knowing: another way of being. Amen.

I wonder if this prayer resonates with you. It certainly makes me reflect on our gospel reading for today and more widely on how Jesus goes about appearing to his disciples after his resurrection. How strange Jesus' strategy seems to be – if indeed it is a strategy – an empty tomb, sightings so out of the ordinary that to begin with his friends don't recognise him. Surely there could have been quicker, more efficient ways of convincing followers... and yet... he slows down – nothing can be loved at speed – and moves at their pace, at their walking pace, as he has always done.

The two disciples in our gospel reading, Cleopas (and perhaps the other unnamed one is his wife), are despondent, they are desolate, for they have had all their hopes dashed by Jesus' death. Now the Sabbath rest is over, they are walking away from the scene – perhaps it is just too painful for them to stay around, perhaps they are scared that the soldiers will come for them next. They have heard the women recount their experience of the empty tomb at the start of the day, but it isn't enough to keep Cleopas and his companion in Jerusalem. Then, in the midst of their despair, they find this seeming stranger has joined them and engages them in conversation as they walk along. Jesus, the risen Christ, continues to journey with them at their speed: he asks them why they look so sad, and they pour out their dashed hopes, their longings – all that they had pinned on Jesus. He could have approached this encounter so differently; he could have immediately revealed himself to them and compelled them to return to Jerusalem, but he doesn't. He hears their story and having berated them a bit for being slow to grasp what is happening, he then takes time to interpret their scriptures for them to help them understand, as they go along together, still walking away from Jerusalem. And as he was talking, their hearts were burning within them. What they were hearing wasn't just information for their minds, this was food for their hearts and souls!

Not once does Jesus, the risen Christ, suggest they turn back – he doesn't even look as if he will stop when they do, once Emmaus has been reached. It is they who urge him to stay and at the meal, it is in the very homely act of breaking and blessing the bread that they finally recognise him for who he is. And now, they can't wait to return to Jerusalem! To re-join their companions and to tell them their experience and what had been revealed to them.

The walk to Emmaus was an act of love. It was a walk at the speed of love.

The Japanese writer and theologian Kosuke Koyama believes that for humans, three miles an hour is the speed of love. This is what he says:

'Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is 'slow' yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love. It goes on in the depth of our life, whether we notice or not, whether we are currently hit by storm or not, at three miles an hour. It is the speed we walk and therefore it is the speed the love of God walks.' Amen.

*Hymn: **Light of the Minds that Know Him***

1 Light of the minds that know him,
may Christ be light to mine!
My sun in risen splendour,
my light of truth divine;
my guide in doubt and darkness,
my true and living way,
my clear light ever shining,
my dawn of heaven's day.

3 Strength of the wills that serve him,
may Christ be strength to me,
who stilled the storm and tempest,
who calmed the tossing sea;
his Spirit's power to move me,
his will to master mine,
his cross to carry daily
and conquer in his sign.

2 Life of the souls that love him,
may Christ be ours indeed!
The living bread from heaven
on whom our spirits feed;
who died for love of sinners
to bear our guilty load,
and make of life's brief journey
a new Emmaus road.

4 May it be ours to know him
that we may truly love,
and loving, fully serve him
as serve the saints above;
till in that home of glory
with fadeless splendour bright,
we serve in perfect freedom
our strength, our life, our light.

Timothy Dudley-Smith (born 1926) from a prayer of Saint Augustine CCLI Licence 2370586

Prayer: Let us pray

May it not be long, Lord...

May it not be long, Lord, before the world we pray for and the world we inhabit are one.

May it not be long before the earth no longer suffers through human selfishness, so that the valleys can sing again, the meadows laugh and barren places burst into bloom. **May it not be long.**

May it not be long, Lord, before the domination of wealth over want, male over female, white over black, the privileged over the poor, be facts of history, not facts of life. **May it not be long.**

May it not be long, Lord, before spears are turned into pruning forks and all the peoples of the world are able to live in peace and harmony with one another. **May it not be long.**

May it not be long, Lord, before we vacate the places of fear and anxiety and find wells of hope and peace, deeper than shallow pools of optimism. **May it not be long. 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

Closing Responses

Now may God who gives seed to the sower and corn to the reaper, give to us all that we need to produce a good harvest.

May God make us fertile in faith, hope and love, and take us out with joy and lead us on in peace, as signs of the fruitfulness of heaven. Amen.

Anthem: Hallelujah chorus - Handel

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, is copyright The Archbishop's Council (2000). *A Wee Worship Book: Fifth Incarnation*, is copyright The Wild Goose Resource Group (2015). Michael Leunig, *When I Pray to You*, (Harper Collins 2014), p53. Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God*, (SCM Press 1979), p7.