

THE BRIDE VALLEY CHURCHES:

Telephone Service for Sunday 14th May 2023 – 6th 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 6th Sunday of Easter, which has been put together by Liz Howlett, using liturgy from the Iona Community and with intercessions written by Sue Taylor, one of the churchwardens at Holy Trinity Swyre.

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.**

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

Hymn: The king of love my shepherd is

1 The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

2 Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.

3 Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me

4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.

5 Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!

6 And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877) Public Domain

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, 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 17: 22 – 31

Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: “People of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you.

“The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being. ‘As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’

“Therefore since we are God’s offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone—an image made by human design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead.”

Gospel Reading John 14: 15 – 21

Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

Reflection

‘In God we live and move and have our being.’

This is a sentence from Paul’s speech to the people in Athens, as we heard in our first reading this morning. They are important words which I will be returning to later, but as we begin to reflect together now, I wonder what strikes you about our reading from Acts. For me, one of the things that interests me is this – how on earth did Paul, a Jew from Asia, wind up, over so many borders, in Europe, in Athens in Greece?

The book of the Acts of the Apostles tells how people’s lives were turned upside down arising from the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We might think of those who were on the receiving end of the message, the good news, and of course their lives would have been changed, one way or another, depending on how they received what they heard. But I am focussing more on how Paul and other followers of Christ found themselves embarking on projects and journeys entailing danger, risk to life and limb and perhaps most importantly, how they felt impelled to step out beyond old boundaries and old ways of viewing the world and the people within it. Their lives were changed out of all recognition. Nothing in their former lives had prepared them for this revolution. In the former life, there were clear distinctions between peoples of different ethnicities – Jews and Greeks, between different gender identities – male and female, between people of different status – slave and free. These clear distinctions were part of how the ancient world worked, people knew their place in the pecking order. You knew who you would talk to and who you would not dream of engaging in conversation with. Therefore, anything that challenged that status quo was bound to cause disturbances. Paul and the others, who were captivated by the message of Christ, were discovering that following Christ wasn’t just a change of inner beliefs – it was changing for ever how they viewed

the world and all humans within it – and their whole way of living. This is how Paul, a Jew, turns up in Athens, the ancient centre of the Greek world.

‘In God we live and move and have our being.’

In the few verses before our passage, we are told that as Paul went round the city, it really distressed him to see so many idols to the pagan gods. I wonder if he was tempted to turn around and not bother to engage with these alien people. How on earth could he find a way to talk with people so different from himself? Yet he stepped over that threshold and ended up getting an invitation to speak in a place where many people were gathered to hear what he had to say. And he finds key ways of making connections. One of the shrines that he had come across in the city was dedicated ‘to an unknown god’. He tells the crowd that the god they say they don’t know is in fact the creator of all things, themselves included, so this is a god who is actually nearer to them than they had realised. And that sentence which I keep coming back to – ‘In God we live and move and have our being’ – it sounds biblical doesn’t it? In fact, it is almost certainly a sentence from one of their own ancient writers, living 600 years before them. There were glimpses of this creator God in their own culture centuries ago.

‘In God we live and move and have our being.’

I wonder what strikes you about this little sentence. This is a God who has drawn near to all that has been created. There is no sense here of a God who sets things off and leaves creation alone to struggle on. We and all creation are in God – there is no boundary. This resonates with some words of Jesus in our gospel passage, ‘On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.’ He is talking about the coming of the Spirit. There will come a time when the disciples will not see Jesus in the flesh anymore, but what he is saying is that the connection between him and them will be even deeper than anything they have experienced with him up to now. They will be in him and he will be in his Father and he will be in them as well. Such a deep connectedness – not earned by merit, not a prize for being good, but a gift of love from creator to created beings. Isn’t that something to rejoice at?

I want to finish with some words from James Finley. He is a modern mystic – he was a monk in his youth, with Thomas Merton and then left the monastery and became a spiritual director and psychotherapist. He has a deep sense of this connectedness of God and the whole of creation and he expresses that in this way...

‘...when we are born and take in our first breath, God is exhaling himself, whole and complete in and as the gift and miracle of our very life. We move on in our passage through time, sustained by God, inhaling/exhaling, inhaling/exhaling through all our days. Then, when the moment of death finally arrives, we exhale and do not inhale. And in our final exhalation God inhales us back into the infinite depths of God, which is our true and eternal home.’ (James Finley, *The Healing Path*, (Orbis: 2023) p10)

‘In God we live and move and have our being.’ Amen.

Hymn: How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

1 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
in a believer's ear!

It soothes his sorrows, heals his wounds,
and drives away his fear.

2 It makes the wounded spirit whole,
and calms the troubled breast;
'tis manna to the hungry soul,
and to the weary rest.

3 Dear name! the rock on which I build,
my shield and hiding-place,
my never-failing treasury filled
with boundless stores of grace.

4 Jesus! my Shepherd, Husband, Friend,
my Prophet, Priest, and King,
my Lord, my Life, my Way, my End,
accept the praise I bring.

5 Weak is the effort of my heart,
and cold my warmest thought;
but when I see thee as thou art,
I'll praise thee as I ought.

6 Till then I would thy love proclaim
with every fleeting breath;
and may the music of thy name
refresh my soul in death.

Prayers by Sue Taylor

In this precious time of quiet, in the stillness, let us pray together, for friends, family and communities throughout the world.

Gracious Lord, we give thanks for the joy of those many quiet acts of kindness and generosity each day. They encourage and sustain us when our life's journey seems daunting and difficult. In the Bride Valley Benefice, we ask a blessing on all our clergy and congregations as we wait with hope for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our Prayer**

In the world we pray for those countries where there is conflict, The Sudan, Palestine, Ukraine, Myanmar. That their peoples may have relief from violence, oppression and fear.

Lord in your Mercy **Hear our Prayer**

Father of All; we ask a blessing on all those who are sick; those in hospital, in care or at home, grant that they may be aware of your enfolding love. We remember also those who have died and completed their journey here on earth.

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 Gods unfailing love.

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

Chant: Halle, halle, hallelujah

Halle, halle, hallelujah!

Halle, halle, hallelujah!

Halle, halle, hallelujah!

Hallelujah, hallelujah!

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