



## 7th Sunday of Easter 16 May 2021

### Welcome

Welcome to worship on the 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, the last Sunday before Pentecost. This means that next week the three churches in the pastorate will be open again for worship in their church buildings. Yes, along with the country “opening up” after lockdown, so we are opening up, even though we were never “closed,” just that we could not gather in the place of worship which is the church building. But we certainly have learned over the months and year of lockdowns that while the church building is much loved, well cared for and a good place to gather in for worship and fellowship, the church really is the people! And as God’s people we worship once more, each in our own homes and we proclaim: *The wonders of creation, the splendour of the heavens, the beauty of the earth, the order and richness of nature, all speak to us of God’s glory. The coming of Jesus Christ, the presence of the Spirit and the fellowship of the church show us the marvel of God’s love.* And so let us worship in gladness and with expectation.....

### Hymn

All creatures of our God and king

### Prayer

Every part of creation is a hymn of praise to your greatness, O God.  
Every person is a statement of your claiming love in Christ.  
We rejoice in your creation and in the gift of your faithfulness.  
We give you thanks for your living presence in Jesus Christ that revealed your purposes for our lives and the lives of all living creatures.  
We praise you for the glimpse of your kingdom that we may catch, the resonance of your voice that we can hear and the experience of your Spirit that we can feel in our time of worship and throughout our lives.  
We pray that this time of worship be a blessing and that we, in turn, may be a blessing to others. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### Scripture Reading

John 17: 6-19

### Reflection

Tomorrow, the 17<sup>th</sup> of May, lockdown restrictions we have lived with for the past months, and on and off for more than a year, will be lifted. Beside that we can meet indoors with family and friends, and even hug them, we are also allowed to travel abroad again. For some that is a long-awaited freedom, for others it will make no difference as they have no travel plans or have settled for a holiday in the UK. But whatever we are planning, or not, certainly the holidays are a hot topic of conversation these days. Many of us are keen for a break, “to get away from it all”.....from work, from school, from boredom perhaps, an escape from the routine of our (lockdown) lives, a respite from the news that we are daily bombarded with, a time of retreat from the world’s pressures. Of course, a holiday is only a temporary escape but a more permanent withdrawal from the world has held a particular appeal for Christians all through history. There have always been those within the Christian community who have been suspicious of the world and have set their sights on eternity rather than life in the world in the here and now. This goes back all the way to the early Christians who were influenced by the dualistic thinking of the ancient Greeks who believed that reality is divided in matter and spirit, the world divided in the secular and the sacred, and people in body and soul. And it was self-evident which of the two was better! While many were influenced by that Greek dualistic way of thinking, Jesus was not. He was a Jew, and Judaism, distinct from Greek dualism, holds that there are not two different realms, but one. The world is a holy place. God is found in the world and holiness is in life lived in the world. Instead of retreat from the world, Jesus wants his followers to be in the world, to live in the midst of all the complexities of the world, to engage with the world, with all of its pressures, in other words, to love the world as God loved the world and in serving the world to experience joy. And so, in the reading in John’s gospel, Jesus is praying for his disciples as his end is drawing near. He asks God to protect them, to keep them united, to give them joy in their life and work. *“I am not asking you to take them out of the world. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.”*

Just like Jesus was sent *into* the world, so his followers are. But it was not easy for the community John was addressing in his gospel because their world was hostile and dangerous. As they were being persecuted

the early Christians would have been very weary and ready to give up on the world. Who would blame them? And we also, at times, may be overcome with weariness and feelings of powerlessness and despair.....despair that we seem so inadequate as we face the many problems in the world, presently of the pandemic but also of continuing conflict, violence, injustice as well as a climate crisis that is affecting and will affect so many communities around the world. If only we could take a break from it all!

But Jesus, in his prayer, gives his disciples a message on how to persevere, even when faced with overwhelming challenges, as they are to be *in* the world even if not *of* the world; as they are to be Christ's presence in the world. And down the ages Jesus' message comes to us. In the words of Teresa of Avila, "*Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands but yours; no feet but yours. Yours are the eyes through which the compassion of Christ must look out on the world. Yours are the feet with which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless his people.*" And that is the joyful life Jesus refers to when he prays for his disciples to share in his joy. It is life lived in the world, a life of service, engaged in the world and concerned with people's lives. It is recognizing the holy in the ordinary, having a real sense of Christ's presence and being and living the good news that we proclaim. Yes, we may need a break once in a while, to get away from it all and to be refreshed and re-energized, but upon our return the world will be still waiting for us, to be loved and to serve.....

Amen

## **Hymn**

Make me a channel of your peace

## **Prayers**

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the springtime, the longer daylight hours, the beauty of creation for us to see and enjoy. We are thankful that after months of lockdown the restrictions in our country can be gradually lifted and we are able to enjoy the company of family and friends once again, not only outdoors but also indoors.

For the ways that you have carried us through difficult days, and for the people who have been channels of your love and comfort, we thank you.

In our prayers, we remember those who are ill or in hospital..... May they know your healing touch. We remember those who are mourning.... May they know your comfort. We remember those who are struggling with depression and loneliness... May we bring them hope and joy.

We pray for the world, for reconciliation where there is disunity and for peace where there is conflict. And we think especially of the Middle East and the escalation of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

We pray for health and healing in the countries and for the people that continue to be very much affected by the pandemic. And we think especially of the countries where the infection rates are still very high or rising. We pray for the health care workers that they may find the strength to carry on in their caring and for the sick and their families, that they may find the attention and treatment they need.

O God, help us to be an answer to the prayers we pray, and may your love flow through us and touch the people we pray for.....And we say together...OUR FATHER

### **Offering**

Loving God, we offer our gifts as a sign of our gratitude for creating us to care for one another. We pray your blessings upon these gifts, and hope they will be a witness to your healing and faithful love for all. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

### **Hymn**

We are one in the Spirit

### **Blessing**

May the blessing of God be with us, as we are united in Spirit, as we recognise Christ in friend and stranger, as we serve the needs of the world by doing justice, loving kindness and walking humbly with God. Amen