

Basingstoke and Reading Circuit Service: 10th May 2020

prepared by Judy Davies: feel free to adapt as you wish!

Welcome to our worship. You may be alone at home, or with members of your immediate family; you may be reading this service quietly or following it with others online; but know that you are part of a wider group of sisters and brothers who are worshipping with you. Above all, remember that our loving God, who raised Jesus from the dead, is with you now to bring new life and hope this Eastertide.

Let us begin our worship with words of praise:

**Lord, touch our lips:
that we may sing your praise with all our hearts.**

**We greet you risen Lord! Alleluia!
You have conquered sin and death! Alleluia!**

**Glory to God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit:
mystery of love behind, through and beyond all things.**

**Rejoice, heaven and earth! Exult, all creation!
Jesus Christ is risen! Alleluia!**

https://youtu.be/Mglx_0jhW1Y

StF 311: The day of resurrection

The day of resurrection,
Earth, tell it out abroad!
the Passover of gladness,
the Passover of God!
From death to life eternal,
from earth unto the sky,
our Christ has brought us over,
with hymns of victory.

Our hearts be pure from evil,
that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal
of resurrection light;
and listening to his accents,
may hear, so calm and plain,
his own "All hail!" and, hearing,
may raise the victor strain.

Now let the heavens be joyful,
Let earth her song begin!
The round world keep high triumph,
and all that is therein;
Let all things seen and unseen
their notes of gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord hath risen,
our joy that has no end.

Let us pray.

Gracious God, creator of us all, we come to worship you.
You are holy beyond our imagining, yet in your love you have reached out to us and called us by name. We are your people, and we offer you our adoration and praise.

We praise you for all the blessings of this life:
for the wonder and wildness of your creation;
for the invisible bonds of love and friendship which sustain us;
for the everyday joys which lift our spirits and speak to us of you.

Above all, we praise you for Jesus, our brother and our Saviour:
for his life of love and service among us;
for his suffering and death upon the cross;
for his glorious resurrection, which assures us that there is nothing that can ever separate us from your love.

Fill our hearts, we pray, with the transforming joy of Easter; that our lives may overflow with wonder, love and praise.

Gracious God, we call to mind our sins: our failures to be the people you have called us to be and that, deep down, we long to be. Forgive us when we live as if you were not there, or as if you did not matter. Forgive us when we close our eyes and hearts to others, forgetting that they are just as precious to you as we are.

Silence

Gracious God, your boundless love fashions from the dead-ends of our lives your new beginnings. Restore and remake us through your Spirit and set us free to proclaim your praise in thought, word and deed.

We offer our prayers through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Reflection

In these strange times, have you been more aware of the birds singing? If you wish, take a moment after the service (or now!) to stand by an open window or go out into the garden, and just *listen*. Here's one of the commonest birds you may recognise...

<https://youtu.be/Nrw9xPCFtYw>

It's easy to imagine that the birds are singing more right now, or at least more loudly; but in fact it's just that we are usually too busy to hear them. Some ornithologists think that birds in urban settings are even singing more quietly at the moment, because they don't have to make such an effort to be heard above the traffic! The birds are here, singing their wonderfully varied songs, whether we're aware of them or not; but when we stop and listen, we become more attuned to them and to the wonder of the created world all around us.

God is always present, always close to us, whether we're aware of it or not. But perhaps at this time, which in many ways feels so restrictive and in which we can't engage in our usual activities, we have a precious opportunity really to stop – listen – and become more attuned to the God who loves us.

We'll now sing a hymn which asks God to speak to us through the words of the Bible:

<https://youtu.be/HEzClRz3UeE>

StF 161: Speak, O Lord, as we come to you

Speak, O Lord, as we come to you
To receive the food of Your Holy Word.
Take Your truth, plant it deep in us;
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness,
That the light of Christ might be seen today
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith.
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us
All Your purposes for Your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience,
Holy reverence, true humility;
Test our thoughts and our attitudes
In the radiance of Your purity.
Cause our faith to rise; cause our eyes to see
Your majestic love and authority.
Words of power that can never fail—
Let their truth prevail over unbelief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds;
Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us.
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
That will echo down through eternity.
And by grace we'll stand on Your promises,
And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us.
Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
And the earth is filled with Your glory.

Readings

First we read a psalm which speaks of the Lord who continually watches over us:

Psalm 121 (StF 830)

Our gospel reading from John records Jesus' words of reassurance to his disciples, as his death approaches:

John 14: vs 1-14

<https://youtu.be/-QcvRvE7Z2s>

This recording is of the MAYC orchestra and singers. Please note that they reverse the order of verses 2 and 3 found in Singing the Faith!

StF 492: Christ be my leader by night as by day

Christ be my leader by night as by day;
safe through the darkness for he is the way.
Gladly I follow, my future his care,
darkness is daylight when Jesus is there.

Christ be my teacher in age as in youth,
drifting or doubting, for he is the truth.
Grant me to trust him; though shifting as sand,
doubt cannot daunt me; in Jesus I stand.

Christ be my Saviour in calm as in strife;
death cannot hold me, for he is the life.
Nor darkness nor doubting nor sin and its stain
can touch my salvation: with Jesus I reign.

Reflection

Our gospel reading forms part of what Bible scholars sometimes call the "farewell discourses" between Jesus and his disciples. They have just shared a last supper together, where Jesus has told them that he is going to die and that they will desert

him, and this has shaken them to the core. Now, John pictures Jesus saying some final, farewell words to his anxious friends.

Goodbyes are never easy, for any of us; but sometimes they can concentrate our minds on the stuff that really matters, what we need to say to the people we love. In this passage Jesus shares with his disciples the stuff that really matters; it's as if he is saying: "Whatever you do, whatever happens, remember *this*". He longs to reassure them, so that their hearts "will not be troubled" (v1).

So what does he tell them? simply, to **trust** him. "Trust in God; trust also in me" (v1). Trust can be a scary thing for us, because it involves a kind of letting go, putting our life in someone else's hands. The Christian writer Henri Nouwen talks about our life with God through the image of trapeze artists, where it is the catcher (God) who has to do all the work while the flyer (you and me) has simply to let go. Nouwen writes: "Don't try to grab him; he will grab you. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust, trust, trust."

And what is the basis for this trust? Jesus tells his disciples that *they are not alone*; that wherever they are, he will be too. We're all familiar with these verses from our gospel reading: "I go to prepare a place for you; and when I go and prepare a place for you I will come again, and take you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also" (v2-3). These beautiful words are often used at funeral services, and rightly, because they assure us that beyond this life there is a place prepared for us and those we love in God's eternal presence. But these are not just words about the life to come. Jesus is telling his disciples that, through his death and resurrection, he is opening up a way for them to the Father that begins *now*. He is the Way and he will walk the road with them to the end. The words "I will take you to myself" can also be translated "I will take you along with me". Jesus promises his disciples that he will be their way to the Father, and their companion on the journey, taking them along with him.

That same promise is for us today – not just for the next life, but for our lives right now. I said that these chapters of John are sometimes called "farewell discourses"; but the original meaning of that Old English word "farewell" "is not just a noun, but a verb: "fare (journey) well", wishing the traveller a blessing for the road ahead. How can we, as people of faith, "fare" well, journey well, through the present times and beyond? The key to it all is trust; and the basis of our trust is the Lord who has opened up for us a way to God the Father and who takes us along with him. Wherever we are, however we may feel, whatever may happen, he walks the road beside us, now and always.

Prayers of intercession

Below are some suggestions for our prayers; but please use this time in whatever way you wish to bring to God the concerns of your heart.

We pray for those who are sick, at home, in hospital or in the community.
Enfold them, Lord, in your love, and grant them healing.

[We pray for.....]

We pray for all who care for others throughout our health and social care services, and who through their work make themselves vulnerable.

Guard and strengthen them, Lord, and grant them times of rest and renewal.

[We pray for]

We pray for all who are beset with fears and anxieties for family members and friends. We remember especially all who at this time cannot be physically close to their loved ones.

[We pray for]

We pray for those who have died, and commend them into your hands of love.

We pray for all who mourn, that they may be comforted.

[We pray especially for]

We pray for all in positions of authority who face difficult decisions that will affect the lives of many: grant them wisdom and discernment.

[We pray for]

We pray for your Church throughout these strange and confusing times.

Keep us firm in our faith, help us to support one another, and through your creative Spirit fire our imaginations to proclaim your unchanging love in new ways.

[We pray for]

We pray for those whose everyday lives are marred by suffering and deprivation, and whom we forget because of the crisis facing us: for those who live in war zones - in situations of poverty and injustice – in places devastated by natural disaster

[We pray for]

Gracious God, receive all our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord.
Amen.

<https://youtu.be/oXc04P8d654>

StF 736: In heavenly love abiding

1 In heavenly love abiding,
no change my heart shall fear:
and safe is such confiding,
for nothing changes here:
the storm may roar around me,
my heart may low be laid;
but God is round about me,
and can I be dismayed?

2 Wherever he may guide me
no want shall turn me back;
my shepherd is beside me
and nothing can I lack:
his wisdom ever waketh,
his sight is never dim;
he knows the way he taketh,
and I will walk with him.

3 Green pastures are before me,
which yet I have not seen;
bright skies will soon be o'er me
where the dark clouds have been:
my hope I cannot measure,
my path to life is free;
my Saviour has my treasure,
and he will walk with me.

Blessing

May the blessing of God go before us;
May God's grace and peace abound.
May God's Spirit live within us;
May God's love wrap us round.
May God's blessing be with us always.
May we walk on holy ground.
Amen.