

SERVICE AT HOME SUNDAY 17TH MAY 2020 – prepared by Rev Trish Davis

Call to Worship: (from Psalm 66:1-3)

'Shout for joy to God, all the earth! ² Sing the glory of his name; make his praise glorious. ³ Say to God, 'How awesome are your deeds!'

Prayer:

Gracious God, we come before you,
whether meeting alone or with others,
drawn by the power of your welcoming love.
We come with our sorrows and joys.
We come with our expectations and apprehensions.
We come with what we have done.
We come as who we are.
In your love help us find peace and hope. Amen.

Hymn: Come down, O Love divine (STF 372)

(By Bianco da Siena; translated by Richard Frederick Littledale.)

Come down, O Love divine, seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardour glowing;
O Comforter, draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy Holy flame bestowing.

O let it freely burn, till earthly passions turn
to dust and ashes, in its heat consuming;
and let thy glorious light shine ever on my sight,
and clothe me round, the while my path illuming.

Let holy charity mine outward vesture be,
and lowliness become mine inner clothing;
true lowliness of heart, which takes the humbler part,
and o'er its own shortcomings weeps with loathing.

And so the yearning strong, with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
for none can guess its grace, till he become the place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling.

Prayer of Thanksgiving:

You make yourself known to us, and you are present in our lives
even though we do not always recognise or acknowledge you.
For all that you are, we thank you, loving God.

You do not leave us orphaned,
but embrace us with parental love that encourages and comforts us.
For all that you are, we thank you, loving God.

You ensure that we are not alone
by filling us with your Spirit of truth, that inspires and empowers us.
For all that you are, we thank you, loving God.

(Pause and add your own specific prayers of thanksgiving...)

Thank you, Father, for your presence, your love and your encouragement.
Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God of love, we are sorry that at times our love for you falters;
that we have wrong priorities; that we overlook your guidance.

(Pause..., then add whatever you need to add...)

O God, forgive us. O God, renew us.

Loving Saviour, we are sorry that we disobey your commandments;
that we fail to love; that we walk by on the other side.

(Pause..., then add whatever you need to add...)

O God, forgive us. O God, renew us.

Spirit of truth, we are sorry that we disregard your presence;
that our thoughts and feelings are unrighteous;
that we follow the world's way.

(Pause..., then add whatever you need to add...)

O God, forgive us. O God, renew us.

May your presence abiding in us lead us in the right way,
in the name of Jesus. Amen.

John 14:15-21 The Spirit beside us

¹⁵ 'If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – ¹⁷ 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.

¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ 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.'

Sermon:

We are way past Easter now and heading for Pentecost (well, in two week's time...) so it is very timely that we get to think about the Holy Spirit today in our reading from John's Gospel.

I wonder what comes into your mind when you think of the Holy Spirit? Is it excitement, or confusion, wonder or fear? Do you sigh or do you rejoice? You might like to pause for a moment and consider your response...

This passage, John 14:15-21, comes after the very well known passage where Jesus says: *'My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?'*

(John 14:2) And after the important verse in which Jesus states: 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' (John 14:6)

Jesus' disciples seem rather uncertain about what Jesus is telling them and Jesus appears to be trying to explain to them why they are going to be OK without him physically present. We could see this as Jesus trying to introduce them to the concept of the Trinity. He wants to let them know that they will never be alone, even without him there as a man. Jesus says: *'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth.'*

Were they any the wiser do you think?! I can almost picture their blank faces... Jesus tries again; he says more about what he means by 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.'* (John 14:17 some translations say: *'and is in you.'*)

I do feel for those disciples. I wonder if they rolled their eyes at one another; nudged one another, or sighed...? Jesus starts speaking about leaving them as 'orphans', or to be more precise – not leaving them as orphans. Given that they haven't really grasped that he is leaving them anyway, I'm not sure how much this helps.

Jesus carries on: *'¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me any more, but you will see me.'* Again, Jesus is mentioning that he is not going to remain with them; they will have heard this a few times now – maybe it does begin to sink in?

Then he says something else that must have been very strange to hear: *'Because I live, you also will live.'* (John 14:19) Jesus is implying that he is leaving them... but I doubt they really think he is speaking of death. We have such a different perspective on things because we know what happened (and yet even so we can struggle a bit with the teaching about the Holy Spirit).

Jesus tells them that they will get it! ²⁰ *On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.* I guess Jesus is looking ahead to Pentecost when the arrival of the Holy Spirit was full-on; unforgettable; transforming them ready for their missionary roles.

In case they are doubtful about what they should be doing in the light of the information he is revealing to them, Jesus says: ²¹ *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.*

What does this mean for us today? Like the disciples, we are living in a time of uncertainty. We may often find we do not understand what the Government's message is exactly. Some of us may feel that we are being left to sort ourselves out; we may feel insecure about going out or not going out.

The disciples had Jesus living amongst them, in the flesh, for a time. They learned a lot from him about God, and their minds were being prepared for the arrival of the Holy Spirit. We may feel that, without our physical connection with church, we are losing out. Yet, all the months and years that we have connected with church in some form or other, mean we have been prepared for this strange time. If we look deep into ourselves, we will discover afresh that we know God - as Father, as Son and as Holy Spirit. Nothing we have learned through our Christian lives is wasted. We can draw on it now during our absence from our church buildings and groups.

We do know God's commands; we do know God's love... it's all in there, but we might need to reactivate it, and that is definitely where the Holy Spirit comes in – remember Jesus says: *'I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you for ever – ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth.'*

Hallelujah! What a gift we have! Maybe this time now is like the period of time when the disciples began to know about the Holy Spirit, through

Jesus' teaching, but hadn't yet fully received it (as they were to do at Pentecost – see Acts chapter 2). As the church right now, we are slightly hidden away, possibly a little confused about what God is saying to us at this time, but it is my hope and prayer that we will come through it and be revitalised as 'church' when we emerge into whatever comes next for churches. Let's learn what we can about listening to God's word to us; receiving God's teaching. And let's ask to be filled afresh with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, so that we can have as big an impact on our communities as the disciples did after they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. How wonderful that would be!

Hymn: 'O breath of life come sweeping through us' (StF 391)

(by Elizabeth Ann Head)

O breath of life, come sweeping through us,
revive your Church with life and power;
O breath of life, come, cleanse, renew us,
and fit your Church to meet this hour.

O wind of God, come bend us, break us,
till humbly we confess our need;
then in your tenderness remake us,
revive, restore; for this we plead.

O breath of love, come, breathe within us,
renewing thought and will and heart;
come love of Christ, afresh to win us,
revive your Church in every part.

Prayers:

(You might like to pray using the hymn you have just read or sung. Spend a few moments asking God what you need to hear at this time...)

Holy God, there are many prayers on our lips arising from the present situation:

We ask that you help scientists develop treatments and vaccines for Covid-19.

We ask that the Government and their advisors can plan and set out a safe and sensible way for coming out of lockdown.

We pray for all who are in work during this crisis, whether on the frontline or in some other role – that they will be protected and supported.

We ask for resources to be made available to those not in work; those whose businesses are failing; and those who are very fearful about their economic future.

We ask for help for vulnerable, grieving and hurting people, and we pray that we will be prompted by your Spirit to offer help when we can.

(Pause for a time of silent or spoken prayer about other issues that are on your mind.)

Gracious God we lay our prayers before you, uplifted by the knowledge that each prayer is valuable and meaningful. Nourish us this day, and throughout the coming week, and give us a sense of your Holy Spirit drawing us together as Church as we speak out the words of the Lord's Prayer.

"Our Father... Amen."

Hymn: 'Holy Spirit, come, confirm us' (StF 382)

(by Brian Foley, Words © 1971 Faber Music Ltd. CCL No. 1817)

(The tune is the one we use for 'All for Jesus – All for Jesus')

Holy Spirit, come, confirm us
in the truth that Christ makes known;
we have faith and understanding
through your helping gifts alone.

Holy Spirit, come, console us,
come as Advocate to plead;
loving Spirit from the Father,
grant in Christ the help we need.

Holy Spirit, come renew us,
come yourself to make us live:
holy through your loving presence,
holy through the gifts you give.

Holy Spirit, come, possess us,
you the love of Three in One,
Holy Spirit of the Father,
Holy Spirit of the Son.

Blessing:

I am your child, O God: Help me always to show love, and fill me with the Spirit of truth. Amen.

'May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth and your saving power among all nations.' (Psalm 67:1-2)