

North Staffordshire Circuit (11/22)

Service Sheets For the Month of May 2024

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Sunday 5th May 2024 – Easter 6 (Vocations Sunday)

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

**Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship.
May you find it to be a time of blessing.**

Call to Worship:

Come into God's presence.
Leave worries behind. Leave cares behind.
Leave prejudice and preference behind.
Come to God, who accepts all,
Who receives all and who loves all. **Amen.**

Hymn: Christ Triumphant, Ever Reigning (StF 319)

Christ triumphant, ever reigning,
Saviour, Master, King!
Lord of heaven, our lives sustaining,
hear us as we sing:
*Yours the glory and the crown,
the high renown, the eternal name!*

Word incarnate, truth revealing,
Son of Man on earth!
Power and majesty concealing
by your humble birth:

Suffering servant, scorned, ill-treated,
victim crucified!
Death is through the cross defeated,
sinners justified:

Priestly king, enthroned for ever
high in heaven above!
Sin and death and hell shall never
stifle hymns of love.

So, our hearts and voices raising
through the ages long,
ceaselessly upon you gazing,
this shall be our song

Michael Saward (b.1932)

Prayer of Praise:

Lord God, there are so many ways we could describe You.

As Almighty, Sovereign, ruling over all.

As holy, pure, and righteous.

As Alpha and Omega, before time and beyond it,

The same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

As the Creator of the ends of the earth,

The source of everything that is, has been and ever shall be.

Yet while these all express aspects of who and what You are,

Each pointing to part of the truth, none of them finally does You justice.

One description only can do this:

The word LOVE.

Remind us each day that this sums up Your whole nature

And expresses a reality at the heart of the universe –

The most important reality of all:

That we are truly loved and will continue to be so for all eternity.

For that assurance, we thank You. **Amen.**

Prayer of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

Help us, Lord, to recognise not just our faults,

But Your ability to overcome them;

Not just our weaknesses

But Your strength;

Not just our fickleness,

But Your faithfulness.

Help us to discern the gifts You have blessed us with

And with Your Spirit's direction, equip and guide us in faithful service.

Gracious God, help us, as well as acknowledging our faults to You,

To truly accept that we are forgiven, and to rejoice in that unshakeable and wonderful truth. **Amen.**

You may like to join in The Lord's Prayer here ... Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen.

Psalm: PSALM 98 taken from 'PSALMS NOW'

Introduction:

To sing a new song is to sing with a new perception of the 'marvellous things' God has done. We may begin by celebrating God's faithfulness to us, and then we may rejoice that this steadfast love is within the divine purpose to establish healthy and just relationships in all nations throughout

the earth. But that is not the limit of the psalmist's vision. Our songs of praise must be in tune with the whole of creation and with everything sounding throughout the immense universe in which we live. Throughout the vast expanses that we can only glimpse, God comes to make things right.

'Men and women have proclaimed God's praises throughout the ages.

Now it's our time to worship the Lord

And to announce God's presence

And His loving concern

To the inhabitants in this world.

His power is as great today as it ever was.

He continues to reign over His universe

And the creatures that move in this world.

He alone is the true God.

He offers to all men and women His salvation.

He is close to His children and servants

And fills their hearts with joy.

Now, as His children and servants,

Let us express this joy,

With voice and musical instruments,

With lovely melodies and joyful sounds,

Let us proclaim the glory of God.

Let us fill our homes and sanctuaries,

Our halls of learning,

Our factories and marketplaces,

Even the streets of our city,

With sounds of celebration.

God is here! God is now!

Hymn: God Is Love (StF 103)

God is Love: let heaven adore Him;

God is Love: let earth rejoice;

Let creation sing before Him,

And exalt Him with one voice.

He who laid the earth's foundation,

He who spread the heavens above

He who breathes through all creation,

He is love, eternal Love.

God is Love: and He, enfolding
All the world in one embrace,
With unfailing grasp is holding
Every child of every race.
And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
Then they find the self-same aching
Deep within the heart of God.

God is Love: and though with blindness
Sin afflicts each human soul,
God's eternal loving-kindness
Holds and guides and keeps them whole.
Sin and death and hell shall never
O'er us final triumph gain;
God is Love, so Love forever
O'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Reese (1874 – 1939 alt)

Gospel Reading: John chapter 15 vs. 9-17

Introduction:

Today's passage continues the conversation at the Last Supper that began, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener' (15:1). The imagery of bearing fruit continues, and is further related to doing what is commanded. Wealthy pilgrims to the Temple added golden grapes to the golden vines above the sanctuary door, but Jesus' followers bear fruit with a more personal connection to 'the true vine'. There is an implied contrast between observing commandments associated with Temple worship and keeping the commandment to love as we are loved. It is expressed in the contrast Jesus makes between servants who rightly do what they are told and friends who are 'in the know' and enjoy participating in God's purposes.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for

everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.”

Reflection:

Mickey is an adorable, outgoing 4 year old who loves going to Church and loves singing. One Sunday morning, Mickey ran down the aisle to the sanctuary area just before the start of Morning Worship and enthusiastically pleaded with the Minister: “Revd. Brown, can I sing a song this morning”. Not wanting to say “no” or curb her enthusiasm in any way, with some trepidation, Revd. Brown said: “Of course you can.” She then announced to the congregation that Mickey would sing the Call to Worship to start the Service. Revd. Brown picked Mickey up and stood her on the front pew. She turned her around to face the now expectant and smiling congregation in Church that morning ... And Mickey sang: “**Jesus wuvs me dis I know, for da Bible tells me so. Yes, Jesus wuvs me.**” And then, Mickey threw her arms in the air and with a triumphant voice, she said: “**And dat’s dat!**” and then Mickey sat down.

Well, Mickey was right on target, wasn’t she? What more do we need to know – she was absolutely right. Jesus loves us – and that’s that! When we are afraid or lonely, if we have to make difficult decisions or face tough challenges, if we feel rejected – what more do we need to know? Jesus loves us and that’s that! And today’s Gospel reading has reminded us of it: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you,” [v.9]

It’s like the Wayside pulpit poster that we often place on our noticeboard at Church: **GOD LOVES YOU – IT’S PERSONAL.** I sometimes wonder what the reaction would be if we saw that message plastered on roadside hoardings, printed on fridge magnets, window and car stickers? Would anyone challenge it and want to find out more?

These verses come as part of Jesus’ last conversation with His disciples after the Passover Meal just before they leave for the Garden of Gethsemane. He has talked about the metaphor of the Vine, the branches and the Vine Grower to emphasise the qualities of a right relationship with God. This key word ‘LOVE’ is a central theme of Jesus’ teaching: the absolute intimacy and connectedness of the love of the Father to the Son which is the source of Jesus’ own love for His disciples. It is what will

make them ‘family members’, rather, they will share in the matchless union between God the Father and Jesus the Son. And it comes with a specific responsibility – to: “Obey my commands” [v.10]. Just as Jesus’ love for the Father was shown through His perfect obedience to God’s will, even to the Cross, Jesus’ disciples are to demonstrate their love for Him by remaining obedient to His commandment. Jesus assures them that this is not a burden or a series of trials and tests, it is what will enable His disciples to experience complete ‘joy’.

In v. 12, Jesus makes His demand explicit: “Love each other as I have loved you”. The depth and breadth of His love is made clear by Jesus for whom the Cross is imminent, the sacrifice Jesus is about to make is to be the template of the love all Jesus’ disciples are to show – His friends – and these include Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him and Peter who denied Him.

For us, this is quite a challenge – the word LOVE. Today, its use devalues its true meaning. It is expressed in so many ways: people ‘love’ chocolate; ‘love’ a particular colour; ‘love’ a certain brand of clothing; ‘love’ a certain restaurant; ‘love’ a certain holiday resort. The word has so many diverse uses that its original context is lost, and in this passage from John, we have a stark reminder of it. Jesus is about to lay down His life for His friends. In following His commandment, the disciples will become His friends [v.14] because He has chosen them – sought them out, not to be servants – following His example out of a sense of duty, but a deeply close, intimate friendship, fed by prayer and the promised gift of the Holy Spirit. This is part of their vocation. And it’s not reserved solely for the disciples. It is offered to us too. In Jesus, we have a beautiful, loving Friend who has paved the way for us to be God’s friends too. We can come right into His presence without fear. We don’t have to work endlessly to please Him so that He will treat us well. Instead, He comes to us as a warm and loving Friend whom we then serve because we may, not because we must. His love then radiates through us. It’s amazing that Christ, in spite of all our weaknesses and failings, considers **US** His friends and trusts us like a loyal friend trusts another. It’s His choice; chosen for love, chosen for joy – it’s personal.

Jesus reminds us that He has done everything necessary for us, as His disciples, to produce lasting fruit. He has sent His Holy Spirit and called us to be His co-workers. Are we bearing and sharing God’s love too? That is

part of our vocation. So let's embrace the words of today's Psalm and we, like Mickey, can say with confidence:

Jesus loves me this I know
For the Bible tells me so
Little ones to Him belong
They are weak but He is strong

Jesus loves me, He who died
Heaven's gate to open wide
He will wash away my sin
Let His little child come in

Jesus take this heart of mine
Make it pure and wholly Thine
On the Cross You died for me
I will try to live for Thee

*Yes Jesus loves me
Yes Jesus loves me
Yes Jesus loves me
The Bible tells me so.*

Anna Bartlett Warner (1859)

AND DAT'S DAT!

Hymn: Christ Our King Before Creation (StF 318)

Christ, our King before creation,
Life, before all life began,
Crowned in deep humiliation
By Your partners in God's plan,
Make us humble in believing,
And believing, bold to pray:
"Lord forgive our self-deceiving,
Come and reign in us today!"

Lord of time and Lord of history,
Giving, when the world despairs,
Faith that wrestles with the mystery
Of a God who loves and cares,
Make us humble in believing,
And believing, bold to pray:

“Lord, by grace beyond conceiving,
Come and reign in us today!”

Word that ends our long debating,
Life of God which sets us free,
Through Your body recreating
Life as life is meant to be,
Make us humble in believing,
And, believing bold to pray:
“Lord, in us Your aim achieving,
Come and reign in us today!”

Ivor H. Jones (b. 1934)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

God of love, friend to those in power,
as the local elections have taken place this week we are reminded of the privilege we have in being able to engage in democracy and elections. Whatever our political leanings, we pray for those who have retained or gained places on our local councils and the new Police Commissioners. May they be diligent in working for the communities they serve, passionate about improving the lives of others, and open to listening to views different from their own. Equip *all* of our political representatives with the gifts of thoughtfulness, grace, integrity and service.

**God of love,
Hear our prayer.**

God of love, friend of all who suffer,
we look at the situations continuing to unfold in the Gaza, Ukraine and other countries, we continue to feel despair for those who are suffering and for those grieving for loved ones. We pray for urgent supplies of food and medical equipment to arrive quickly. May countries who have plenty be generous in their response to these crises, that people know they are being remembered and cared about, offering them signs of hope.

**God of love,
Hear our prayer.**

God of love, friend to those who are struggling,
we think of those who are searching for jobs and face financial hardship. We ask for resilience in the face of continued challenging times, perseverance for those struggling to manage and deal with the demands of everyday life and courage to face the challenges each new day brings.

**God of love,
Hear our prayer.**

God of love, friend of our families and friends, thank you for the gift of belonging. Thank you for the people who bring fun and joy into our lives. Thank you for the warmth those we love brings. Bless all those we know and love and help us to look to Jesus to learn how to deepen our relationships and live the life of love He modelled.

God of love, hear these and all our prayers. Amen.

Hymn: Jesus Calls Us Here To Meet Him (StF 28)

Jesus calls us here to meet Him
as, through word and song and prayer,
we affirm God's promised presence
where His people live and care.
Praise the God who keeps His promise;
Praise the Son who calls us friends;
Praise the Spirit, who among us,
To our hopes and fears attends.

Jesus calls us to confess Him
Word of life and Lord of all,
Sharer of our flesh and frailness,
Saving all who fail or fall.
Tell His holy human story;
Tell His tales that all may hear
Tell the world that Christ in glory
Came to earth to meet us here.

Jesus calls us to each other,
Vastly different though we are;
Creed and colour, class and gender
Neither limit nor debar.
Join the hand of friend and stranger;
Join the hands of age and youth;
Join the faithful and the doubter
In their common search for truth.

John L. Bell (b.1949) and Graham Maule (b. 1958)

Blessing:

Loving God, thank you for sending Jesus to show us Your love.
Help us to make new friends and comfort those who are lonely.
Show us that, although we are all different, we are all loved by You,
As we receive Your blessings in Jesus, through Your Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Some material is adapted from 'Roots For Churches'

Sunday 12th May 2024 – Easter 7

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Christine Legge

Call to Worship:

Come to God and be ready to listen.
Come to God and be willing to hear.
Bring your gifts and talents.
Bring your hearts and minds.
Come and find a way to serve today.

A Prayer of Approach:

Lord God, we come into your presence as individuals. We do not always realise how special we are, especially to you.

You believe in us with your whole heart;

we believe in you with our whole heart.

There is so much more to each one of us than we ever believe.

Put us together and we are even more amazing!

You believe in us with your whole heart;

we believe in you with our whole heart.

May we come to understand our distinctiveness,
the things that make each one of us special.
All with our own talents, traits and quirks.

You believe in us with your whole heart;

we believe in you with our whole heart. Amen.

Hymn: For The Beauty Of The Earth (StF 102)

For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies,
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.*

For the beauty of each hour
Of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower,
Sun and moon and stars of light,

*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.*

For the joy of ear and eye
For the heart and mind's delight
For the mystic harmony
Linking sense to sound and sight
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise*

For the joy of human love,
Brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above,
Pleasures pure and undefiled,
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.*

For each perfect gift and sign,
of your hope so freely given,
Graces human and divine,
Flowers of earth and buds of heaven,
*Gracious God, to you we raise
This our sacrifice of praise.*

Folliott Sandford Pierpoint (1835–1917)

Introduction And Short Commentary on Psalm 1:

The Bible often uses the poetic imagery of trees to describe people. Those 'who forsake the Lord' are 'like an oak whose leaf withers' (Isaiah 1:28-30), whereas someone able to 'trust in the steadfast love of God' is 'like a green olive tree in the house of God' (Psalm 52:8). There are different trees, but all need the same water if they are not to wither and yield their particular fruit. Here God's law is likened to water that nourishes roots and cleanses leaves. Meditating on God's law and delighting in its guidance will permeate and renew us, becoming as essential to our existence as water. It strengthens us to discern what is wicked, and to stand against it.

Psalm 1

¹ Blessed is the one
who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take

or sit in the company of mockers,
2 but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
3 That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither—
whatever they do prospers.
4 Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
6 For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to destruction.

A Prayer Of Confession And An Assurance Of Forgiveness

A Prayer Of Confession:

Lord, we might think that casting lots isn't a very spiritual way to make decisions. But the important thing was that the apostles prayed first. They knew these men well. They recognised their gifts and experiences. But they needed your insight and guidance. Lord, forgive us for the times when we don't pray before we act. When we don't pray before the big decisions. Or the small decisions. Or anytime really. Forgive us for the times we don't see ourselves as special. When we don't let you use our unique talents. When we don't even realise we have talents. Forgive us, dear Lord, and help us to put our trust in you.

Amen.

Assurance Of Forgiveness:

'Whoever has the Son, has life.' (1 John 5:12)
Father God, you have given us eternal life in your precious Son, Jesus. Thank you for the assurance of your new life in us, and the blessing of your love and compassion. Forgiving God, we come to you and you make us whole. Thanks be to God. **Amen.**

Hymn: I've Come To Wash My Soul In The Living Water, (StF 428)

I've come to wash my soul in the living water
Wash my heart in your cleansing stream
Here is mercy and forgiveness
I shall be clean again

*O wash me whole in your rushing river
My Saviour
Take me down to die and rise again x2*

I've come to bathe my eyes in your word Lord Jesus
Cleanse my thoughts, my imaginings
May these eyes see as your love sees
Light flood my being

*O wash me whole in your rushing river
My Saviour
Take me down to die and rise again x2*

Now I've been bought with the blood of Jesus
Now my life is not my own
A temple holy for you only
Where you are loved and know

*O wash me whole in your rushing river
My Saviour
Take me down to die and rise again x2*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Reading: Acts 1: 15 – 17, 21- 26

¹⁵ In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a group numbering about a hundred and twenty) ¹⁶ and said, “Brothers and sisters, ^[a] the Scripture had to be fulfilled in which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through David concerning Judas, who served as guide for those who arrested Jesus. ¹⁷ He was one of our number and shared in our ministry.”

²¹ Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus was living among us, ²² beginning from John’s baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us. For one of these must become a witness with us of his resurrection.”

²³ So they nominated two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. ²⁴ Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen ²⁵ to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs.” ²⁶ Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles.

Reflection:

One day a church member approached the pastor and began to speak: ‘God has told me...’. The pastor listened patiently and then replied, ‘Well, that’s very interesting, and when I feel that God is telling me the same, perhaps we can move forward’. Stories like that are amusing, but they have a serious undertone. It’s not always easy to discern the way we should go, either in daily life or in church circles – and we go it alone at our peril. Most of us will have experienced enthusiastic colleagues who put forward ideas without properly considering whether they are feasible or desirable. Such folk may need a kindly mentor to draw them aside and point out some pitfalls and alternatives.

As I draw towards the close of my full-time Ministry in a few months time I’m reminded of my own Vocational discernment process back in 2000. I’d felt God calling me into Ministry for a long time, but had found a number of excellent reasons why I couldn’t do it. Finally, God got serious with me and after a year at Cliff College I began a period of Vocational discernment through the Methodist Church. Still I was uncertain that this Call, which I had always thought was out of reach, could possibly be what God actually wanted me to do for Him. I was at a small Retreat House in Warminster, sitting on my bed in a very sparse room and prayed that God would direct and lead me. I ‘heard’ the words ‘Step forward in faith’. I believe that through that confirmation and my on-going Ministerial training God has enabled me to serve Him and those to whom He has called me – and I am truly, eternally, grateful for the privilege.

In the reading from Acts, the disciples seemed to understand the need for collaboration between people and God. No doubt they had observed and spoken to likely candidates before short-listing Joseph and Matthias, and before involving God in prayer and trusting in the process of drawing lots. How do you respond if you feel that God might be calling you to something new (in church or in the world)? We recently had an ‘older’ volunteer step forward for a role – what is God nudging you about – age is often only an excuse!

If our call is to a formal, recognised form of ministry, lay or ordained, there is almost certainly a recognised process of discernment to go with it. (And selection...and training...and...) Such processes give the assurance of the church's confidence and protection. The sense of calling is not ours alone; it belongs to the church as a whole.

Of course, not everyone is called to ordained or authorised ministry.

However, everyone **is** called to serve God, the community of believers, and their neighbour. If we are not sure what our calling is, a first step might be to assess our gifts and talents, and to ask what those around us see in us.

Gifts of friendship, welcome, hospitality, artistic ability, computer skills (to name just a few) are just as important and necessary as those of a preacher.

In the first place, Matthias and Joseph were willing to be called by God.

Then they were prepared to participate in the selection process. Finally, they were obedient to the call of the Church and accepted the roles that were assigned to them. By the power of the Spirit, may we be able to assess our skills and talents and discern God's call. May we have the grace to seek the counsel of others. And may we joyfully accept our calling, whatever that may be. **Amen.**

Hymn: The Saviour, When To Heaven He Rose (StF 669)

1. The Saviour, when to heaven he rose,
In splendid triumph o'er his foes,
Scattered his gifts on us below,
And wide his royal bounties flow.

2. Hence sprung the Apostle's honoured name.
Sacred beyond heroic fame;
In lowlier forms, to bless our eyes.
Pastors from hence and teachers rise;

3. From Christ their varied gifts derive,
And, fed by him, their graces live;
Whilst, guarded by his mighty hand.
Amidst the rage of hell they stand.

5. So shall the bright succession run
Through all the courses of the sun;
Whilst unborn Churches, by their care,
Shall rise and flourish large and fair.

6. Jesus, our Lord, their hearts shall know
The Spring whence all these blessings flow;
Pastors and people shout his praise.
Through the long round of endless days. **Amen.**

Philip Doddridge (1702-1751)

Prayers Of Intercession:

Once again, the tensions between Israel and Palestine are causing sadness, anxiety and concern, even despair. We pray for the peacemakers in that area. Hold them from despair, give them the energy and vision for a better future that will keep them going during these difficult times. Help the local politicians and those in the international community who are trying to mediate and resolve this crisis. Equip them with the skills they need, give them the words that will speak into this situation and help those who need to hear listen to their words and cease their fire.

Leader: Lord, in a dark hour,

All: Let your light shine.

For those many people in our country and around the world who need help with physical and mental illness may they turn to you for healing as well as receiving help from medical services. We pray for those who we know and love who need extra care at this time – guide us in how we might help, show support, be a listening ear enable them to know they are not alone.

Lord in amongst the pain and suffering,

let your light shine.

In the aftermath of the recent elections we pray for everyone who has either lost or gained a job. Give people who are leaving their posts a sense of closure. Help them as they move on to something new. May they take the experience they gained and find ways to use it to empower and help others. For those who find themselves with a new job, give them the grace and humility needed to get to know new colleagues and work out what is required of them.

Lord, in a world of losses and gains,

let your light shine.

The blossoms on the trees and parks filled with plants and flowers at this time of the year remind us of the wonders of the natural world. But we are well aware of the difficulties facing our planet. The issues around climate change can feel overwhelming but we pray that the church has a voice in the debate and that we face up to our personal responsibilities.

Lord, in a world challenged by the climate crisis,

let your light shine.

In uncertain times we thank you Lord for the relationships and friendships that have carried us through: for those who have made us laugh, for those who have listened, for those who have stood by us. Thank you for the love, care and attention of others. Help us to learn to pray as Jesus did. As we move through this week and encounter our friends help us to pray for their needs and that they would know your peace in their lives.

Lord, in all of our lives and friendships,

let your light shine. Amen.

We say Lord's Prayer:

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.**

Our closing hymn:

Hymn: There Is No Moment Of My Life (StF 482)

There is no moment of my life,

No place where I may go,

No action which God does not see,

No thought God does not know.

Before I speak, my words are known,

And all that I decide,

To come or go: God knows my choice,

And waits to be my guide.

If I should close my eyes to God,

Then I am given sight:

If I should go where all is dark,

My darkness is made light.

God knew my days before all days,
Before I came to be;
And keeps me, loves me, in my ways,
Through all eternity.

Blessing

May the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you now and with all those whom you love and cherish,
in this world and the next, for evermore. **Amen.**

Sunday 19th May 2024 – Pentecost

This service has been compiled by Mrs Sheila Heap

‘HAPPY BIRTHDAY’ - Today we celebrate the birth of the
Christian Church

Wherever you are, welcome to this time of worship on this special day of
celebration. May you find it to be a time of blessing.

Call to Worship:

God of Pentecost,
come to us today and fill us with your Holy Spirit.
Teach us to see the new things you are doing in us.
Help us to embrace the changes and challenges you ask of us,
as we look for the coming of your Kingdom. **Amen.**

Hymn: Come Down, O Love Divine (StF 372)

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 vestment 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.

Bianca da Sienna (d.1434)

Translated by Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890)

Prayer of Praise:

Mighty God, we praise You for the activity, experience and power of Your Spirit, making real Your presence within our hearts.

We celebrate how through that Spirit, You give us guidance, instruction and insight;

How You challenge and inspire, nurturing and nourishing our faith and equipping us for service.

Above all,

We rejoice that the Spirit works - not according to our own wishes –

Directed by any merit, deserving or ingenuity on our part –

But directed by Your will, moving at Your direction and fulfilling Your purpose.

Fill us now, renew us now, and use us now, in Your service and for Your glory. **Amen.**

Prayers of Confession and Assurance of Forgiveness:

For all we have done or said or failed to do or say that has caused hurt to others and to You, we pray for Your forgiveness. In Your mercy, You will cleanse, transform, renew and restore us. Refashion us by Your transforming Spirit in the likeness of Your Son, our Lord and Saviour.

Amen.

You may like to join in the words of The Lord's Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Amen

Introduction:

On the day of the Jewish festival of Pentecost, Jesus' disciples experience being filled dramatically with God's Holy Spirit. This power and life spills out into the whole of creation. Peter says that this is the culmination of many centuries of waiting for the fulfilment of God's promise, made known through Old Testament prophets.

The disciples are amazed at the scope of God's love and see a glimpse of what the future might hold in God's Kingdom. We are invited to consider our part in continuing the widening of this Kingdom.

Gospel reading: Acts chapter 2 vs. 1-21

‘When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like the sound of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came down to rest on each one of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs – we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues! Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

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. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“In these last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
Your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood
Before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.”

Meditation: THE PENTECOST EXPERIENCE

It happened, just as He had promised,

The Spirit coming upon us to transform our lives.
One moment we were weak,
The next strong,
First timid,
Then suddenly bold –
Faith that we'd hidden away now shouted from the rooftops.
Joyfully and proudly proclaimed.
We'd been changed,
Outwardly and within,
God's living presence kindling faith and equipping for service,
Inspiring faith, hope, love and joy.
And there's more,
Much more –
Gifts to build us up,
Fruits to mark us out –
His power continuing to shape all we do
And all we are.
Jesus is gone,
Yet He's *here* with us;
Is far,
Yet He's always near –
Teaching, guiding,
Enabling, inspiring,
Just as He did before.
It happened as He promised,
The Spirit coming from on high,
And it's happening still,
All around.
Open your heart and receive in turn:
Christ in you
And you in Him.'

Hymn: There's A Spirit In The Air (StF 398)

There's a Spirit in the air,
Telling Christians everywhere:
'Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working in our world.'

Lose your shyness, find your tongue;
Tell the world what God has done:
God in Christ has come to stay
Live tomorrow's life today.

When believers bread the bread,
When a hungry child is fed,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working in our world.

Still the Spirit gives us light,
Seeing wrong and setting right:
God in Christ has come to stay,
Live tomorrow's life today.

When a stranger's not alone,
Where the homeless find a home,
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.

May the Spirit fill our praise,
Guide our steps and change our ways.
God in Christ has come to stay,
Live tomorrow's life today.

There's a Spirit in the air,
Calling people everywhere:
Praise the love that Christ revealed,
Living, working, in our world.

Brian Wren (b. 1936)

Reflection:

On holiday some years ago, I felt prompted to go to worship at the nearby Methodist Church on the Sunday evening. I'd never done it before – so it felt quite strange. Why now? The Church was packed – around 1,000 of us and most local residents. Even though it was July, the Service was based on the Resurrection - which seemed quite odd. It was a powerful, uplifting Service. At the close, the Minister asked us to hold hands with the person next to us and say the Grace together. What an experience! What seemed like an electric current flowed right through my body from one fingertip to the other! I couldn't explain it. I hadn't expected it. I didn't see or hear anything. I can only describe what it felt like – electricity. It was one of the

most wonderful experiences I've ever had. I left the Church feeling so happy, singing Easter songs and not caring about the strange looks from other people walking along the sea shore. It had to be the Holy Spirit – there was no other explanation.

So, like the disciples, I can only say what my experience felt like. Pentecost came on the 50th day following the Feast of the Passover and was generally a week-long festival attended by some 100,000 people. Every male was required to attend the Temple with two baked loaves, a sin and a peace offering, not just to celebrate Harvest but also to mark the renewal of their covenant with God and by the second century, almost certainly commemorated the gift of the Law. But this Pentecost was different. Jesus' followers were gathered together in the Upper Room. What they felt and seemed to recognise reminded them of familiar passages of the Old Testament. Violent winds were symbolic of God's Spirit moving over the waters in the first creation story. Tongues of fire were always seen as a manifestation of God's presence such as Moses and the burning bush. This was a new experience of God. It was the moment of the Church's birth, which some commentators have likened to the miracle of Jesus' birth – an unrepeatable phenomenon. The first gift of the Spirit comes from the Divine to the disciples. Now, believers were to be recognised as 'the body of Christ'. In its fullest sense: in the Church in vigorous life, redeemed by the Cross of Christ, set on the path of worship and service, and what God gave on that day, He has never withdrawn. The Spirit which transformed the disciples and led them into action remains with the Church today – which means includes *us*. Jesus promised that the Spirit would be with us forever.

This new experience of God travelled far and wide as people made their way back to their home regions and the experience was retold. At this Pentecost, a new law was established – the proclamation of the Messianic age and of the Messiah, to every nation.

God's Spirit often goes unrecognised, it is sometimes misunderstood – as it was on that first day of Pentecost, but it is very much alive and active in and through those who belong 'to the body of Christ'. It is a gift to be welcomed and cherished and used to build up our faith and the way it is reflected in our lives – which will be unique to each one of us.

Like the King, we have two Birthdays, the celebration of our physical birth and that of our spiritual birth. Truly a time for celebration. However you

spend today: 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY'. Celebrate that God wants you to be united with Him through the Holy Spirit, whoever you are and whatever your circumstances. **Amen.**

Prayer:

Gracious God, we thank You for those extraordinary moments we occasionally experience which change our lives, giving us joy and fulfilment we never imagined possible. We thank You especially for the great gift of Your Holy Spirit – an experience which transformed the lives of the Apostles, which has changed the lives of countless believers across the centuries and which has power to reshape our lives here and now. Open our hearts, our minds and our souls to Your living presence so that we shall know Your life-changing power for ourselves. **Amen.**

Hymn: Holy Spirit, Come Confirm Us (StF 382)

Holy Spirit, come confirm us
In the truth that Christ made 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.

Brian Foley (1919–2000)

Prayers of Love and Concern:

God of love, we pray for the poor.

We pray for those around the world who don't have the resources of the richer nations, for those countries struggling to supply food and basic

health care. We think in particular of people in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. May those who have the power to bring relief to others use their influence to ensure help is directed to the people who need it most. May conversations and negotiations be filled with generosity and concern for the poor and powerless.

May those who have very little in this world
be filled to overflowing with your Spirit.

God of love, we pray for those who mourn.
With wars continuing to rage in the Middle East, Ukraine and other countries, with the death toll rising, we pray for everyone who has lost friends and loved ones. It's difficult to imagine the fear people must face living with the constant threat of bombing, shooting and terrorism. We pray for those caught in the middle of the chaos. We are also aware of rising tensions in our own communities with the increasing threat of knife crime and street violence. We pray for wisdom for community leaders trying to bring calm; may they know the right words to use and be able to mediate problems with insight and skill.

May those who live with violence and pain
be filled to overflowing with your Spirit.

God of love, we pray for those who go hungry and thirsty.
People around the world are suffering through crop failure and floods. Many are struggling with food poverty because of rising prices and limited incomes. Help us to continue to reach out to those who are hungry. Thank you for the network of foodbanks, community shops, Breakfast clubs and so many other groups and charities working to ease this burden. We pray that volunteers would have renewed energy and that food and financial donations would continue to flow, and we pray that those needing work would find employment.

May those who need hope
be filled to overflowing with your Spirit.

God of love, we pray for the poor in spirit.
With so many people experiencing mental health issues we think of those we know who are struggling. We bring to mind family members, friends, neighbours and people within our Church communities. Help us to be compassionate listeners and good friends to people who need us. We also think of the steep rise in teenage anxiety, suicidal thoughts and issues such

as anorexia and pray for help for families trying to deal with young people who are suffering. Bless the agencies and professionals working in mental health with good judgement as they work with their patients.

May those who face the darkness
be filled to overflowing with your Spirit.

God of love, we pray for the peacemakers.
On this Pentecost Sunday thank You for the work of Your Spirit bringing hope, joy and peace to us and to Your world. Renew us in our faith, remind us of the outpouring of Your Spirit and help us to be the agents of hope, joy and peace to those around us.

May those who sow peace in our neighbourhoods
be filled to overflowing with your Spirit.

Thank you, God, for making us all different, all special, and all loved.
Thank you for sending your Holy Spirit to help us to love other people.
Give us joy as we hope and plan for the future. **Amen.**

Hymn: O Thou Who Camest From Above (StF 564)

O thou who camest from above
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return,
In humble prayer and fervent praise.

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for Thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me –

Ready for all Thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death Thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete.

Charles Wesley (1707-1788)

Blessing:

Go with us in the roller-coaster of life, and whatever our hopes and fears, successes or disappointments, help us to recognise Your presence by our sides. Go with us in the days ahead, whatever they may bring, and despite our limitations, help us to live and work to Your praise and glory. **Amen.**

Sunday 26th May 2024 – Trinity Sunday (Aldersgate Sunday)

This service has been compiled by Rev'd Joy Ventom

Call to Worship:

Mysterious God,

be with us today as we seek to know you better.

May we learn from each other as we search for you.

Teach us to ask questions as well as to expect answers.

Give us fresh understanding of yourself today.

Amen.

Hymn: Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty (StF 11)

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee;

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Holy, holy, holy! all the saints adore Thee,

casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;

cherubim and seraphim, falling down before Thee,

which wert and art and evermore shalt be.

Holy, holy, holy! though the darkness hide Thee,

though the sinful human eye Thy glory may not see;

only Thou art holy, there is none beside Thee,

perfect in power, in love, and purity.

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!

All Thy works shall praise Thy name, in earth and sky and sea;

Holy, holy, holy! merciful and mighty!

God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Prayers:

Creator God,

we come to you in awe, marvelling at the mysteries of the universe,
and delighting in the world you have made.

Redeemer God,

we come to you in gratitude, wondering at your love revealed in the face of
your Son, and in his arms stretched wide to embrace us.

Sustainer God, we come to you in expectation, opening our lives, hearts and minds to the breath of your Spirit and the flame of your love. God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, make us holy, make us strong, and draw us into the unity of your love, creating, redeeming and sustaining us, now and for ever.

We bring our confession:

God, you are one, but we are divided.

We enjoy your many gifts, but in our greed we consume more than our share, and in our thoughtlessness we contribute to the depletion of the earth's resources.

Lord, have mercy, Lord Forgive

We are eager for your love, but in our selfishness we turn away from those who demand our time and care, and in our fear we reject those who would take us out of ourselves.

Lord, have mercy, Lord Forgive

We long for your truth, but in our apathy we shrink from challenge and hard questions, and in our insecurity we confine you in familiar formulas and take refuge in reassuring routine.

Lord, have mercy, Lord Forgive

Amen.

Hymn: Master Speak, Thy Servant Heareth (StF 666)

Master, speak! thy servant heareth,
waiting for thy gracious word,
longing for thy voice that cheereth,
Master, let it now be heard.

I am listening, Lord, for thee;
what hast thou to say to me?

Speak to me by name, O Master,
let me know it is to me;
speak, that I may follow faster,
with a step more firm and free,
where the Shepherd leads the flock,
in the shadow of the Rock!

Master, speak! though least and lowest,
let me not unheard depart;

Master, speak! for oh, thou knowest
all the yearning of my heart,
knowest all its truest need;
speak! and make me blest indeed.

Master, speak! and make me ready,
when thy voice is truly heard,
with obedience glad and steady,
still to follow every word.
I am listening, Lord, for thee:
Master, speak, oh speak to me!

Bible Reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

“Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.”

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

⁵ “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.”

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, “See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”

⁸ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

Activity:

Think about how we experience God in worship

You will need: paper and a pen

- We have five senses: sight/sound/smell/taste/touch. Divide the paper into five sections and add a suitable body-part symbol for each sense.
- Identify what Isaiah saw, heard, smelled, tasted and touched during his encounter with God. Write or draw these in each section.
- Reflect on the ways in which we use our senses in Christian worship. Can you think of different ways that smell or touch, or other senses, could be used in worship in a way that is pleasing to God?

Hymn: Come Down, O Love Divine (StF 372)

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're 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 Love create a place
 wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

Thought For The Day:

The words ‘mystery’ and ‘revelation’ are tantalising. Both imply that something is hidden with more to reveal. On receiving a letter or parcel, some tear it open to see the contents quickly. Others examine the handwriting and the postmark, sniff it or shake it, feel its thickness or speculate about who sent it or what it contains. And those who use the internet and social media will know about those tempting ‘click to find out more’ invitations that are not always what they seem.

On a journey of faith, some people like to know everything about God all at once, perhaps even believing that that is truly possible (it isn’t). Others are content to discover a little at a time so that there is always more to look forward to.

Isaiah had a direct encounter with God through a vision. The image of a high and holy being had a profound effect on Isaiah. Isaiah perceived that he himself was far from holy, and this distressed him. But he also saw that God was a God of love and mercy. So, he was not left in his state of despair; in fact, it was the exact opposite: he was cleansed, healed and made fit for service. In the Gospel reading, Nicodemus had the privilege of seeing God face-to-face in the person of Jesus. Yet, even this wonderful revelation was not completely satisfying for him. He wanted to know more about who Jesus was, so plied him with questions that Jesus patiently answered. Both Isaiah and Nicodemus had wonderful experiences of God.

While we may not experience a vision like Isaiah’s, and we certainly don’t have the advantage of seeing Jesus face-to-face, thankfully God is still revealed to those who are seeking, who are prepared to ask questions. The clue is in Jesus’ response to Nicodemus, and the answer involves the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit comes today to give tantalising glimpses of God – in the Scriptures, in our worship, and also in the encounters that we have with each other. There is a story about a fictional priest called Don Camillo. In conversation with God, he suggests that ideas are like a candle in a room, lighting up the darkness for that person. Ah, says God, you are nearly right, but if more people enter the room with candles, they give more light to those near them, and eventually everything in the room is made plain.

The mystery of God – and in particular, of God as Holy Trinity – is tantalising, and all is not revealed at once. Yet, God invites us into that

mystery, to explore and ask questions. There is always more to discover and look forward to.

Intercessions:

Let us pray with faith to the blessed and glorious Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Preserve your Church in the true faith, to acknowledge with awe and reverence the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Fill our worship with love and adoration. Give us humility and assurance as devoted members of your Church which you have created, loved and sanctified.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Open our eyes to the wonders of the world around us, of things seen and unseen. Make all our lives richer in the hope of enjoying the blessings of our land in more ways than we can comprehend. Give clearer vision to those in positions of power and influence.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Grant to us in our lives a share of the mutual love of the Holy Trinity. May that unbroken strength and harmony be shown in our community, our families, in our work and in all our relationships.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

Have mercy on those whose lives are crippled by strain and anxiety in themselves, and hostility to others. May they see the light of the Holy Trinity to guide them to greater comfort within. May you ease their sufferings, give them inner peace and restore them to wholeness again. And in a moment of silence let us pray for those we hold most dear, known only to us and to you our God.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

We pray for the departed who in this world held fast to the faith of the Holy Trinity and now adore you for ever in your Kingdom. May their example strengthen and prepare us for the coming joy made complete and love made perfect in your heavenly Kingdom.

Lord in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

May our prayers be received in the unity of the Holy Trinity, three Persons and one God. **Amen**

Hymn: I the Lord of Sea and Sky (StF 663)

I, the Lord of sea and sky,
I have heard My people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin,
My hand will save.
I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear My light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have born my peoples pain.
I have wept for love of them,
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
Give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak My word to them,
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them,
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide,
Till their hearts be satisfied.

I will give My life to them,
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord, Is it I Lord?
I have heard You calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if You lead me.
I will hold Your people in my heart*

Blessing:

We praise you, God the Father,
life-giver and creator of all.
We praise you, God the Son,
Jesus Christ, our Lord.
We praise you, God the Holy Spirit,
guide and friend.
Surround us in your mystery,
and be with us this coming week.
Amen.

Our printed services do not include an offering but if you feel you would like to respond to God's love in this way please contact the treasurer of your church or contact the Circuit Office. Thank you.

If you no longer wish to receive this printed sheet, could you let either your Minister or the Circuit Office (tel: 01782 612648 e-mail: northstaffscircuit@hotmail.co.uk) know please, or equally, please let us know if there's someone you know who would like to receive it.