



Birstall and Rothley Methodist Churches
A Service for the 6th Sunday of Easter: May 9th, 2021



This service has been prepared for use at home.
If you are able to join us online at 10:30am on Sunday,

Call to Worship StF 33

O Lord, we are always in your presence.
In you we live and move, and have our being.
You hold us in the palm of your hand,
and you lead us to your glory.

words: Philip Jakob

Prayer

Let us pray:

***Creator God,
you have called us to worship you,
chosen us to be your friends
and invited us to extend that friendship
to your people in all the world.
May we live as Jesus lived,
serve as he served,
and love as he loved, to the glory of you name.
Amen.***

Hymn STF 315.

1. We sing the praise of Jesus, of our ascending Lord:
the triumph of our Saviour, of Christ the Son of God.
The forty days are over, earth sees his face no more;
but Christ the King of glory we worship and adore.
2. Rejoicing in Christ's promise we wait in prayer and praise,
the Spirit sent from heaven to set the earth ablaze;
we pray with expectation, we praise with one accord,
we wait for living fire, the power of the Lord.
3. Therefore with saints and angels all the hosts above
we lift our hearts and voices to bless the God of love;
to sing of our Redeemer who intercedes and prays,
that God the Holy Spirit may guide us all our days.
4. With songs of alleluia let earth and heaven ring;
and praises to the Father let all creation sing.
All honour be to Jesus, God's own eternal Son;
and to the Holy Spirit let endless praise be done!

words: Norman Wallwork (b. 1946)

*Permission has been given by the author for the words of this hymn
to be reproduced and also to be projected*

Prayer:

God of relationships,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
together and as one,
you draw us into friendship with you that we may draw others.
You command us to love you as you have loved, that we might inspire others.
You fill our hearts with the passion of your heart, that we might serve others.
You are the truest of friends, the most faithful friend, the most enduring –
and we praise you for all you are and more.

Dear Lord, your love is so precious;
but we have turned away from you when our lives have been easy
forgive us and help us to turn back to you.

*You have commanded us to love others;
but we have turned away from them when their lives have been difficult*
forgive us and help us to be there for them.

*You have shared with us your ministry of welcome
but we have turned people away*
forgive us and help us always to be open to them.

*for the sake of Jesus,
whose life and death, deeds and words have saved us.
We thank you in Jesus' name*

Amen.

Our Father, who art in heaven

Introduction to the Reading:

We have come to the end of one story and the beginning of another. Peter's visit to Cornelius has resulted in a crossing of religious, political and cultural boundaries and through the Holy Spirit the coming of people into the Christian faith.

Reading Acts 10: 44 - 48

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God.

Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Hymn

STF 382

1. Holy Spirit, come, confirm us
in the truth that Christ makes known;
we have faith and understanding
through your helping gifts alone.
2. Holy Spirit, come, console us,
come as Advocate to plead,
loving Spirit from the Father,
grant in Christ the help we need.
3. Holy Spirit, come, renew us,
Come yourself to make us live;
Holy through your loving presence,
Holy through the gifts you give.
4. Holy Spirit, come, possess us,
You the Love of Three in One,
Holy Spirit of the Father,
Holy Spirit of the Son.

words: Brian Foley (1919-2000)

Readings John 15: 9 - 17

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.”

First Letter of John 5: 1 - 6

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome, for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

Reflection

“You are my friends if you do what I command.”

Jesus has been trying to prepare his disciples for his leaving them. They have much to take in - warnings of betrayal and death, the promise that he goes ahead of him, help they will receive from the Holy Spirit.

Can you imagine how they will be feeling? And how might Jesus be feeling?

In his humanity Jesus needed friends, for friendship is a two way relationship.

You might like to sketch out your friendship network; e.g. Some perhaps long-standing, even from school days, or recently as a result of pandemic, or because of shared interests.

And those who demonstrate true friendship, with whom you can share deepest thoughts and feelings; mutual love and respect for each other, trust, understanding, confidence, qualities that may take a long time to develop on both sides. That’s the kind of friendship Jesus offers.

How amazing that in spite of all shortcomings and failures Jesus needs and offers his gift of friendship.

I don’t always read terms and conditions before I tick the box. But, notice Jesus says " you are my friends IF you do what I command you IF you love one another." Those are Jesus test of friendship with him.

But don’t be discouraged, John tells us these commands are not burdensome.

To be a friend of Jesus is to be loved and chosen, and he will give us all we need with his gift of friendship. We can’t earn it, it is his gift. Not so that we become important or praiseworthy, but so we may be equipped, not for privilege but service.

What kind of friend does Jesus want us to be?

Are we?

If not what can we do about it?

Hymn

StF 531

1. What a friend we have in Jesus,
all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
everything to God in prayer.
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry
everything to God in prayer.
2. Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged;
take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
take it to the Lord in prayer.
3. Are we weak and heavy-laden,
cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge -
take it to the Lord in prayer!
Do your friends despise, forsake you?
Take it to the Lord in prayer;
in his arms he'll take and shield you,
you will find a solace there.

words: Joseph Medlicott Scriven (1819-1886)

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Let us pray:

***God of all, we thank you for the gift of friendship,
the giving and receiving,
the opportunities and challenges,
laughter and tears,
conversations and silences.
Draw us deeper into your love
that we may proclaim Jesus as our dearest friend, teacher and Saviour.
Amen***

Prayers of Concern

Jesus' commandment is "Love one another, just as I love you"

With this challenge from Jesus in mind we now turn to our prayers of intercession.

Let us pray:

We pray for all countries around the world where there is:- violence & oppression,
inequality & discrimination,
shortage of food & clean water
tragic loss of life

In particular we think of :- Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, held hostage in Iran
the on-going violence in Somalia
Jews crushed to death in Israel

Lord you have challenged us

Help us to respond in love

We pray for all nations worldwide & their leaders:

that they can work together towards world peace,
towards climate change
towards sharing resources
towards equal distribution of the COVID vaccine

Lord you have challenged us

Help us to respond in love

We pray for the Christian Church: in countries where the church is growing
in countries where the church is in decline
for churches that are having to adjust to meet different needs

We pray especially for our own church as we start to open our doors again.
Help us to look to the future with open eyes, willing to go where you lead us,
willing to explore new avenues & open to change.

Lord you have challenged us
Help us to respond in love

We pray for ourselves, our families & friends,
for those who are sad & feeling lonely
for those who are sick or suffering
for those who are grieving

Let us take a moment in silence to bring to you our own private prayers.

Lord you have challenged us
Help us to respond in love
Amen

Hymn STF 516

1 What shall I do my God to love,
my Saviour, and the world's, to praise?
Whose tenderest compassions move
to me, and all the fallen race,
whose mercy is divinely free
for all the fallen race, and me!

2 I long to know, and to make known,
the heights and depths of love divine,
the kindness thou to me hast shown,
whose every sin was counted thine!
My God for me resigned his breath,
he died to save my soul from death!

3 How shall I thank thee for the grace
on me and all the world bestowed?
O that my every breath were praise!
O that my heart were filled with God!
My heart would then with love o'erflow,
and all my life thy glory show.

words: Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Blessing.

May the love of the Lord rest upon your soul.
May his love dwell in you throughout every day.
May his countenance shine upon you
and be gracious to you.
May His Spirit be upon you wherever you may go.

Amen