

## **ST STEPHEN'S HOME SERVICE**

**6<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2021**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As holiday season approaches – I wonder how many of us have already booked some time away or are planning some time away? We spend most of the year in our usual surroundings and then for one or maybe two weeks of the year we pack all but the kitchen sink into the car and head off for a change of scenery. A temporary change of scenery – because of course we can't stay on holiday forever.

In talking about our earthly existence Saint Paul uses the language of tents – he was after all a tentmaker by trade so he draws from his own experience to describe our physical bodies as 'earthly tents'. He uses this analogy to reinforce the fact that we have a permanent spiritual residence with our heavenly God – and that when we die we simply fold up the tent that has provided temporary accommodation for our earthly journey through life.

Paul speaks of fixing our gaze on the things that can't be seen as opposed to those things that can. The permanent rather than the temporary. The spiritual rather than the earthly.

Take a moment to give thanks for the permanent, spiritual home we share as brothers and sisters in Christ.

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

O God, you summon the day to dawn,  
You teach the morning to waken the earth.

**Great is your name.**

**Great is your love.**

For you the valleys shall sing for joy,  
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

**Great is your name.**

**Great is your love.**

For you the powerful of the earth shall bow,  
And the poor and persecuted shall shout for joy.

**Great is your name.**

**Great is your love.**

Your love and mercy shall last for ever,  
Fresh as the morning, new as the sunrise.

**Great is your name.**

**Great is your love.**

### **TURNING TO GOD**

We come to God as one from whom no secrets are hidden,  
To ask his forgiveness and peace.

**God you know us.**

**You know that we can be  
loving and kind;**

**and you know that sometimes  
we get things wrong.  
We're sorry for the times we  
hurt other people,  
forget to listen to you  
and forget to take care  
of your world.**

**God forgive us.  
Jesus bless us.  
Holy Spirit help us  
to grow in love.  
Amen.**

### **PRAISE**

See what love the Father has given us,  
**that we should be called the children of God.**

You are my sons and daughters,  
this day I have begotten you.

**See what love the Father has given us.**

As many as received him,  
to them he gave power to become the children of God.

**See what love the Father has given us.**

Glory to the Father and to the Son  
and to the Holy Spirit.

**See what love the Father has given us,  
that we should be called the children of God.**

### **A HOME FOR ALL IN CHRIST**

Christ's is the world in which we move.  
Christ's are the folk we're summoned to love,  
Christ's is the voice which calls us to care,  
and Christ is the One who meets us here.

*To the lost Christ shows His face;  
to the unloved He gives His embrace;  
to those who cry in pain or disgrace,  
Christ, makes, with His friends, a touching place.*

Feel for the people we most avoid.  
Strange or bereaved or never employed;  
Feel for the women and feel for the men  
who fear that their living is all in vain.

*Refrain*

Feel for the lives by life confused.  
Riddled with doubt, in loving abused;  
Feel for the lonely heart, conscious of sin,  
which longs to be pure but fears to begin.

*Refrain*

### **NEW TESTAMENT READING**

#### **2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1 (New Living Translation)**

But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, "I believed in God, so I spoke." We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with

you. All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

Thanks be to God.

### **GOSPEL READING**

#### **Mark 3:20-35 (NRSV)**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

One time, Jesus went home, and the crowd came together again, so that they could not even eat. When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, "He

has gone out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul, and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons." And he called them to him, and spoke to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but his end has come. But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his property without first tying up the strong man; then indeed the house can be plundered.

"Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"— for they had said, "He has an unclean spirit."

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him. A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside, asking for you." And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you O Christ.**

## **REFLECTION (by Andy Todd)**

“Jesus went home....” (Mark 3:20)

“We will have a home in heaven....” (2 Corinthians 5:1)

What does “Home” mean to you? What images does it conjure up? What feelings does it evoke?

Jesus and St Paul both invite you and me to think about “home” today – or rather about “homes”, because part of what it means to be a Christian is to be someone for whom the idea of home is not simple or straightforward.

For most people, the first (and maybe only) thing they will associate with “home” is the place of family – either the place they grew up, or where they share space with their family now, or both. Often the word conjures up an ideal image of security, welcome and love; but at the same time there is a recognition that the reality is often more complex. In our family house, we have a plaque which says: “Remember: as far as anyone knows, we are a nice, normal family.” I’m fairly sure you will immediately get the point!

For most people, our family homes are not perfect. But hopefully, somewhere in our family life, we get a glimpse of what it means to be among people who love us for who we are rather than what we do, of the possibility of forgiveness

when mistakes are made, of how to grow into relationships of give and take. Home at its best is the place where we learn of unconditional love, of the possibility of forgiveness, and that the world is at a very basic level a good place. It is a tragic truth that some homes offer none of these things. Indeed, very few homes offer all of them; but by the grace of God, most homes offer at least a glimpse – enough to start us on our journey.

I say “journey” because for everyone there is a necessary growth beyond the family home, a journey which calls us to discover more fully our true identities. Each of us needs to some extent to leave that first “home” in order to become the mature people God intends us to be. And for Christians, one aspect of that calling takes a very specific form, because God calls us to discover a profound new sense of home among a bigger family, given to us not at birth but at baptism. That bigger home is the Church.

Jesus’ looked at those around him and said, “Look, these are my mother and brothers. Anyone who does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” Those words should shock you and me now: in their first-century Middle Eastern context they were absolutely scandalous. For many people now as then, blood ties are the thickest bonds of all. But Jesus points to a new community formed around himself – the people who sat at his feet and listened to him – and claims that loyalty to this new family transcends even blood ties.

Of course, it only takes a moment of reflection to realise that the family we call Church is no more perfect than our natural families. Sister Macrina Wiederkehr expresses it poignantly: "I am aware of the many ways the Church has failed me, and I have failed her. She is home, a broken home, yes! Broken because you and I are broken."

For Christians, this new family to which we belong by baptism is the place where we journey deeper into those things of which our natural families gave us a glimpse: the nature of unconditional love, the possibility of forgiveness, a community in which we can be accepted for who we are, warts and all. Because of that, the Church can and should be a place of quiet protest against the values of the world, where people are valued only for what they can contribute, and where the strong thrive at the expense of the weak. In a world which is so lost it can no longer tell the difference between good and bad (what Jesus calls the "sin against the Holy Spirit"), the Church should be a signpost to the truth of God's goodness, salt and light in a fractured society.

The Church is an imperfect home. But its imperfection points us to yet another home. You and I are not meant to feel completely "at home" in this world: as Christians, we are citizens of another land, pilgrims journeying to another home. In St Augustine's wonderful phrase, "You (God) have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their home in you."

In case that sounds like it is simply about the hope of a future heaven, St Paul offers a tantalizing glimpse of something altogether more down-to-earth: "For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands." What God has in store for us is not a disembodied, "spiritual" future existence, but something for which the only model we have is Jesus' own post-Easter body. Comparing our present bodies with the glorious bodies which God will give us is like comparing a tent to a palace! We have as much chance of being able to visualise that future state as a caterpillar has of being able to visualise being a butterfly. But that is our hope - a life infused by God's very presence. And that hope, says St Paul, will somehow make sense of our present sufferings, in ways which would be impossible without God's transforming power.

As St Augustine grasped, that hope is also of a homecoming - when all our experiences, all our sufferings, all we are and have become, will be brought together into God, and we recognise that our truest home is in the God who created, redeems and sanctifies us. It will be, as T S Eliot wrote in *Little Gidding*, like arriving at a place which we then finally know to have always been home:

*"And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started*

*And know the place for the first time."*

We will have come home.

### **RESPONDING TO THE WORD**

In response to what we have heard, we affirm our trust and faith in God:

**We believe in God the Father,  
from whom every family  
in heaven and on earth is named.**

**We believe in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love.**

**We believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who strengthens us  
with power from on high.  
We believe in one God;  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

### **PRAYERS**

As members of God's family,  
let us pray together to our heavenly Father.

That as family members of the Church of God  
we may show his likeness by doing his will;  
that those visiting our churches  
may find God's beauty and truth,  
open-hearted loving and a unity of purpose.

*Silence*

Father:

**let your will be done.**

That as members of the human race  
we may work together, share resources,  
respect and learn from one another.  
That leaders may inspire collective good,  
and those with vision be valued and heard.

*Silence*

Father:

**let your will be done.**

That we may give both support and space  
to those we love and nurture;  
that those of our own families  
who do not yet know God  
may come to understand the depth  
of his love for them.

*Silence*

Father:

**let your will be done.**

That all who come to Jesus in need  
may find in him forgiveness,  
healing and wholeness of body, mind and spirit,  
strength to cope with their difficulties  
and a constant inner renewing.

From our own church community we pray especially for: Paul  
Burston, David New, Anna Clements and Adrina and Alan  
Price.

And in a moment now, we bring before you those known only  
to us and to you.

*Silence*

Father:

**let your will be done.**

That as those coming to death  
roll up the tents of their earthly existence,  
they may be welcomed into the eternal home  
prepared for them by their loving God.

We remember the recently departed and all who mourn their  
loss.

And we remember with love and gratitude: Johanna Anwyl-  
Hughes,  
Wendy Anwyl-Hughes, Jill Scholes, Hilda Stewart, Rowland Hill,  
Freda Hemmings, May Brown, Iain McBain and Ugo Frascina.

*Silence*

Father:

**let your will be done.**

That as we marvel at the generosity  
of God's love, and his acceptance of us,  
we may grow closer to his likeness  
each day we live.

Merciful Father,

**Accept these prayers**

**For the sake of your Son,**

**Our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

We pray the Lord's Prayer together as Jesus taught us, saying:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily  
bread.**

**Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who  
sin against us.  
Lead us not into  
temptation  
but deliver us from evil.**

**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**

**For the kingdom, the  
power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever.  
Amen.**

**temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.**

### **GRACE WILL LEAD US HOME**

Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind but now I see

Was Grace that taught my heart to fear  
And Grace, my fears relieved  
How precious did that Grace appear  
The hour I first believed

The Lord hath promised good to me,  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils and snares  
We have already come  
T'was Grace that brought us safe thus far  
And Grace will lead us home.

### **SENDING**

Great God, you are one God,  
and you bring together what is scattered  
and mend what is broken.

Unite us with the scattered peoples of the earth  
that we may be one family of your children.

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, evermore. Amen.**

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*Macrina Wiederkehr, A Tree Full of Angels*

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