

Sunday Morning Worship
Readings, Refelction and Prayers 5th May



Isaiah 55.1-11

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labour for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
 listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
 my steadfast, sure love for David.
See, I made him a witness to the peoples,
 a leader and commander for the peoples.
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,
 and nations that do not know you shall run to you,
because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,
 for he has glorified you.
Seek the LORD while he may be found,
 call upon him while he is near;
let the wicked forsake their way,
 and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

This is the word of the Lord.

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.

This is the word of the Lord.

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.

Reflection by Margaret Mandrell

Today we are thinking about our church life and what it means to us as Christians. We will look at some aspects of our relationship with St Stephen's and how we can be more fully involved.

Agape love is the selfless, sacrificial unconditional love of God for each one of us. It leads us to seek other's wellbeing. In the light of this love, we are called to love others.

Bellringers call us to worship.

Communion or Eucharist is the memorial of Christ's death and symbolises the union between Christ and each communicant. It unites believers across time and place. Eucharistic Assistants help the clergy. Some are called to take the Eucharist to people in their homes.

Church wardens fulfil a vital role.

We demonstrate our dedication by our commitment to the church community and the wider neighbourhood.

Drivers can bring people to church who otherwise could not attend.

Evangelising is when we show God's love by really engaging with people and listening to their concerns and worries. This can be at any time, and in any place.

Faith sustains us in times of difficulty. Faith involves trust in God and we can cast our cares on him because he loves us. It leads us to reach out to those who are suffering.

Flowers make the church more beautiful.

The gospel or good news of the kingdom is at the heart of our worship as we hear it read and learn more each week.

Readers and Intercessors enhance our services.

Gardeners can help keep the area around church looking its best.

Hospitality is provided with love and enables us to develop friendships and share in fellowship. Open Church is a good outreach and supports those who are lonely. Good Companions is a valued resource providing enjoyment and friendship.

Individuals who may be feeling isolated will be pleased with a phone call or visit.

Jesus came that we might have life in all its fullness. We are able to meet freely, a privilege not enjoyed by Christians in many parts of the world. Joy is infectious and impacts others.

Knitting, craft and chat can all be part of our outreach.

Little Stars and Sunday Stars encourage carers and children to feel part of our community and enjoy activities and chats and to feel valued.

Membership of the church encourages a feeling of belonging.

Maintenance is on going and necessary and those who provide it are serving us well.

We are members of a worldwide body of believers and can praise God with those who speak different languages because we share in a common faith.

We can pray for those are suffering.

No one is excluded from God's love.

Our organ and choir enhance our worship.

P is for PCC which helps decision making and the smooth running of church.

Prayer is when we give our attention to God who is always alongside us and is always ready to listen. It underpins all we do. Jesus taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer which gives us a blueprint for our intercessions.

The pastoral care team supports the vulnerable through visits and telephone calls.

Questions and doubts are part of our journey of faith, and we can explore and develop our understanding through reading, asking questions or attending house groups.

Righteousness is ours through the grace of God.

Sides people are important in welcoming as we enter church.

Awareness of Safeguarding and a commitment to it ensure that individuals are protected.

Trust is belief in God, who gives us security and confidence, and knows each one of us and what we need. Training is provided formally through courses and retreats. This can help us grown in faith and confidence.

We have a place of belonging here but are also part of a universal church, made up of all individuals who share belief in Jesus. This motivates us to reach out to others through Christian Aid and other charities.

Vestments are the robes which reflect the special mission and identity in Christ of members of the clergy. Vergers provide support and ensure the smooth running of services.

Words from the Bible and from hymns can give us comfort when we are in distress and can help us to pray.

X is the extra dimension to life as we have hope, hope in God and hope for the future.

Each one of us has a role to play in the life of the church, a calling, which enables us to serve and to grow. Welcoming people is so important, and a word or smile can make a newcomer feel accepted and part of the church family.

Zoom has made such a difference through lockdown and continues to enable those who cannot be with us in person to still be a part of our services.

Prayers

Let us pray to the Lord God Almighty,
in whom we live and move and have our being.

To the bidding: Help us, Lord:
Please respond: **to love one another.**

Father, wherever there is friction and conflict in Your Church in the world, and its communities are divided and weakened, give us a greater longing for Your healing and a deeper commitment to forgiving love. We pray for all priests, ministers and pastors who preach Your healing love and forgiveness.

Silence

Help us, Lord:
to love one another.

Father, wherever the beauty of creation reflects your love, may our hearts be lifted to you in thanks and praise. May we strive to preserve Your world for the benefit of all your creation.

Silence

Help us, Lord:
to love one another.

Father, wherever tangled political situations seem impossible to solve, wherever conflicting interests threaten peace; wherever the ears of the powerful remain insulated against the cries of the oppressed; give us ears to hear your guidance. We pray for Israel/Palestine, Ukraine and other countries where there is war or famine.

Silence

Help us, Lord:
to love one another.

Father, we pray that we may have love and respect in our daily dealings with family, friends, work colleagues and people we meet.

At this time of local elections we pray that candidates will have the best interests of their constituents at heart and not just self interest.

Silence

Help us, Lord:

to love one another.

Father, wherever the ill and injured need comfort and assistance; wherever the elderly and housebound sit each day for hours alone; may we bring your love and help. Give all medical personnel and carers the strength they need to continue their work.

From our own community we pray especially for:

Claire, Joyce Pringle, Peter Murphy, Anuwat Wanggane, Joan Tyson, Alan Coe, Jack Tubby, Rob & Lucy, Roger Jones, Patricia Ash, Jason Thomson, Ryan Day, Bryan Plester, Brenda Hulland, David New, and Adrina and Alan Price.

Silence

Help us, Lord:

to love one another.

We remember those who have recently died: Beryl Bremner and we pray for all who mourn.

We remember with love and gratitude those whose anniversary of death falls at this time:

Joan Kendall, Jim Thorp, Harriet Symmonds, Jo Wasley, Alice Laver and Joy Smith.

And we remember those we love but see no longer.

We commend them all into your unfailing and eternal care

Silence

Merciful Father,

accept these prayers

for the sake of your Son,

our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**