

WORSHIP AT HOME – EASTER 7 – 16TH MAY 2021

Dear Friends,

This week we stress the importance of prayer, especially in the face of hostility and uncertainty. In Acts, devotion to prayer prepares Jesus' followers for the promised Spirit of Pentecost while in the Gospel, being caught up in the living prayer of Jesus strengthens the disciples' unity with him and with one another. God's glory is everywhere though it is not always visible to us. Sometimes glory can be hard to recognise – as it was for the disciples before the crucifixion. Sometimes glory is hidden as it was for the suffering Christians of the early Church. Whatever is happening, however, the glory of God persists. I hope that you all keep well and are able to gradually feel freer as restrictions ease. Every blessing, *Margaret*

Call to worship:

Lord of all glory, we come before you, seeking your wisdom, that we may glorify you through our thinking.
We come before you, seeking your love that we may glorify you through our emotions.
We come before you, seeking your strength that we may glorify you at all times.
We come before you, seeking your perseverance that we may glorify you in all places.
Show us how to live, that our lives might shine with your glory so that those who encounter us may know you and know that you are at work in your world. **Amen.**

The words to 'Jesus, the carpenter' written by Marjorie Dobson [b. 1940] Singing the Faith 275

{this is a hymn I did not know before but I thought the words were good. The tune is 'King's Cross'. I hope that you also find the words refreshing - giving a different slant.}

Jesus the carpenter, hanging on Calvary, nails through your feet and your work-hardened hands.

Wood you have worked with and wood is your destiny, paying the price of our sinful demands.

1 You came to our world as part of a family, living and learning the carpenter's trade.

You followed your father's instructions so faithfully, shaping and crafting the yokes that you made.

Jesus the carpenter.....

2 You called other workers to join in your ministry, laying rough hands on the sick and the lame.

You taught of God's love with such power and authority, people who knew you believed you insane:

Jesus the carpenter.....

3 You faced with great courage the open hostility coming from those who believed they were right.

They stripped you and beat you and laughed at you, finally thinking your death was the end of the fight:

Jesus the carpenter.....

4 But we, who now know you ended triumphantly, working with wood till your task was complete,

Can come to your cross with our hope and humility, laying our pride at the carpenter's feet:

Jesus the carpenter.....

Prayers: God of majesty and might, your glory shines through the universe – from the highest heaven to the deepest sea – in all the creatures you have made – in the seasons that shape our living.

Your glory shines through all that you are and through all that you do.

The power of your glory touches your creation and exalts it.

To you we offer our worship – to you we offer our praise – we come before you in adoration in the name of your Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

But we also need to come to you for forgiveness, Lord.

For the times when our actions are not loving, and we think just of ourselves – times when your name is not glorified in what we do – **forgive us, God of glory.**

For those times when our words bring hurt to others and we do not even notice – **forgive us, God of glory.**

When the way we live is selfish and we find no time for you – **forgive us, God of glory.**

When we do not see you or reveal your love – **forgive us, God of glory.**

Forgive us and renew us, and let your glory be seen in our lives. **Amen**

God in his grace and mercy does forgive us and redeems, restores, and renews us. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

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.

Acts 1: 6-14: NIV

Then they [*the disciples*] gathered around him and asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’

He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’

After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them.

‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way that you have seen him go into heaven.’

Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day’s walk from the city. When they arrived they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James, son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers.

Comment: Those poor disciples! Over the past few weeks they had been on a rollercoaster and had to deal with great swings of emotion. Firstly, they faced the horrors of Good Friday. There would have been the anguish they felt for Jesus – the fear for their own safety – their guilt over having deserted him in this hour of need – and how confused they must have been about what the future held now for it appeared just then that Jesus’ mission had utterly failed. Then there were the rumours that Jesus was alive. They must have been perplexed – and hopeful. Then it seemed as if things were heading back to normality, albeit a far more wonderful normality than before. Jesus was back among them – talking, teaching, and making them feel at the centre of God’s world, just as he always had.

It is difficult to tell from the Gospels and from Paul’s writings just how long it was between the resurrection and Jesus’ ascension into heaven. The Church’s liturgical year suggests a few weeks, whereas in Matthew’s gospel the time seems very short, though Paul, on the other hand, seems to extend it to include Jesus’ appearance to him on the road to Damascus. John’s account is the most vivid with details of significant meetings and memorable meals. But, for sheer poignancy, these few verses from Acts are hard to beat. It seems that the disciples were imagining that everything would just go on just as it had in the old days – only better. They felt that Jesus was concentrating solely on them – no preaching, teaching or healing outsiders, but listening to them, answering their questions. All their doubts had gone – and they were back to believing that Jesus would take over Israel – and they would be part of the ruling party.

But suddenly they discovered that he wasn’t going to stay here on earth with them. Not only that, he expected them to carry on without him. They were probably drained of emotion – just keeping going as

they adjusted to this new way. In the end, they just got on with things and waited for whatever it was that Jesus had said he would send to help them, They weren't at all sure as to what that would be and wondered if they would know it when it came.

One minute they were the inner circle, waiting to hear about the plans for Israel and their vital part in that – and the next minute they were a leaderless group with no apparent purpose. Jesus had, however, left them with a very daunting job to do – to be his witnesses all over the world. Jane Williams wrote: 'The Holy Spirit had better be good, whatever it is, if it is going to get this emotionally drained bunch of waifs and strays going again'.

Still – they had at least learned two things through all of the turmoil. One was that they should stick together – they should witness together; the other was to keep praying. These two characteristics defined the Christian community which derived from all of this – and should define all Christian communities today.

Meditation by James the Apostle. [Nick Fawcett – No Ordinary Man]:

We thought we had lost him. After everything we'd been through we thought we had lost him. And it was dreadful. It had been terrible enough the first time – watching helplessly from the shadows as he was crucified – as he was cut down from the cross – as they laid him in that tomb. We had believed it was all over – the end of a wonderful adventure – and we were devastated, inconsolable.

Only then he came back!

Astonishingly, incredibly – he came back! And we were together once more, almost like in the old days and life was suddenly magical again, even more than it had been before.

Until he left us – by our sides one minute, gone the next!

We couldn't work it out at all – just stood there gazing up at the clouds with tears streaming down our faces. He'd left us to face the world alone – abandoned us when we needed him most.

Why? How could he do it? That's what we kept asking.

But then a strange feeling came over us. I can't explain it, it was almost like a voice from heaven.

And when we looked at each other again we somehow knew he hadn't gone, not really. Even though we wouldn't see him again – even though we wouldn't be able to talk to him as we used to – we knew he was there with us;

There in Jerusalem; there in Galilee; there in Judea and Samaria; there in all the world, wherever we might choose to go.

And we knew he would be with us every moment, every day – constantly by our side, even in death itself, waiting to receive us and welcome us home.

We thought we'd lost him, and for a moment it was dreadful. But the fact was that we had to lose him before we could really find him.

The words to 'I danced in the morning' written by Sydney Carter [1915-2004] StF 247

1 I danced in the morning when the world was begun,
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun;
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth,
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

*Dance, then, wherever you may be, 'I am the Lord of the dance', said he,
'And I'll lead you all wherever you may be,
And I'll lead you all in the Dance', said he.*

2 I danced for the scribe and the pharisee,
But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;
I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;
They danced with me and the Dance went on.

Dance, then.....

3 I danced on the Sabbath and I healed the lame;
The holy people said it was a shame.
They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,
And they left me there on a Cross to die.

Dance, then.....

4 I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;
It's hard to dance with the devil on your back.
They buried my body, and they thought I'd gone;
But I am the Dance and I still go on.

Dance, then.....

5 They cut me down and I leapt up high;
I am the life that'll never, never die;
I'll live in you if you'll live in me;
'I am the Lord of the Dance' said he.

Dance, then.....

John 17: 1-11. [NIV]:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

'Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word. Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me. I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours. All I have is yours, and all you have is mine. And glory has come to me through them. I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name, the name you gave me, so that they may be one as we are one.

Meditation: again of James, one of the disciples: [Nick Fawcett – An Amazing Man. Year A]

I couldn't help overhearing his words, that night in the garden before our world fell apart and they nailed him to a cross. He was praying, pouring out his soul to God, and as I listened my spirits soared, for it seemed as though our hopes were about to be realised and our fears proved unfounded – that instead of sorrow and death there would be a happy ending, our Lord recognised by all, acclaimed and worshipped – enthroned in glory.

He spoke of authority from God – of fulfilling the mission he'd been sent to achieve – so I put two and two together and made five, assuming he expected the dawn of God's kingdom here on earth and deliverance at last for his people.

I was right in a way, of course, for he achieved precisely that – but he did so through a cross rather than crown – through apparent defeat rather than trumpeted victory, and at first we couldn't see it.

I'd assumed he was praying for himself back there in Gethsemane – that he'd begged God to provide another way, less costly, undemanding, and that God might somehow oblige – but I had misread things

completely, for his entreaties were for *our* welfare rather than his own – for all who would come after him – for the world itself.

That's what mattered most, even at such a time. Not *his* fate, but *ours* – that we should share his joy, his life, his kingdom, now and for all eternity.

Prayer:

We bring before God our concerns for our world: where there is war we pray for peace; where there is sickness we pray for health; where there is despair we pray for hope.

Cast all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

Lord, we pray that you would be active in health care – in that world of doctors and nurses, dentists, psychiatrists and psychologists, pharmacists and researchers, and for administrators.

Guide our activity in the church; may we find ways to grow; may we always honour you; may we serve our communities.

We hold in your love those whom we love; those who are sick; those who are sorrowful; those who need guidance and direction.

Cast all anxieties on him because he cares for each and every one of us.

Come to us, God of glory,.

Hear us – heal us – and shine through our lives.

Thank you for caring for your world and we who live in it. Help us to show your love and compassion through all that we do in your name and to your praise and glory. **Amen**

Illustration: [David Adam – Sermon Illustrations.]

If the disciples were asked after the ascension, 'Where is Jesus now?' their reply would be very like the one that Longinus made to the wife of Pilate in John Masefield's *The Trial of Jesus*. Procula asks, 'Do you think he is dead?' To which Longinus replies, 'No, lady, I don't.' When asked, 'Then where is he?' Longinus replies, 'Let loose in all the world, lady.'

In the ascension we come to know that the Jesus who was limited by time and space is now able to be with all peoples at all times and in all places.

The words to: 'Forth in thy name' written by Charles Wesley [1707-1788] Singing the Faith 550

1 Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go, my daily labour to pursue,
Thee, only thee, resolved to know in all I think, or speak, or do.

2 The task thy wisdom has assigned O let me cheerfully fulfil.

In all my works thy presence find, and prove thy good and perfect will.

3 Thee may I set at my right hand, whose eyes my inmost substance see,
And labour on at thy command, and offer all my works to thee.

4 Give me to bear thy easy yoke, and every moment watch and pray,
And still to things eternal look, and hasten to thy glorious day.

5 For thee delightfully employ whate'er thy bounteous grace has given,
And run my course with even joy, and closely walk with thee to heaven.

Closing Prayer and Blessing:

From the commonplace to the glorious;

From the ordinary to the extraordinary;

From the limited experiences of life here and now to the unlimited experience of God's glorious future,
We go into the week ahead to live and serve in Jesus' name.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us and with all whom we love this day and through all eternity. **Amen.**