

Gloucestershire Methodist Circuit

Order of Service for Sunday 16th May 2021

7th Sunday of Easter.

Opening Prayer

May we know the presence of God as we worship.
May we experience unity in Jesus as we worship.
As we worship, may we be blessed. Amen.

Hymn 37 You're Calling Us

You're calling us
and so we are gathered here.
You're building us
into a house of prayer.

A holy place
where stories of grace are told;
a sacred space
where miracles unfold
and praises rise
from the offering of our lives.
Let's fill this house,
let's fill this house.

Call the seeker,
call the stranger,
call the children,
let's hear their praises.
Call the lonely,
call the broken,
young and old
will sing hosannas.

Let's fill this house,
let's fill this house
with praise.

We're living stones
built together here
with nail-pierced hands -
oh teach us holy fear.

And prayer will rise
for all nations;
and open skies
will pour your glory down;
and there'll be praise,
for the Lord is in this place.
Let's fill this house,
let's fill this house.

Call the seeker ...

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

Let us pray together:

Wonderful, marvellous, mysterious God,
known to us in the wonder of life and of creation:
praise and glory be given to you.
Love and life be given to you.

In Jesus Christ your Son, you have held out to us fullness of life on earth and the promise of life in heaven.

In Him you have shown that you are Lord of Life; that you are Power over Death; that you are Source of Love beyond our imagining.
Sovereign God, hear our prayer.

Reading: Psalm 1 (STF 800)

- 1 Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers ;
- 2 their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
- 3 They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season,
their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.
- 4 The wicked are not so,
they are like chaff that the wind drives away.
- 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous ;

6 for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

From The New Revised Standard Version

Reading: Acts 1: 15-17, 21-26

15 In those days Peter stood up among the believers[a] (together the crowd numbered about one hundred twenty persons) and said, 16 “Friends,[b] the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold concerning Judas, who became a guide for those who arrested Jesus— 17 for he was numbered among us and was allotted his share in this ministry.”

21 So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us to his resurrection.” 23 So they proposed two, Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also known as Justus, and Matthias. 24 Then they prayed and said, “Lord, you know everyone’s heart. Show us which one of these two you have chosen 25 to take the place[a] in this ministry and apostleship from which Judas turned aside to go to his own place.” 26 And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias; and he was added to the eleven apostles.

Hymn: STF 293 All heaven declares

All heaven declares
the glory of the risen Lord;
who can compare
with the beauty of the Lord?
For ever he will be
the Lamb upon the throne;
I gladly bow the knee,
and worship him alone.

I will proclaim
the glory of the risen Lord,
who once was slain
to reconcile us to God.
For ever you will be
the Lamb upon the throne;
I gladly bow the knee,
and worship you alone.

Noël Richards (b. 1955) and Tricia Richards (b. 1960)

Reading: John 17: 6-19

6 “I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. 9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. 12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that[a] you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, [b] so that the scripture might be fulfilled. 13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.[c] 14 I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.[d] 16 They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

Sermon

Protect them in your name

Have you ever watched the film ‘Brooklyn’? It’s about an Irish girl in the 1950’s who, finding no jobs or prospects for her in Ireland, is persuaded to go and seek better prospects in America. A Catholic priest in Brooklyn arranges accommodation and a job for her and after some heart searching she decides to go. Later, she receives news that her sister has died and after returning home, too late

for the funeral, her decision to return to the life she has made in America is even more difficult. How does she tell her mother, now alone, that she has a husband waiting for her across the ocean? It raises questions about how we cope with life changes and how we can let go of the past.

Jesus had such a difficult task with his closest friends, the disciples. He had to tell them that their life together would soon be changed forever, that he would be leaving them after suffering an excruciating and humiliating death, but that this was the price to pay for our reconciliation with God through his glorious resurrection. He attempts to tell them in a series of farewell speeches.

Today's passage from John's gospel comes from one of the last of these speeches which he appears to give sometime between the last Supper and his arrest. After speaking his final words to the disciples, he turns and prays to the Father on their behalf, words which have great implications.

As he prays, Jesus looks forward in time to after the crucifixion. Jesus has taught his disciples in various ways and he says that they have learned and obeyed all his commands and to live according to his teaching. He prays: "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me out of the world" - he has taught the way of God to those God had given him as his disciples - to learn so that his teaching can be passed on after he has gone.

He says "I have made your name known" which reminds us that it was Moses in the Old Testament to whom the name of God was revealed: "I Am" who I Am" (Exodus 3:14). God revealed this to Moses when he met him in the burning bush just before he began his great task of leading the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt. So we might think that the "name of God" is given here by Jesus to the disciples to prepare them for their great task that they are being given - to continue to take Jesus' teaching to the world - leading people away from slavery again - this time slavery to sin, to the freedom of salvation.

Jesus continues to intercede, to pray to God, on behalf of those he now calls "friends" (15:14). He makes clear that this prayer is specifically for those who have been called to his mission and chosen as his friends "I pray for them", he says "I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, because they belong to you". Jesus has made clear that those chosen as his friends are those who have obeyed his command - who have made the choice to follow when he called and by doing so have been changed by the experience of knowing and loving him.

When we become 'friends of Jesus' we cease to be "people of the world" because we are transformed through knowing Him and through receiving the Holy Spirit. Now we are God's children adopted by him as Paul says in Romans 8:14 NRSVA "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God".

The reference to the "world" here is significant. In the language of the New Testament "The world" doesn't mean the universe or the planet, it means that which opposes God by not following Jesus and his teaching. He says "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..... My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it”.

So those who follow Jesus remain in the world even though they are no longer ‘of the world’. They are no longer part of that which opposes Jesus and his teaching. He is praying for all of us who follow Him, who form the community that will become the church. The church is intended to be a community which will exist in the world but which will be substantially different from other communities in the world, because it will be a community with the word and power of God at its heart. It will be a community that will be energised by the Holy Spirit for the task it has been given to fulfil in the world, which is to bear fruit for Christ.

We have a tendency to think of the church as a building or a place - but it isn't - its a worldwide community of believers and followers of Jesus. We have, perhaps seen this especially in this last year, while buildings have been closed, but the church has continued as a community.

Jesus prays for this community because he is about to leave them and so the protection that they have been under through his presence being with them will leave with him. While Christ was with them they received protection under his name. But now Jesus prays that they will be protected from “the evil one”. Living in the world is a risky business at the best of times, and being identified as belonging to a community which sets itself apart through holding to the name of someone like Jesus poses a threat to the established values. Security and stability was not assured and the experience of Judas had already indicated the dangers that Christians could fall into in following the wrong path.

Christians are called “strangers in the world” as Jesus was. Jesus doesn't pray that they be removed from the world, or from the dangers and temptations that will surround them as strangers in what is now virtually a foreign land to them, but that they are given the power and help that they need to remain strong against them. The Christian community is not be taken out of the world, but come under the protection of a power not known to the world. And that is because their role is to transform the world from within - by being like salt and light to it.

The Church from its earliest days has been called to maintain its nature as a community which is radically different and “other” than the world, not necessarily conforming to the ways and values of the world but to the commands of Jesus instead, with the name of Jesus at its very heart. We have to constantly check that we are not falling into the trap of acting according to the values of the world, but being true to the values of Jesus, the values of His Kingdom. Whenever the church forgets its otherworldliness and assumes that it exists as an institution like all other institutions, it contradicts its very being. When the church begins to lose touch with its reason for being and with its calling in the world it is in danger of extinction just like any other worldly institution.

Today pressures for Christians to conform to the prevailing culture of “the world” come from a wide range of sources just as in the early days of Christianity:

For example: we live in an image rich age of mass media and electronic communication where we are continually bombarded with information and misinformation and messages that urge us to conform to the prevailing values, to fail to hold to account those who perpetrate injustice or dishonesty or fail to use power in appropriate ways to care for the poor, the vulnerable and the planet.

Finally Jesus prays that the Christian community might have his joy “in full measure”. This is a contrast to the world which opposes and offers hostility towards Jesus and will put him to death. But his joy comes from the new life he about to bestow. His words have offended the world and brought hatred, but from death will ultimately come life, and life in all its fullness for those who put their faith in Jesus, who obey his commands and his teaching.

As Christians today and we stand as the heirs of all that Jesus prayed for in this farewell discourse. We are the guardians of the faith today and of Jesus’ words and love – and therefore we have a responsibility to share what we have received. God made the world and called it “good” and calls upon us to spread the good news to all because no one is worthless or expendable. To be in the world but not of the world, is to be centred upon God, but living within the parameters of the world in which we reside. We are called to transform the world from within as we live by the commands of Jesus – being salt and light for the world. So today as we go from here, let us consider how we can transform maybe just one part of it with the things we do and say in the coming week. Amen

A time of prayer

Listening, loving, all-knowing God,
we place before you the challenge we face as we seek to live a life that is truly informed by our faith.

Around us we see selfishness, corruption, and a lack of compassion towards, or concern for, others.

Power and control appear to be the aim of many.

Bless us, we pray, forgive our failings, be sovereign over our lives that faith is full within us, that boldness to work to change the world is within us, that love of neighbour, of enemy, of all people, is our goal.

Give peace and healing, we pray, to those who struggle to maintain their lives, and those of their families, in the current of disadvantage that flows from shortsighted decision-making, provision-giving.

Give wisdom and insight, we pray, to those who work in search of medicines and treatments, that fullness of life may be the possession of those who are ill.

Give wisdom of judgment and of decision, we pray, to those who govern locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. May we see a world of peace, of fair-trade and shared resources.

Give wisdom and strength, vision and purpose, expertise and renewed spirit to the people of your church that the future may be faced with confidence and with that hope which is to be found only in you. Bless the compassionate and the just, all those who walk alongside those in need.

Giving God, may we give to you all that we are and all that we might ever be. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer.....

Hymn: STF 351 In Christ alone my hope is found,

In Christ alone my hope is found,
he is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! — who took on flesh,
fullness of God in helpless babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
scorned by the ones he came to save:
till on that cross as Jesus died,
the wrath of God was satisfied
for every sin on him was laid;
here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground his body lay,
light of the world by darkness slain:
then bursting forth in glorious Day
up from the grave he rose again!
And as he stands in victory,
sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
for I am his and he is mine —
bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
this is the power of Christ in me;
from life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from his hand;
till he returns or calls me home,
here in the power of Christ I'll stand!

Keith Getty (b. 1974) and Stuart Townend (b. 1963)

A prayer of blessing

The blessing of God who is of day and of night,
of last year, this year and the years to come, be upon us;
that always we may know comfort and healing, hope and strength.
Through Jesus Christ, risen and ascended Lord. Amen.

Original Materials by Trevor Pratt

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