

Morning Worship for the fifth Sunday of Easter

Preparation

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He has given us new life and hope.

He has raised Jesus from the dead.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Opening Prayer

Faithful one, whose word is life:

come with saving power

to free our praise,

inspire our prayer

and shape our lives

for the kingdom of your Son,

Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Cast your burden upon the Lord:

And he will sustain you.

Create in us clean hearts O God:

And renew a right spirit within us.

Cast us not away from your presence:

And take not your Holy Spirit from us.

Give us the joy of your saving help:

And sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.

Blessed be the Lord day by day:

The God of our salvation who bears our burdens.

We confess our sins.

Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord,

we come to you in sorrow for our sins,

and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength,

and not by the power of your resurrection.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes,
as faithless and not believing.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone,
and doubted our home in heaven.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Lord, hear us and help us.

May the God of love and power

forgive you and free you from your sins,

heal and strengthen you by his Spirit,

and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord. ***Amen.***

Praise

O Lord, open our lips:

And our mouth shall proclaim your praise.

Let us worship the Lord:

All praise to his name.

Gloria in Excelsis

Glory to God in the highest,

and peace to his people on earth.

Lord God, heavenly King,

almighty God and Father,

we worship you, we give you thanks,

we praise you for your glory.

Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father,

Lord God, Lamb of God,

you take away the sin of the world:

have mercy on us;

you are seated at the right hand of the Father:

receive our prayer.

For you alone are the Holy One,

you alone are the Lord,

you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ,

with the Holy Spirit,

in the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

The word of God

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Standing before the high priest and the council, Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 'Look,' he said, 'I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him. Then they dragged him out of the city and began to stone him; and the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he knelt down and cried out in a loud voice, 'Lord, do not hold this sin against them.' When he had said this, he died. (Acts 7:55–60)

A reading from the gospel of John

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.' Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.' (John 14:1–14)

A reflection by Revd Joy Cousans Vicar of Eaton Bray with Edlesborough

I am constantly surprised by God. One of the ways that I have been surprised recently is how relevant the Bible readings in our services have been to our current situation. Each week the Scriptures speak afresh to us,

powerfully reminding us of God's love and care in these unprecedented times. Today's gospel reading from John is part of what is called Jesus' 'Farewell Discourse' to his Disciples. It comprises words of encouragement and hope for the disciples who were soon to experience the terrifying events of Jesus' trial, crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus begins with words of reassurance. 'Set your troubled hearts at rest. Trust in God always; trust also in me.' Although the disciples will soon be tested to breaking point, they do not need to fear that God has abandoned them. He is always there.

As Jesus prepares the disciples for his death he also talks to them about their own life and death. Jesus gives promises about what they can expect. He promises a permanent existence lived in fellowship with him. The Greek word for 'dwelling places' has the same root as the verb 'to abide'. The disciples are given 'a promise regarding an established and unfading fellowship with Jesus even beyond death.' So the relationship which they already have with him will continue beyond the grave. The promise of a safe and guaranteed 'place' echoes the language of the Psalms. In them God is described as a refuge, a rock, a fortress. For example Psalm 46 opens with these words: 'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.' Jesus tells his disciples: 'Trust in God always; trust also in me.' They are to be people of hope because God is their place of safety.

Thomas, always the disciple to question and seek clarification, asks Jesus how they can follow when they do not know the way. Jesus tells Thomas to put his trust in him and describes himself as 'the way, the truth and the life.' The way is not a particular route it is about relationship. It is through relationship with Jesus that they will find the way ahead.

The passage ends with another promise of Jesus. 'If you ask anything in my name I will do it.' What does Jesus mean? Can we as his followers ask for absolutely anything in prayer and he will do it? I don't believe that is what he meant. And from my own experience I know that is not the case. As always, context is key. Jesus pledges to the disciples that their prayers will be answered. But this is not an open ended commitment. God is not like a slot machine: you put in your prayer request and out comes the answer. The key again is relationship with Jesus. Prayers are to be made in Jesus' name: they are to flow from the disciples' established relationship with Jesus. The answers to their requests are given in order 'that the Father may be glorified in the Son'. This is exemplified by the Lord's Prayer which begins 'Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name' and ends 'thy kingdom come.'

The reading from Acts sits alongside these confronting words of Jesus and shows what discipleship can become. Stephen is the first Christian martyr, who is stoned to death because he talks about his relationship with Jesus. The passage reminds us that death, evil and pain are very pervasive realities in our world. But it also reminds us that although we have to deal with them daily, they will not gain the ultimate victory. Medieval theologians called the vision of Stephen the beatific vision. 'Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing on the right hand side of God.' (Acts 7:57) So Luke makes clear that Stephen's death is not a passage from life to death but from life to life. He enters into the Easter hope. Death is not the end but the gateway to a new and eternal life with God.

Today's readings provide both reassurance and challenge. Disciples of Jesus- and that includes us- are given the powerful promise that we can trust in God and trust in Jesus whatever we face. We can pray and know that he hears and answers prayer. This is set alongside the death of Stephen which is a sharp reminder of the cost of discipleship. I am going to end with a prayer called 'Christ beside me' which was given to me when I was ordained priest. It sums up the promises of Jesus in John Chapter 14.

Christ beside me.
The light in the dark. The presence in our loneliness. The strength in our weakness. The guide in our lostness. He is ready to carry not only our burdens, but us if need be. He IS the mission that we take to others. Amen.

Our faith

Let us declare our faith in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles:
this we have received,
and this we believe. Amen.**

Prayers of intercession- Chris Banks

Lord, in these difficult and troubling times we seek your support as we try to move forward with our lives whilst missing so much that we normally take for granted. We thank you for the support offered by Joy, Stephen, Gordon

and by all other members of the St Mary's team who are there for the family of your church in these villages.

Strengthen your church in the service of Christ, praying this morning for our Bishops, Alan Richard, and Michael and for our spiritual leaders as they lead us through these dark moments when hope is sometimes lost and our faith turns more than ever to you, Lord, for comfort.
Lord, in your mercy; *hear our prayer*

Bless and guide Elizabeth our Queen; give wisdom to all in Government that their actions in dealing with the Covid-19 crisis be guided by you and that their actions to protect the nation might prove to be successful.

We give grateful thanks too for the dedication of our health professionals and for all who expose themselves to risk in caring for others as well as for the many other people in key and other roles who work tirelessly in the background.

Lord, we pray too at this time for all those living in Eaton Bray, in Northall Road, Rose Court, Cantilupe Court and Northall Close as well as for Clergy and laity of our fellow churches in the North Chilterns Group of Parishes and, today more than ever, we pray for all who suffer doubt in you or who have lost their faith.
Lord, in your mercy; *hear our prayer*

Comfort and heal all those who suffer in body, mind, or spirit – thinking especially of all those affected in any way by the Covid-19 virus – whether infected themselves or worried about loved ones who may be at risk or who have been hospitalised, or who find themselves isolated as a result of taking precautionary measures. We pray that their trust in you will be rewarded and that they will be delivered safely back to their loved ones

Lord God, whose son, Jesus Christ, understood people's fear and pain before they spoke of them, we pray for those in hospital; surround the frightened with your tenderness; give strength to those in pain; hold the weak in your arms of love, and give hope and patience to those who are recovering.
Lord, in your mercy; *hear our prayer*

Lord, hear us too as we remember those who have died in the faith of Christ, especially those whose years mind falls at this time, the families who cannot properly mark the loss of their loved ones, and all who mourn.
Lord, in your mercy; *hear our prayer*

Lord, you lead us in ways we do not know, through joy and sorrow, through victory and defeat, beyond our understanding.

Give us faith to see your guiding hand in all things; that being neither lifted up by seeming success, nor cast down by seeming failure, we may press forward wherever you may lead us.

Merciful Father **accept these prayers for the sake of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.**

A prayer for the coronavirus outbreak

Keep us, good Lord,
under the shadow of your mercy
in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful,
and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

We join together with Christians throughout the world in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**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.**

Conclusion

The Collect for the day

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect; through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

God has claimed us as his own.

He has brought us out of darkness.

He has made us light to the world.

Alleluia. Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

We end with the words of the Grace, an ancient Christian prayer of fellowship, remembering that although we are not together in person, nothing can separate us from the love of God found in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**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.**



If you would like us to pray for you during this time of stress and anxiety, please leave a prayer request on the website email address or contact Joy (vicar@stmaryseatonbray.org.uk)

Reverend Joy Cousins
Reverend Stephen Burge

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