

## **A Service for 19<sup>th</sup> July**

The Sixth Sunday after Trinity

*The Notices & welcome*

Call to worship

O Lord, open our lips

*All* **and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.**

Give us the joy of your saving help

*All* **and sustain us with your life-giving Spirit.**

Let us pray.

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.

*All* **Amen**

O magnify the Lord with me;

let us exalt his name together.

**O magnify the Lord with me;**

**let us exalt his name together.**

I sought the Lord and he answered me;

he delivered me from all my fears.

**O magnify the Lord with me.**

In my weakness I cried to the Lord;

he heard me and saved me from my troubles.

**Let us exalt his name together.**

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

**O magnify the Lord with me;  
let us exalt his name together.**

### Hymn

- 1 O Lord our God, how majestic is Your name,  
The earth is filled with Your glory.  
O Lord our God, You are robed in majesty,  
You've set Your glory above the heavens.  
*We will magnify, we will magnify  
The Lord enthroned in Zion.  
We will magnify, we will magnify  
The Lord enthroned in Zion.*
  
- 2 O Lord our God, You have established a throne,  
You reign in righteousness and splendour.  
O Lord our God, the skies are ringing with Your praise,  
Soon those on earth will come to worship.  
*Refrain*
  
- 3 O Lord our God, the world was made at Your command,  
In You all things now hold together.  
Now to Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb,  
Be praise and glory and power forever.  
*Refrain*

## The Collect

Merciful God,  
you have prepared for those who love you  
such good things as pass our understanding:  
pour into our hearts such love toward you  
that we, loving you in all things and above all things,  
may obtain your promises,  
which exceed all that we can desire;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

## The Confession

God our Father,  
we come to you in repentance for our sins.  
For turning away from you,  
and ignoring your will for our lives;  
Father, forgive us:

*All* **save us and help us.**

For behaving just as we wish,  
without thinking of you;  
Father, forgive us:

*All* **save us and help us.**

For the times we sin by what we do,  
and think and say;  
Father, forgive us:

*All* **save us and help us.**

For letting ourselves be drawn away from you  
by temptations in the world about us;  
Father, forgive us:

*All* **save us and help us.**

For living as if we were ashamed  
to belong to your Son;  
Father, forgive us:

*All* **save us and help us.**

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent,  
have mercy upon *us*,  
pardon and deliver *us* from all *our* sins,  
confirm and strengthen *us* in all goodness,  
and keep *us* in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*All* **Amen.**

### First Bible Reading

*Paul explains how the Spirit brings Christians life and hope*

Romans.8.12-25 from the CEV

My dear friends, we must not live to satisfy our desires.

<sup>13</sup> If you do, you will die. But you will live, if by the help of God's Spirit you say "No" to your desires. <sup>14</sup> Only those people who are led by God's Spirit are his children.

<sup>15</sup> God's Spirit doesn't make us slaves who are afraid of him. Instead, we become his children and call him our

Father. <sup>16</sup> God's Spirit makes us sure that we are his

children. <sup>17</sup> His Spirit lets us know that together with

Christ we will be given what God has promised. We will

also share in the glory of Christ, because we have suffered with him.

<sup>18</sup> I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us. <sup>19</sup> In fact, all creation is eagerly waiting for God to show who his children are. <sup>20</sup> Meanwhile, creation is confused, but not because it wants to be confused. God made it this way in the hope <sup>21</sup> that creation would be set free from decay and would share in the glorious freedom of his children. <sup>22</sup> We know that all creation is still groaning and is in pain, like a woman about to give birth.

<sup>23</sup> The Spirit makes us sure about what we will be in the future. But now we groan silently, while we wait for God to show that we are his children. This means that our bodies will also be set free. <sup>24</sup> And this hope is what saves us. But if we already have what we hope for, there is no need to keep on hoping. <sup>25</sup> However, we hope for something we have not yet seen, and we patiently wait for it.

- 1     You laid aside your majesty,  
      Gave up everything for me,  
      Suffered at the hands of those You had created.  
      You took all my guilt and shame,  
      When You died and rose again;  
      Now today You reign,  
      In heaven and earth exalted.
  
- 2     I really want to worship You, my Lord,  
      You have won my heart  
      And I am Yours for ever and ever;

I will love You.  
You are the only one who died for me,  
Gave Your life to set me free,  
So I lift my voice to You in adoration.

Noel Richards

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## A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

*Luke records the effect on the Jerusalem church of the martyrdom of Stephen – the first Christian to die for his faith.*

### Acts.8.1-8

<sup>8</sup> And Saul approved of their killing Stephen.

On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup> Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. <sup>3</sup> But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

<sup>4</sup> Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. <sup>6</sup> When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. <sup>7</sup> For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralysed or lame were healed. <sup>8</sup> So there was great joy in that city.

## The Sermon

## **Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father?

**All** I believe in **God, the Father almighty,**  
**creator of heaven and earth.**

Do you believe and trust in his Son Jesus Christ?

**All** I believe in **Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,**  
**who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,**  
**born of the Virgin Mary,**  
**suffered under Pontius Pilate,**  
**was crucified, died, and was buried;**  
**he descended to the dead.**  
**On the third day he rose again;**  
**he ascended into heaven,**  
**he is seated at the right hand of the Father,**  
**and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

Do you believe and trust in the Holy Spirit?

**All** I believe in the **Holy Spirit,**  
**the holy catholic Church,**  
**the communion of saints,**  
**the forgiveness of sins,**  
**the resurrection of the body,**  
**and the life everlasting.**

## **The Intercessions**

*Intercessions on the theme of racism, the DEC coronavirus appeal and the 'new normal'*

A pandemic is the time the world discovers who its neighbour really is - when we begin to embrace the concerns of others who are suffering with Coronavirus, as

well as dealing with our own fears and anxieties. When we reach out to those whose need is greater than ours and do all that we can to become 'community', then we are being true followers of Christ.

*"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second (Commandment) is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."*

*(Mark 12:30,31)*

And so let us pray:

Today Lord, we bring to you the forgotten people who were TV headlines just a month or two ago; who are still suffering, still fleeing for their lives, still dying for lack of medical provision, still seeing their world crumbling into dust beneath tired feet, but whose plight has been downgraded to make room for more recent tragedies.

Lord, we bring to you this fragile world, its precious people, its suffering people, its forgotten people, made beautifully in your image and still crying out for help.

We pray this morning especially for the people of the Yemen where millions of people exist in extreme hunger and violence and now the virus is taking hold.

Lord we know that our nation has been deeply affected by Covid 19 but we can't imagine facing the virus without running water, soap, enough hospital beds and no home as they do in so many countries around the world.

**Lord hear us and help us**

We pray for justice, compassion and equality in the world, especially for the poor and helpless, that we, members of the richer nations, may be generous with all that we have, materially and spiritually.

We pray that here in our nation the virus will not be used as an excuse to promote racism. We pray that those, sometimes so frightened by the thought of becoming ill, that they strike out against any who are perceived as being from a different background that they will reach out with a hand of love rather than a hand of hate.

### **Lord hear us and help us**

Father we know it breaks your heart that children make up more than half of the world's 22.5 million refugees\*. Many have known nothing but war, deprivation and fear. They aren't in school and often struggle to find the basic essentials – their lives and futures at risk.

And so we give thanks for all those people whose daily lives are about giving;  
be it medical or physical assistance, teaching, training and encouraging,  
loving, caring, supporting, praying;  
all the many ways that one life can be blessed and enriched by another.

So this morning we bring before you the Aid agencies working tirelessly with little thought for their own well being. We especially pray for the Tear Fund who put their Christian faith into action around the world. Christian Aid and the UN refugee agency and many others.

Gracious God, let us never forget, as daily life becomes more difficult and restrictions cause annoyance, that there are many for whom this has been normality for years; affected by long-term drought or destructive storms; struggling in poverty, or through violence forced to adopt the life of refugee. May we remember to be thankful for what we have, and work together selflessly for all who need our help by supporting the relief agencies when we can.

### **Lord hear us and help us**

We pray that we, as Christians, may show by our example, that religion is a force for good, not evil in this world and so we pray for almost a million people (half of them children) of the Rohingya people forced out of their homes in Myanmar and now living in Bangladesh. And the Uighur people forced into slavery in China. All because the state cannot accept their religion is different.

You are God of the refugee, the oppressed and dispossessed.

You are God of the weak, the starving and suffering.

You are God who asks for justice like a flowing river, goodness as a sparkling stream, love that is seen in action.

Forgive us, challenge us, change us, God of love, we pray.

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

## **Followed by The Lord's Prayer**

**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**

## Hymn

- 1 To God be the glory, great things he has done;  
so loved he the world that he gave us his Son;  
who yielded his life in atonement for sin,  
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.  
*Praise the Lord, praise the Lord!*  
*Let the earth hear his voice;*  
*praise the Lord, Praise the Lord!*  
*Let the people rejoice:*  
*oh come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,*  
*and give him the glory, great things he has done!*
- 2 Oh perfect redemption, the purchase of blood!  
To all who accept it, the promise of God;  
the worst of offenders who truly believes,  
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

## *Chorus*

- 3 Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,  
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;  
but purer, and higher, and greater will be  
our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see.

## *Chorus*

Frances Jane van Alstyne (Fanny Crosby) (1820-1915) alt.  
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## A Prayer

**We go into the world  
to walk in God's light,  
to rejoice in God's love  
and to reflect God's glory.  
Amen**

## The Blessing

May Christ's holy, healing, enabling Spirit be with you  
and guide you on your way at every change and turn;  
And the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit  
be with you and those who you love, this day and always  
**Amen**

I have chosen to preach on this passage because there are some parallels with our present circumstances. The experiences of the church in Jerusalem as it faced its first major upheaval are relevant to the circumstances that the church today is facing amidst the upheaval of the Coronavirus. There are lessons to learn as we seek to be God's church in this present time with the help of the Holy Spirit.

**The context of the reading is of a healthy, rapidly growing church, in Jerusalem.** This church came into existence following the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit that filled the believers with new life and a supernatural dynamism. This empowered them to stand out as God's distinctive people. Of this church it was noted:

*“No one else dared join them, even though they were highly regarded by the people. Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.” Acts.5.13-14*

However, there were three significant issues which needed to be faced in the life of this church.

1. The first issue concerned the final command of Jesus to his disciples. This was a command they had not taken seriously enough.

*“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.” Acts1.8*

It was a very Jerusalem centric church.

2. The second issue was a division in the church over the daily distribution of food.

*“In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews*

*because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.” Acts.6.1*

3. The third issue was a wave of persecution that came upon the church. This wave was intense and dangerous and was spearheaded by this Pharisaic fanatic called Saul.

But let us take the dispute over the distribution of food first. This was a tension between Hebraic Jews (those who spoke Hebrew) and Greek speaking Jews of the diaspora. This was a racial tension.

What is the one social issue that has been brought to public attention across the world in the past few months? **It is the issue of racism.**

The unjust treatment that led to the death of George Floyd has led to many questions being asked and many crying out for social justice.

Many western countries pride themselves on their anti-racist stance, but we have seen that official statistics and much anecdotal evidence seem to tell a different story. And sometimes the church has been complicit. Is there also a latent racism in our hearts that prevents us responding with real humility and compassion to the frequent cries of injustice that we hear. A racism that hinders us from examining our own hearts and motives?

**The first note of relevance** from this passage to the current situation is this. Stephen the first Christian martyr was also one of the seven deacons or dedicated workers in the church who were chosen by the apostles to look after the Greek speaking widows so that the bias was ended in the distribution of food. In other words, the Jerusalem church quickly took up the issue of this incipient racial bias and addressed it.

Each one of the deacons appointed had Greek names and they were from among Greek speaking Jews. They were godly men, full of the Spirit. The church did not permit their exclusion from positions of responsibility. I am pleased to hear that our Bishop has appointed the Revd Karlene Kerr, Team Vicar at Gaywood in King's Lynn, to the additional role of Bishop's Adviser for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Affairs.

The Church is listening, and we too need to be listening and praying and examining our own hearts and attitudes.

**The second note is this.** The wave of persecution that came upon the church disturbed the 'normal' of the Jerusalem church (though their normal was a very different from our normal!) and Christians were scattered. Just think about the effect that had upon their regular patterns of worship and fellowship that had grown up over several years – only the apostolic leadership were able to stay together. As they experienced the suffering associated with Saul's purge – Stephen was the first to die.

**Three specific things happened as a consequence of the death of Stephen.**

1. His death was an occasion for lament.

*Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him.  
Acts.8.2. ESV*

The threats that had been made against the Jerusalem church by the authorities were now a terrifying reality. The pain was felt across the church. The church genuinely mourned for the Spirit filled and godly man they had lost. As a very public act it was also a visible sign to the authorities of their cruelty but also of a compassionate church that knew the reality of God's mercy.

During the pandemic there has been all kinds of loss. The most terrible has been the loss of life but also the loss of community life, church life and now the loss of jobs. So much has been disrupted and we may grieve and mourn and question. To lament is to face the truth that God leads people through painful times that we cannot explain.

Lament can also be the participation in the pain of another. As Christians we are called to share in the pain the world experiences and not only lament our own pain. Thereby in God's name to demonstrate compassion and mercy. The Disasters Emergency committee has now launched an appeal for funds to help societies far less able than our own to meet the current challenges. These challenges are compounded in these societies by lack of resources and lack of basic necessities. Hopefully our Lament for and with them will help us to respond to their need with the very practical compassion of giving.

2. Secondly this sudden and unexpected scattering of the church had a remarkable outcome for the spread of the Christian Gospel. God turned the evil thing that happened to good.

The Christians who were scattered didn't lose their faith, but they *'preached the word wherever they went'*. 'Preached' is a word which basically means to proclaim 'good news' in public It is something that is done with the mouth in the name of another. We the best news in this pandemic for those who are ready to listen.

Let us ask God for opportunities to share that good news in sensitive way. This will also mean that we are ready to listen to people's stories.

3. This seemingly catastrophic event that came upon the church of Jerusalem actually compelled them to do what Jesus had told them

to do and reach out to Samaria. (Philip another Greek led the way!) In fact the mission to the wider world began to gather pace.

Our response to this pandemic is not only one of Lament we need to be asking this question.

**What may the Lord be saying to us or doing with us through all that has happened?**

One of the things we are being asked to do by our bishop is to think about some of the things that we have been doing for a long time that perhaps need to change. Things that may actually be hindering our mission and engagement with those beyond our heavy wooden doors. Let us take the time necessary to pray and think about that too.