

Sunday 22 May 2022
The Sixth Sunday of Easter
Led by Michaela McNeill, ALM



Greeting

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you
and also with you.

Prayer of Preparation

Lord God,
we have sinned against you;
we have done evil in your sight.
We are sorry and repent.
Have mercy on us according to your love.
Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us from our sin.
Renew a right spirit within us
and restore to us the joy of your salvation,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Hymn – Lord of the Dance

I 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.

Chorus

*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 came with me and the Dance went on.

Chorus

3 I danced on the Sabbath and I cured 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.

Chorus

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.

Chorus

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.

Chorus

*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.*

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Venite – a Song of Triumph

**O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us heartily rejoice in the rock of our salvation.
Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving
and be glad in him with psalms.
For the Lord is a great God**

**and a great king above all gods.
In his hand are the depths of the earth
and the heights of the mountains are his also.
The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands have moulded the dry land.
Come, let us worship and bow down
and kneel before the Lord our Maker.
For he is our God;
we are the people of his pasture
and the sheep of his hand.
Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Readings by John Barker

Acts 9:9-15

⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.”

¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

¹¹ From Troas we put out to sea and sailed straight for Samothrace, and the next day we went on to Neapolis. ¹² From there we travelled to Philippi, a Roman colony and the leading city of that district of Macedonia. And we stayed there several days.

¹³ On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. She was a worshipper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message. ¹⁵ When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us

to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us.

John 5:5-9

⁵ Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralysed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Reflection by Cathy Michell

Three Voices

Voice I – The Man

I suppose after 38 years – a very long time my dears – you could say that a man can get himself into a rut, stuck in the mud so to speak, like a soul in limbo – or is that purgatory I mean?? Not that Bethesda was such an awful place to be stuck in I admit. I rather liked those nice shady colonnades, the attractive arches and the pool of course, a refreshing sight in the midday heat. I got in the habit of being there as much as I could if someone would help to get me there with my mat! After so long; illness like mine; the useless legs and all that, you get accustomed. It's normality ain't it? And I've always said, make the best of your disability! If someone wants to help carry you somewhere nice, let 'em. If they throw some coins in your direction – thanks very much mate. And if there's a bit of room, then lie down and soak up the

atmosphere I say, get a bit of shut eye, but keep the other eye out for the main chance too – that pool is magic. They say that the angel of the Lord in person no less, makes it bubble up. Then you're supposed to rush down there and jump in fast – first one in gets healed – yipee! So that's fair in't it? That's a laugh - I'm really good at rushing, ha ha!! I gave up years ago, it's like the lotto, promises, promises but the odds are definitely stacked against you – like life!

Well.....what was I saying. Ah.....so there I was reclining like the emperor 'imself, on me royal mat having a bit of that famous 'Sabbath rest', when this chap pushed his way through the prostrate bodies. And he stopped right by me and got down close to my ear. Then he says; 'do you want to get well?'. Laugh....I gave myself a pain in the belly! 'Look', I said to him, 'how I am supposed to manage? Can you see the kind fellow who might help me down to that there pool? Look around you, they're all as bad as me! So, no, I've only got near the bubbling water a few times mate, and I've always been shoved out of the way by some other poor so and so – s'cuse my language.

He just looked at me. Yeh - alright, I know I didn't give him a straight answer, but he obviously got the drift. He stood up and said, 'Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.' with not so much as a 'by your leave'! Well, that day I was feeling particularly frisky so, cos I believe devoutly in doing what I'm told, I jumped straight up like a young gazelle - even to my surprise, got me mat and vamooshed out of there. 'Thanks a lot mate' I did not say!

But he was a persistent pain in the neck I tell you. I'd no wish to set eyes on him again, but then I bumped straight into him as I took a smartish short cut through the temple on me way home. I was trying to avoid our revered leaders whose bover boys kept asking me why I was carrying me mat on the sabbath. I just told them – 'orders is orders, some guy told me to, so I am'. But the

sheer cheek of him! You know what he said when we 'bumped' into each other again?? He pointed out the obvious – 'See, you're well now' he said, but then he tried telling me that I shouldn't sin any more in case anything worse got to me than lying on that comfy mat at the pool! I resent that, it wasn't my fault the last 38 years and I'm not about to get all holier than thou for him. 'Well now' – what on earth was he banging on about?

Voice 2 - Jesus

There is something in me, a sense of being drawn, of wanting something very deep beyond words. I often go somewhere really quiet and hidden away to think about this and to ask Abba about it in my prayers. Sometimes I go by the lake in Galilee where the gentle hills curve down to the waterside, green and beautiful. There's such a sense of God just there. Or I go up into the mountains, into the wilderness, or find a peaceful garden. To be alone, sheer silence without anyone around, solitude, space and quietness.

But here in Jerusalem it's another thing altogether. The place is always heaving, hot and claustrophobic, all these narrow lanes and alleys like a maze, the raucous markets and shops, people and animals all struggling together. And then that sense of threat, the soldiers everywhere, their weapons openly carried; pushing, shouting. I have to be here with the people, it is Abba's will for me.

But what was I saying? – Oh yes – that sense in me that draws me, calls me to the people who nobody else seems to even notice. The man by the pool of Bethesda was one of those – there have been many others. He was lying there with amongst all of the other people, crushed together there in mutual misery and rejection. He was thin and his limbs were twisted and useless. His face was that of a man used to failure and cruelty, resigned, bitter perhaps, crafty yes, a bit of a rogue, tough and..... angry?? I went to him through the crowds and crouched down there with

him. I asked him if he wanted to get, to be well. I wonder now if he did? I thought then that he was going to say 'No'. I wouldn't have been surprised. We humans can get accustomed to the loss of ourselves as the weeks and years hurry past. He didn't give me a straight answer, a simple heartfelt 'yes'. But I understood him, he looked only to the pool, the angel, the chance of a miracle that was never going to happen for him. I just said, 'Get up, walk, and, oh, don't forget your mat.' And he did.

I went after him and urged him to a deeper healing. I told him that being well is more than walking; the end of paralysis like his is just the start. I told this man, the one who looked to a pool to cure him but failed to look at me that there is a new life to be lived, an abundant life of the heart. I know this because the life I give is already alive in me.

Father, I thank you for the gift you have given me. I pray now for the paralysed man. Forgive him his sins. May the walk he walks now be in the light. Amen

Voice 3 – John, The Evangelist and Gospel Writer

I have many tales to tell of Jesus the Light, the Life, the Son of the Father! And you know, I always tell them for a reason, I'm not here to entertain people, however good my stories. My job is to call you to the Gospel, to convince you of the truth and make you into his disciples, who is the Way and the Truth. For in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came in to being through him and without him not one thing came to life!

So I have crowded many other narratives around this one that I wrote about the man and the pool at Bethesda. I've included the other tale about water, when the woman at the well discovered that the stranger sitting there was the only true water she craved, springing up to eternal life. And the one about the little son of that royal official who Jesus cured, just like that. Then there's the

feeding of 5,000 people in Galilee when all were satisfied, and Jesus walking on the waters and coming to his disciples in their fishing boat in the darkness.....so many rich stories of Jesus in all his Godly power.

But my account about this man – ah.....what do you make of it I wonder? You see it operates on different levels. Can you see all the things in this that I want you to know about Jesus? Here he is, a humble, self-effacing man who appears and disappears as he wills. He is free, not tied by convention or Sabbath laws for that matter. I present him to you as Lord of the Sabbath – and of everything else of course! And yet he is a human, shy of attention and of crowds, a man of prayer and serenity. But because of what I say in the first chapter of my gospel, we can grasp here also, Jesus who has absolute authority. He cures our man simply with a word of command. And this word acts immediately, like God breathing the world into being; he spoke and it was accomplished. But have you noted too, not just the authority here but also the love of God? Jesus could have turned away from all the miseries he saw – and sometimes he had to do this because he was but a man on this earth. But he was drawn to the most unlikely sufferers, right at the bottom of the pack, the foreigners who were so despised, those people with leprosy or who were blind, tax collectors and women. Compassion, mercy it was, the drive in him to bring healing to everyone, even those least likely to understand or value that free and precious gift.

That's why he said, 'indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomsoever he wishes'.

How extraordinary! Truly he brought life and was The Life – I mean isn't that what 'making well' really means?

And speaking about well-ness, the question Jesus asks you (and me!) is the same as he asked that man. Do we want to be made well? Ah, good question – what does it even mean? It's obvious that the Son and the Father want to do far more than heal our

physical bodies. When Jesus found the man again in the Temple (how symbolic), he addresses this other kind of 'being well'. 'See', he says, 'now you are healed, so don't sin again'. God looks at the whole of us, body and spirit both. What's inside us can be just as paralysed, sick, twisted and broken as that man's physical frame. So it was for him, as Jesus looked beyond his visible illness right into the shadowed and unresponsive soul within. Here was a man absorbed by his own troubles and distracted by the world around him - by the magic pool and its false hopes - when kneeling right by his side was the Saviour of the world, the love and mercy of God looking him, most tenderly, in the face.

There's a lesson I want to teach you today from all this. Don't be like this man who, though he was cured by the grace of God, turned away, walked away from the One who is the Source of all healing. Instead, be like those people we heard of in the Book of Acts, those women, just like my woman at the well. Yes, it was also on the Sabbath when they were gathered by the river listening to the message of Paul. And the woman Lydia, we're told, 'opened her heart' to God. She chose to believe, received baptism and made her home into a place of hospitality for the Christians there. In this she was made well, she trusted, gave herself and embraced the One who is Life.

I beg you - accept the gift, turn to Christ, say yes; yes to love, to life in all its fullness. Amen

Affirmation of Faith

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
**maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is,
seen and unseen.**

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,

eternally begotten of the Father,
**God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,**

begotten not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.

For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.
**For our sake he was crucified under Pontinus Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.**

On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
**he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to the judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.**

We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
**With the Father and the Son
he is worshipped and glorified.**

He has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,

and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers of Intercession by Fiona Whelan

Lord of all love, **open our hearts to hear your call**

Dear Lord, giver of life and teacher of the meaning of true unconditional love, we pray to you this morning that your peace, love and unity may flow through those places in the world currently dealing with war and unrest.

In particular, we pray for the people of Ukraine, that they may know peace soon and that they may have the courage and strength to rebuild their lives and habitats after the destruction of war. We ask for your strength to carry them through their grief and losses.

We pray for the people of Sweden and Finland as they make brave decisions about their future

We pray for the people of Russia as they navigate difficult days ahead.

We pray for the people of Syria and Afghanistan, and anyone else who is living in fear.

Lord of all love, **open our hearts to hear your call**

Dear Lord, we ask for your peace and stillness, for your strength and wisdom for those feeling burdened this morning.

May we have your eyes to see where we can help others. May we have your ears to hear those who need our help. May we share your wisdom to know when to step forward - and when to say nothing. May we have your compassion to know when to extend the hand of friendship and walk silently beside those who need companionship.

In silence we bring before you our struggles, and those of others for whom we now pray.

Silence is kept

Lord of all love, **open our hearts to hear your call**

Dear Lord, as prices rise and people everywhere make difficult decisions on where to cut back, we ask that your compassion may manifest itself in the politicians and their advisors tasked with improving things. May they open their hearts to understand how truly difficult life is for many. May they have the humility to listen and understand the very real struggles faced on a daily basis. May we hear you as you guide us to a fair distribution of the bountiful resources you have provided for all of us. And may we learn to treasure rather than take for granted all that we do have.
Lord of all love, **open our hearts to hear your call**

Dear Lord, we pray for your wisdom, courage and strength for all those taking exams and tests at the moment, in particular those so heavily impacted by the challenges of the last 2 years. We pray for all those throughout the world who are currently excluded from education, especially the girls of Afghanistan and the children of Ukraine. We pray for your strength for those who are fearful or anxious. We pray for those all those providing support. The parents, carers, teachers and teaching assistants. Please guide those who have difficult decisions to make in the coming months over what they do next
Lord of all love, **open our hearts to hear your call**

Dear Lord, we bring before you all that we give thanks for from this week and all that we ask for your help with. In silence now we open our hearts to you. All that we are holding tight inside we now share with you. May we, like the man in the Gospel, lay down our “mat of troubles” and walk with you.

Silence is kept

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

Collect for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

God our Redeemer,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son;
grant, that as by his death he has recalled us to life,
so by his continual presence in us
he may raise us to eternal joy;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray;
**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.**

Hymn – The King of Love My Shepherd is

- 1 The King of love my shepherd is,
whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.
- 2 Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth,
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth.
- 3 Perverse and foolish oft I strayed,
but yet in love he sought me,
and on his shoulder gently laid,
and home rejoicing brought me
- 4 In death's dark vale I fear no ill
with thee, dear Lord, beside me;
thy rod and staff my comfort still,
thy cross before to guide me.
- 5 Thou spread'st a table in my sight;
thy unction grace bestoweth;
and O what transport of delight
from thy pure chalice floweth!
- 6 And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever.

Henry Williams Baker (1821-1877)

Notices

Blessing

May the Father,
who so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
bring you by faith to his eternal life.
Amen.

Conclusion

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Alleluia, alleluia
In the name of Christ. Amen. Alleluia, alleluia